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SOLOMON ISLANDS

STATEMENT BY

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Madam President

Allow me at the outset on congratulating on your election, my Pacific Islands colleagues are eternally grateful to all indigenous communities in the North, South, East and West and to the distinguish representatives of the Permanent Forum for honouring us by having this special half day session on the Pacific, like all indigenous issues we do not get much attention internationally. Within the UN setting, the Pacific is a sub region within the Asian Group. Fast growing economies in the Asian region tends to cast a shining light that blinds the international system from looking at the changing landscape occurring within the Pacific. Climate Change is about our survival of our existence, culture and identity. In this connection we are pleased that the 7th Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues have Climate Change as its theme.

Of eight million people of the Pacific/ Small Islands Developing States, 80-90 per cent are indigenous in nearly all states. Five of the eleven Pacific Islands /SIDS are classified as Least Developed Country with one just graduated. The region is made up of Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesians, speaking more than 800 distinct different languages. I must hasten to add, with the exception of a few languages, all remain unwritten and cultures undocumented. My own country of half a million people more than 90% are indigenous, made of largely indigenous Melanesian with a percentage of indigenous Polynesian population speaking 80 different languages, a small Micronesian population were relocated to Solomon Islands during the colonial period.

Madam President,

Since time immemorial, our people's culture and tradition are connected to the land, the forests, mountains, rivers and sea. They rely on it for food and practice subsistence agriculture. 80 percent of our population in the case of Solomon Islands reside in the rural areas and continue to rely on the forests for their daily needs from food to constructing houses, building canoes to generating income. We have looked to our natural resources for revenue, leasing fishing rights and logging the forests given the limited economic alternatives available for the resource owners. The ecosystems are fragile and unique. Let me say put this into perspective, any increase in temperature 1-2 degrees celsius poses significant risks to many of the unique and threatened biodiversity. Coral in particular are vulnerable to thermal stress and have low adaptive capacity, coral bleaching is occurring. The world's largest saltwater lagoon is in Solomon Islands is under threat, fresh water lake breached through constant cyclones, like our neighbour Papua New Guinea we are one of the six countries are on the coral triangle, commonly referred to the amazons of coral reefs.

The Pacific Islands region in varying degrees are located in a disaster prone region, whenever disaster strikes it accounts for half to a third of our national GDPs. Only in April last year a tsunami raised my island three meters above sea-level while it sunk another. No traditional knowledge prepared our people to explain the rising and sinking of islands. These disaster especially cyclones can push back development achievements decades all within a couple of hours.

Today climate change has eroded our shorelines with sea level rise in which also causes water salination, increased the frequency of flooding, drought, earthquakes have shifted fishing grounds, up lifted reefs and disrupted agriculture. This has seen a slow movement of people from low lying islands, leaving their ancestral islands for larger islands, this somewhat threatens stability and peace. In other words climate change has been responsible for urban drift that is creating new pockets of poverty, placing stress on an economy that is narrowly agriculture based with a large public sector. For the indigenous, it is also a clash of two worlds between tradition and modern. There is a growing cost of food and dependency on imported food resulting in new non communicable disease is now a reality and malaria a killer especially for those coming from non affected areas. Over commercialization has also disrupted the environment. Besides that, a potential for future conflict if not managed properly given the varying land tenure system that exist with Solomon Islands diverse society.

The issue is what can be done, climate change is an old problem that needs new solution, let me now touch on some solutions.

First, climate change is multifaceted and it needs a UN system wide approach not just from a development perspective, it is a security in all its aspect human security, food security, human rights and nation building. If unaddressed these issues will fester and grow and explode in time.

The UN must move from policy to delivering on the ground activities. UN country presence is essential. The usual blaming on policies and governance has gone for so long. As a Small Islands Developing State we can not afford to pay our way out hence have become open and flexible in accessing funds with partners in most cases this is done at the expense of national policies focus. We need a stronger UN presence in all Pacific Countries.

Second, the international community must move away from placing too much emphasis placing on market solutions, there is a reluctance of the private sector to invest in the rural areas. Public investment is needed but done through the lens of communities rather than the market allowing rural communities to take advantage of economic opportunities. Solomon Islands has created a Ministry with a focused policy to assist indigenous population to participate in the economy. This is an effort by the Government to balance externally funded reform with legal and economic empowerments of the rural populations. Hence it is a human rights issues as well.

Third, providing clean energy provides a way forward. For many of the Pacific SIDS, energy accounts for a third of our national budget, getting adequate technology is a must to free up domestic resources to address all MDGs. In the case of Solomon Islands it will allow access of energy to 80% of the populations.

Fourth, valuing of virgin forests for carbon credit purposes is a means of halting unsustainable harvesting of forests but also providing a means of income for the population as nearly 80% of the land in Solomon Islands are customary owned. In the health sector treated bed nets saves lives especially when malaria remains the countries biggest killer and HIV/Aids a time bomb with its young population.

Fifth, there is sufficient technology available but is not been transferred and resources are difficult to access. Strong leadership from Annex I Parties in a coordinated and simplified manner will ensure current mechanisms can be accessed and accommodate requests from Small Islands Developing States.

Currently there are too many processes outside of the Bali Process that every one is doing something and no one is doing anything to make a real difference. A global architecture needs to be developed to facilitate smooth coordination in addressing climate change challenges. Many partners have their own adaptation and mitigation processes outside the multilateral ones

There needs to be a sense of what needs to be done immediately, in the medium and long term from food security to early warning systems.

At international level we have the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action which outlines the special needs of Small Islands Developing States including climate change, in 2005 the Alliance of Small Islands Developing States (AOSIS) established the Mauritius Strategy. Despite these frameworks we are still left to confront climate change from our resources.

Finally the time for action is now as we in the present look to the past and create a better future for our generations of tomorrow to live in freedom from want, from fear and freedom to live in dignity. My Pacific colleagues once again thank you for chairing this event. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge our bigger neighbour Australia for the swift action taken by their Government both on climate change, in ratifying the Kyoto Protocol and on indigenous matters, the apology to the stolen generation as alluded in their opening statement, we salute and thank the Government and people of Australia for their commitment and assure them of our stead fast support.

Thank You