

Country Statement by
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at the meeting on the
HUMAN DIMENSION OF GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE,
MALE, MALDIVES, 13TH-14TH NOVEMBER, 2007

Ni sa bula, namaste, salaam waleikum and warm greetings from the Pacific Ocean and the Republic of the Fiji Islands and thank you for this opportunity to speak at this forum.

Universal concerns on climate change are evident and we have heard countless times and again today, the impact it can have on the quality of the environment **and** the quality of life particularly for vulnerable small island states like ours - which must be clearly understood by government, industry and most of *all our own local communities*, to whom **climate change** is abstract with little they can do to help address it.

Respected delegates, like yourselves, Fiji is subject to extreme climate events such as cyclones, floods and droughts. We experience coastal erosion and physical property damage by the increase in frequency and height of storm surges, damage to infrastructure, interruptions to water availability, interruptions to our normal supply chain, and in the instance of increased rainfall, climate related health issues and the control of dengue fever, coral bleaching and Heaven forbid, the increase in insurance cover, are terrifying!

Cyclones are a major weather concern: the highest concentration of cyclones in the South Pacific occurs west of Fiji in the Vanuatu and northern New Caledonia waters. Fiji's economy is based primarily on tourism and sugar production. Real economic growth averaged 2.7% between 1993 and 1996, however it only grew 1.6% in 1993 due to Tropical cyclone Kina, highlighting Fiji's economic vulnerability to climate change. The 1987, 1998 and 2003 droughts have been the most severe economically in Fiji's history.

A *Climate Change Policy Paper* for Fiji has been drafted and I will be submitting it to Cabinet next month, which recognizes the cross-sectoral impact of climate change and recommends that each sector addresses

climate change under its own peculiar terminology, eg. for *Agriculture*, it is desertification and for *Fisheries* and *Tourism* it is coral bleaching. Climate Change has been mainstreamed to some extent in our *Environment Management Act* where we propose natural resources inventories, the development of resource management plans, environment impact assessments and coordination through the National Environment Council to address climate change. A climate change policy helps government make informed decisions on the economy, livelihood, infrastructure, etc. of the country in relation to climate change risks and adaptation.

A policy such as this is essential as we have seen the overexploitation of resources and unsustainable management practices which have affected the socio-economic fabric of Fiji as well as reducing the resilience of the environment and increasing its vulnerabilities to the adverse effects of climate change.

Fiji recognizes tourism as our economic life line and therefore tourism is a vehicle for socio economic development and poverty alleviation. Fiji's biodiversity and ecosystems are increasingly important attractions for tourists. This relates mainly to marine and coastal ecosystems but to an increasing extent to inland forest ecosystems that are the core of a number of guided ecotourism trips. However, ecosystems, particularly marine and coastal, are at considerable risk due to climate change, while at the same time they are of critical importance for protection against climate impacts. Mangrove forests, for example, protect the shoreline from sea surges and extreme winds, they reduce erosion rates and they act as a natural filter for pollution and sedimentation, hence contributing to a better water quality.

It is becoming clear how climate change, tourism and poverty are interrelated. **Climate** is a valuable and essential resource for tourism, and there can be no complacency in our attitudes to the power of climate hazards and climate change which affects infrastructure, the people, financial networks and, the ecosystems, that are vital to our livelihood.

We have been fortunate that Fiji has been a recipient to a number of climate change funded projects including those funded under the *Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA)* of the Canadian Government. These particular projects identified drought prone areas where the lack of access to water was addressed. Sites were identified with the installation of water tanks, construction of water catchments, drilling of boreholes and piping of water to the respective village communities averaging total

population of 100 each being undertaken. Another climate change project is the *Clean Development Mechanism* (CDM), a climate change mitigating approach for Fiji, where renewable forms of energy (water, wind, solar) are identified to help lessen the impact of burning non-renewable source of energy (fossil fuel) - a big contributor to global warming. Fiji has a windmill farm (Butoni Windmill Farm) and a Hydro Power Supply project.

A major achievement for Fiji in trying to reduce climate change impacts is in our **signing and ratifying** of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) in 1992, the *Kyoto Protocol to the Climate Change Convention* in 1998, and as **signatory** to the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* (UNCCD) - all showing the serious stand Fiji has taken, on the environmental issues of climate change.

In 1997, the Fiji Government completed its first Greenhouse Gas Inventory (GHG) and the report was submitted in November of that year, which highlighted biodiversity issues, such as the reduction of deforestation and the establishment of conservation or protected areas for the purpose of reducing greenhouse gas emission in Fiji.

A *Vulnerability and Adaptation* study was also carried out during the *Pacific Island Climate Change Assistance Programme* period, whereby the International Global Change Institute (IGCI) in partnership with South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the PICCAP Fiji Country Team prepared for the World Bank Group a quantitative vulnerability and adaptation assessment for Fiji, with the main areas or sectors outlined in this report being agriculture, coastal, public health and water sector.

There is also a report on the *Economic Implications of Climate Change* in 2 Pacific Island Countries published on the 21st March 2000 - Fiji and Tarawa in Kiribati. Prepared for the World Bank once again, it provides an assessment of the potential economic damages associated with climate change, together with an economic evaluation of some illustrative adaptive strategies, for these locations.

Fiji has completed its *First National Communication* with our mission statement and strategies directed towards policy formulation, in compliance with our obligations under *Articles 4 and 12* of the UNFCCC - to be undertaken within three years of the convention coming into force.