



Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry

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## REMARKS AT THE SIDE EVENT - COMMITMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE NANSEN INITIATIVE PROTECTION AGENDA

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Istanbul, Turkey

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The launch of the follow up to the Nansen Initiative – the Platform for Disaster Displacement, is one of the most important events for Fiji at this conference. Because Fiji has already made a commitment to give permanent refuge to many thousands of people displaced by climate change. And because of our very recent experience of natural disaster in the form of Tropical Cyclone Winston.

We hope that the Platform for Disaster Displacement will build the consensus needed to establish an effective international mechanism to protect people displaced across borders because of natural disasters and climate change. One of Fiji's formal commitments at this Summit is to support the Nansen process. And allow me to outline the Fijian experience. Because it goes to the heart of why we are all here today and the extent of the challenge that confronts us.

Fiji has offered to give a permanent home to the populations of two of our closest neighbours - Kiribati and Tuvalu - in the event that current scientific projections are realised and the rising seas envelop them altogether. We will naturally need the assistance of the global community to carry out that mass movement of people when the time comes, and help them adapt to new lives in Fiji.

As things stand, we have yet to establish an international legal framework for this to occur. But with this initiative, we are at least building the consensus we need to adequately respond to a situation that is unique in human history. Entire sovereign nations - members of the United Nations - disappearing beneath the waves and their people having to be accommodated elsewhere.

All this, of course, is still some way down the track, although some of the more alarming recent projections of global warming could make it sooner than we think. But with the launch of this initiative, we have at least begun the process of recognising the magnitude of the task ahead of us. And for its part, Fiji has allocated funding to explore the unresearched legal areas of climate change, including giving refuge to the citizens of Kiribati and Tuvalu.

In the meantime, we have facilitated the purchase by Kiribati of a large area of land on our second

biggest island, Vanua Levu, to ensure its food security. And at the same time, we have begun the process of moving our own people out of the way of the rising seas.

Our own challenge as mainly volcanic mountainous islands pales into insignificance beside the challenge to our atoll neighbours. There is no suggestion of any Fijian having to move to another country because of climate change. Nonetheless three entire villages have been moved so far and we have identified more than 600 settlements in Fiji that are threatened by the rising seas. We have also lost a significant amount of arable coastal land, including in our important sugar cane industry, and are currently mapping the areas that are most at risk.

But our more immediate concern is the threat to the welfare of our people and our economy posed by the extreme weather events caused by climate

change – droughts, floods and cyclones - which are more ferocious now than ever before.

Just over three months ago, Tropical Cyclone Winston slammed into Fiji with winds in excess of 300 kilometres an hour.

It was the biggest cyclone ever to make landfall in the southern hemisphere. 44 of our people were killed and around 40,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, along with 229 schools and other public buildings and infrastructure. And we were left with a damage bill estimated by the World Bank at 1.4 billion US dollars.

We are doing everything in our power at global forums to highlight our vulnerability. And to put our case to gain access to the grants and loans we need to build our resilience to future events. To strengthen our homes and our infrastructure to withstand the next onslaught.

So we are all vulnerable in the Pacific, though none more so than those nations that are destined to sink beneath the waves altogether. As we build on the Protection Agenda in the work of the Platform for Disaster Displacement, I assure the world that we in Fiji will welcome the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu as Pacific brothers and sisters with open arms. But we will need the assistance of the global community to do so. And the search for a proper framework begins now.

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