



**STATEMENT BY H.E RATU INOKE KUBUABOLA,
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**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE
67TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Mr. President;
Excellencies;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Prime Minister and the people of Fiji, I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election and have full confidence in your steerage of the 67th Session of the General Assembly.

I wish also to pay tribute to the tireless efforts of your predecessor, His Excellency Nasir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, through what has been an eventful and turbulent year for the global community of nations.

Mr. President:

The world is facing many challenges that demand our attention and collective action.

As we all gathered last June in Rio de Janeiro for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, millions of people were recovering from, or living through, natural disasters. In Fiji, we experienced our worst flooding on record during the months of January and April this year. Beyond the human cost, the economic damage to infrastructure, schools, businesses, agriculture, and tourism - a sector that generates 33 percent of Fiji's GDP - was immense, and we still have not fully recovered. Our floods were by no means the world's worst climatic disaster of the year; other peoples suffered much worse. But as a people who live on a group of small islands in the South Pacific, we feel particularly vulnerable.

The ongoing failure of the international community to seriously address climate change means we will all see more frequent and more intense weather events. These will erode our development gains and leave our people feeling poorer and less secure. So it is clear that it is indispensable to incorporate disaster-risk reduction into global and national development strategies.

The post-2015 development agenda is now under discussion – frameworks and modalities are being developed. However, our job with the Millennium Development Goals is not complete. As a global community of nations that has committed to these goals, we must give meaningful support to all those States lagging in their progress. We must also ensure that a post-2015 development agenda does not simply add the MDG indicators and goals into a delayed target date. The development community can do much more, including meeting our agreed objectives for development funding.

Fiji has embarked on a comprehensive reform program not only to promote development but also to improve the lives of our people. We have embraced the Millennium Development Goals as they were intended—to provide specific objective standards for improving the lives of our people. We are the second country in the world to introduce the Pneumococcal and Rotavirus immunizations as standard, with a view to minimizing child mortality.

This represents progress towards meeting MDGs 4 and 5. But the reward is not in meeting the goals; the reward is in children who are healthier, families that are less burdened, and generations given a better chance to become productive adults. We must never forget that behind each of these Millennium Development Goals are human beings—the citizens of our nations who look to us to provide opportunities for a fuller life. We still have work to do particularly in meeting MDGs 1, 3 and 6, and we are working on these as best we can.

The particular case of Small Island Developing States in meeting these goals, and their specific challenges, will be addressed by the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014 to be held in the Pacific. The success of this conference will be found in actions, not simply more words. Substantive preparations for this conference must therefore be oriented toward taking action and achieving specific goals.

In addition to support for regional development, Fiji is also taking the lead in the region on broadband connectivity.

It is clear to us that broadband is an essential technology for improving education, medicine, agriculture and environmental services. Broadband technology is especially important to us because it will help unite a dispersed people and help draw us closer to our island neighbors in the Pacific. If we take care to make it accessible, affordable, and understandable, we bring an entire universe of wisdom and understanding to the smallest schools and remotest villages. Information need no longer mostly be the property of people who live in the cities or who are attached to large institutions.

Like all islands nations, Fiji relies on the ocean and its resources as our economic lifeblood and source of sustainable development. While fish and other marine living resources have been vital to Fiji's economy and livelihood, we believe that our efforts to explore deep sea mineral resources present greater potential, provided that a precautionary approach with regard to environmental sustainability is ensured.

Mr. President:

The theme you have selected for this year's general debate, "*Adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means*", is most relevant in these times of turbulence across the world. The UN must continue to be the vanguard of international peace and security.

It must be able to respond to new types of crises, always with an aim to stabilize the places it enters and leave behind not just a state of peace and stability, but also an environment that fosters freedom and opportunity for the people.

In this context, Fiji continues to play a role in peacekeeping missions around the world that is far beyond what is expected of a country of our size and level of development. We contribute troops and police personnel to Iraq, Liberia, South Sudan, Darfur and Timor-Leste. Fiji has responded to exigent requests by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operation above and beyond agreed contributions to ensure that peacekeeping operations in Iraq can continue unhindered, despite the additional burden it has placed on our troops operating far from home and for longer than envisaged.

We believe all nations must find ways to make the world safer, more humane, and more livable, and as a people we are proud that we can make this contribution to global peace and security, and to the lives of citizens far from us. This is not just government policy; it is a calling that is deeply embraced by the Fijian people.

Recognising the role that peacekeeping missions with expanded mandates have on helping to build the foundations for a sustainable future, Fiji has in the last year also started to contribute in a small yet meaningful way to the corrections and justice sector of peacekeeping missions. Mentoring and strengthening corrections and justice institutions is part of the process of allowing post-conflict societies to take control of their own destinies, and Fiji is pleased to be able to be a part of these unfolding stories around the world.

Fiji has been honoured to be a part of this process in our own region through our contributions in Timor-Leste through the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste.

Following the successful elections in Timor-Leste early this year, UNMIT will be in a position to wind down its operations later this year, allowing the Timorese people to take full ownership and control of their own destinies. Timor-Leste is now an observer to the regional organization of which Fiji is the current Chair, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, and we trust that through that organization and the United Nations, we will have many years of collaboration ahead.

In the spirit of supporting self-determination, Fiji continues to work through the Decolonisation Committee of the United Nations to ensure that New Caledonia's right to self-determination, as expressed in the Noumea Accord, is implemented faithfully by all parties. Fiji works through the Melanesian Spearhead Group in monitoring the progress of implementation of the Noumea Accord. Additionally, Pacific Island Leaders at the

"Engaging with the Pacific" meeting held in Fiji in 2011 and 2012, committed to supporting the inalienable right of the people of Ma'ohi Nui/French Polynesia to self-determination. We look forward to working through the UN processes and with all relevant partners to have the question of Ma'ohi Nui's self-determination placed on the UN agenda again.

Mr. President:

Fiji is itself working through a period of reform and transition. We are building a sustainable democracy founded on the principle of one person, one vote, one value. Elections will be held under a new constitution and electoral system no later than September 2014. These elections will see the citizens of Fiji go to the polls without regard to their race for the first time in our nation's history.

Fiji's new Constitution will be based on some unassailable democratic principles.

- A secular state that recognises our multi-faith society.
- A common national identity in which all citizens – and not just indigenous people – will call themselves Fijians for the first time
- A war against corruption, which inhibits the country's development
- An independent judiciary to uphold the rights of every Fijian.
- Social justice and the elimination of all forms of discrimination so that every Fijian is treated equally.
- Good and transparent governance.
- And lowering the voting age to 18 to give our young people a voice.

We set up an independent Constitutional Commission in March of this year to draft a new Constitution guided by these principles. It will be a constitution of and for the people. Ordinary Fijians are seizing the opportunity to put forward their views at public hearings throughout the country and voice the issues that are most important to them. The Commission's recommendations will be reviewed by a Constituent Assembly in early 2013. This body - made up of a broad cross section of Fijian society – will formulate the final document through public discussion and debate.

This will set the scene for elections in 2014, for which preparations have already begun. Through a process of electronic registration carried out in July and August of this year, almost half a million Fijians have so far registered to vote.

Mr. President:

Throughout this process we have stayed true to the principle that we in Fiji must determine our own destiny, one that is inclusive and fair to all citizens. We are taking the necessary time to get it right. We have endured criticism and a degree of isolation at the hands of some of our traditional friends among the world's democracies. By now, those countries have begun to recognise that we are serious about building a sustainable democracy, one that is racially blind, that offers equal opportunity, and that protects all citizens from the tyranny of the majority.

We need the support of the world's democracies, and we invite them to work with us in our quest to establish the kind of democratic system that they enjoy.

After 40 years of strife and instability, the work of true and sustainable democracy is just beginning and we ask the international community to support us.

We have examined and redefined our worldview - to forge productive, friendly relationships with all nations of good will. Fiji opened three new embassies in 2011 - in Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa. We have expanded our diplomatic presence this year by opening Embassies in the Republic of Korea and the United Arab Emirates. We want to learn more, to exchange more, to develop more, to trade more, and certainly to contribute more through active and robust engagement with other nations.

In the United Nations, Fiji pledges to work in the most constructive manner possible, and to respect the ideals in the UN's Charter. This includes the International Labour Organisation, with which we are engaged at the present time.

The Fijian Government's commitment to a future of equality and opportunity for all Fijians includes ensuring that the rights of working people are protected and extended.

The Constitutional Commission has received submissions from all sectors of Fijian society, including trade unions and public employees. We expect the new constitution to help us continue to build an environment that promotes safe working conditions, protects workers from arbitrary actions, and allows workers to form unions. We seek to ensure that unions can take collective action as directed by their member workers and are subject only to restrictions that are generally accepted to protect the public good. We also seek to protect the rights of those workers who choose not to affiliate with unions.

The Fijian Government is committed to protecting workers who are fortunate enough to have jobs and to ensuring that all workers receive fair wages. We are equally committed to creating employment opportunities for the young and the less affluent.

As part of Fiji's progress in reform toward democracy, we are reviewing our current labour laws to ensure their compliance with the 34 ILO Conventions that Fiji has ratified. The tripartite Employment Relations Advisory Board is a key participant in this process. In this

year alone, Fiji has ratified or adopted eight ILO instruments, as recommended by the tripartite board, including the Maritime Labour Convention 2006.

By empowering Fijians, the government is seeking to ensure that all citizens – regardless of ethnic background - are placed on a level playing field while possessing the tools to compete with their peers in the global community and to improve their livelihoods and fulfill their dreams. By modernising Fiji, the Government is seeking to make the country, institutions, and legal system strong, independent and world-class.

Fiji may be a relatively small country but it has big aspirations. They include being a good global citizen, a leader by example among island nations, and an actively engaged member of the international community.

In the spirit of constructive contribution to the global community and the United Nations, I am pleased to say that at today's Ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 and China, Fiji was endorsed as the Chair of the G77 for the year 2013. Fiji takes on this responsibility with a deep sense of humility, willingness to work collaboratively with all States, and commitment to addressing inequalities that exist between developing and developed countries.

Mr President:

As we look forward to a productive 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly, we reiterate our full support and cooperation towards you and all members, with a view to advancing the objectives of this august body and the aspirations of the global community.

I thank you, Mr. President.
