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**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry,
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Fiji's National Statement to UNGA76

Prime Minister to United Nations General Assembly

Embargoed until 9am - 25th September, 2021

**(GUIDANCE : 10-12 minutes and allow for 1 more minute
for technical issues)**

**President of 76th Session of UN General Assembly, Abdulla
Shahid;**

Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres;

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bula Vinaka from Fiji.

I've just stepped away from a session in our Parliament — the beating heart of our eight-year-old true parliamentary democracy. I wish I could be with you in New York, but I am beholden to Fiji's shores to lead our COVID-19 response.

Allow me to first congratulate you, Your Excellency Abdulla Shahid, on your election as the President of the General Assembly. The Fijian people — the stewards of 1.3 million square kilometers of Blue Pacific —are proud to see the Maldives, another large ocean state, offer Presidency to the international community.

And to my friend, Secretary General Guterres, congratulations on your second term. Your re-election was a win for the planet, for the climate, and for the smallest states among us.

Our multilateral challenges: UN 2:0

Your Report to the UNGA on Our Common Agenda is the blueprint for a future that is better, greener, and safer — and I would humbly add, “bluer.”

We want that future for Fiji. We want islands inhabited by citizens who stand *with* nature and not against it. We want sustainable economic growth that is powered by clean energy and protected from the impacts of climate change.

We want robust and resilient health systems, and we want good jobs and income supported by a green and blue economy. To succeed, our vision must become the vision of humanity, because our fate is the world's fate.

The world's present course leads nowhere near the future we want for ourselves. A deadly pathogen is burning through humanity like a bushfire — and inequity is fanning the flames. This year alone, climate-driven floods, heatwaves, fires, and cyclones have killed hundreds and inflicted unsustainable economic damage. We humans are the cause, but we are refusing to become the solution.

This grave moment is not without parallel. In the wake of the death and destruction of World War Two, world leaders saw unilateral action as kindling for another world war, one fought with nuclear weapons of planet-destroying potential. They answered that challenge with the genius of this multilateral system.

Our challenges are different, but the stakes are alike. Mr. Secretary General, your recommendations in Our Common Agenda are spot on. We must meet this moment with a new UN — a new energy, new resources, and new bonds of trust with the people this institution serves. A new UN that enlists the dynamism of young people, because our action — and inaction — directly affects their future.

A new UN that empowers those on the margins of society — particularly women and girls — and brings them into the centre of global decision-making.

Excellencies,

Since we last gathered, it has become clearer that we face two pandemics — one that is ending for the wealthy nations and one that is worsening across much of the developing world. That widening chasm can be measured in lives lost and in years of economic progress undone.

Across the Global South, what the world once branded as “sustainable development” is unraveling before our eyes.

Hundreds of millions of jobs have been lost, hundreds of millions of people cannot access adequate food, and an entire generation has had their education disrupted. The wounds of this crisis will cripple us for years if left untreated.

Fiji's experience shows how an equitable recovery can begin. It starts by getting jobs in arms, fast.

After one full year with zero local COVID cases, the insidious Delta variant crept into our country and sparked a deadly second outbreak. After a slow start while we scrambled to acquire enough vaccines, we are winning the battle.

Over 98% of adults across our 110 populated islands have one jab of the vaccine, and more than 67% are fully-vaccinated. We thank India, Australia, New Zealand and the United States for helping us secure the doses we needed.

Our mission now is to recover the more than 100,000 jobs lost to the pandemic and to recoup a 50% loss in Government revenues. Soon, Fiji will reopen to tourism and to regional and international business. We will look to accelerate investment trends, like increased digitization, that will modernize our economy and help it recover.

But Fiji's victory over the virus will be short-lived unless the global community can accelerate vaccinations everywhere.

It is appalling that wealthier countries are already considering third doses or boosters for their citizens while millions of people – including frontline healthcare workers - in the developing world cannot access a single dose. Globally, thousands of lives are still being lost every day to the virus. The majority represent our collective failure to make vaccines available to developing countries.

Vaccine nationalism must end. The G7, G20, and multilateral financial institutions have failed to stop it. Only the UN can fill this void of leadership.

I join other leaders in calling on the UN to convene an urgent special meeting of Leaders to agree to a time bound, costed, and detailed plan for the full vaccination of developing countries.

Our Socio-Economic challenge

Vaccine inequity is a symptom of a much larger injustice, one that is inherent to the international economic system. This injustice is the unequal distribution of finance, or access to finance, that can fuel a recovery.

While wealthy nations have propped up their economies by printing and investing trillions at near zero interest rates, developing nations — particularly Small States — have had to borrow at punitive rates to simply keep our people alive, fed, and healthy.

Through the pandemic, my Government rolled out the largest cash transfer program in our history — providing hundreds of millions of dollars in unemployment benefits to nearly one-third of Fiji's adult population. We even expanded some of our social protection programs, including pensions for the elderly, and financial support for the differently-abled and other vulnerable communities.

The alternative was mass destitution, which we would not accept. But to pay for it, we had to take on debt, precipitated by massive reduction in Government revenue.

We need a more innovative framework for development finance that recognises the unique needs of SIDS. And we must adopt a more sophisticated framework of assessing debt sustainability that incorporates the urgency of building resilience and breaks free of the norms of the 20th century.

This pandemic has been a painful lesson about where unilateral action can lead and where our multilateral institutions are unwilling to go.

We must find new frontiers of co-operation if we stand any chance of averting future pandemics – – or staving off the worst of climate change. If Small States are to build back greener, bluer, and better, we will need an equal voice about and vote on decisions that determine our future. Small States need our interests heard, understood, and acted upon.

Our Climate Challenge

Despite all the talk we hear of saving the planet, the world's collective commitments are paltry. Akin to spitting into the strengthening winds of climate-fueled super-storms.

The climate is on track for 2.7 degrees Celsius of global warming, which would ensure the loss of entire low-lying nations in the Pacific and huge chunks of global coastlines. It guarantees frequent devastation from floods, cyclones, coastal inundations, and wildfires. It spells climate-driven conflict, mass migration, and the collapse of food systems and ecosystems. It is appalling. It is unimaginable. But it is where we are headed.

Since March 2020, Fiji has experienced three cyclones – two of which approached Category Five intensity. Fijians are strong people. We endured much, and we will endure more still. But I am tired of applauding my people's resilience. True resilience is not just defined by a nation's grit but by our access to financial resources.

Resilience is seawalls. It is parametric insurance for those most vulnerable. It is nature-based solutions. It is systematically relocating communities from the rising seas. Fiji is using every fiscal tool in our kit to do these things. And we are doing everything within our means to reduce our emissions. We have submitted an NDC that commits Fiji to net-zero emissions and harnesses nature to lead that transition — commitments that will soon become law through a comprehensive Climate Change Bill. In recognition of the ocean-climate nexus — Fiji hopes to secure a blue bond next year in support of a sustainable blue Fijian economy. But Fiji can't halt climate change by itself.

Today, SIDS are able to access less than 2 percent of the available climate finance. To build a truly resilient Fiji, we need access to fast-deploying targeted grants, long-term concessionary financing and, financial tools and instruments established through public-private collaboration and partnership.

Our Oceans Challenge

The Fijian economy depends on a healthy ocean and so we are taking bold strides to reverse its current decline. We have committed to 100 percent sustainable management of EEZ and 30 percent declared as marine protected areas by 2030. We are expanding investments in sustainable aquaculture, seaweed farming, and high-value processed fish.

But we cannot do this alone. We look to the global system to stop illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. We look to Member States to agree to a new treaty to preserve marine in waters beyond national jurisdictions. We need global greenhouse gas emissions to fall dramatically and quickly. At COP26, we expect the oceans pathway will be locked into the UNFCCC processes. Fiji seeks a decision in “one slash COP 26” reflecting this change.

Our COP26 Package

In one month, we meet in Scotland for a hugely consequential COP. The Pacific’s mission in Glasgow is clear: we must keep the 1.5 target alive.

This demands drastic emissions cuts by 2030 that put large nations on a path towards net-zero emissions before 2050.

Leaders who cannot summon the courage to unveil these commitments and policy packages at COP26 should not bother booking a flight to Glasgow. Instead, they — and the selfish interests they stand for — should face consequences that match the severity of what they are unleashing on our planet. We do not tolerate war between our Members States. So, how can we tolerate war waged against the planet, on the life it sustains, and on future generations? That is the firm red line Pacific nations will draw in Glasgow. We are demanding net-zero emissions and accepting zero excuses.

And, Excellencies, at COP26, the global north must finally deliver on \$100 Billion per year in climate finance and agree to a pathway to increase financing commitments to at least \$750 Billion per year from 2025 forward. If we can spend trillions on missiles, drones, and nuclear submarines, we can fund climate action. It is criminal that vulnerable Pacific Small Island Developing States can access a mere .05% of the climate finance currently available to protect ourselves from an existential crisis we did not cause.

Mr. President, these are the challenges we face, at this UNGA and at COP26. We must find the courage to face them squarely.

The consequences of not doing so are simply unthinkable. We will see you in Glasgow.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.
