

PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

United Nations Member States



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PLACENIA AMBITION FORUM
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Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka, Good afternoon, lokwe ne raelep

I am honored to be delivering this statement on behalf of the 12 Pacific Small Island Developing States namely; the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Palau, Solomon Islands, the Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country Fiji.

On behalf of these Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), I convey our congratulations to the Government of Belize for hosting and convening this virtual Ambition Forum during the unprecedented COVID-19 health crisis. This is a true testament of the commitment and leadership of the Government and the people of Belize during these challenging times.

The Paris Agreement calls for global action to keep the increase in global temperature to well below 2°C, with the aim of limiting it to 1.5°C. The

World is way off target. The window of opportunity is closing rapidly. That is why this Ambition Forum is so important. That is why we look to AOSIS and the Government's of Italy and the UK to lift the commitment and ambition at COP26.

Madam Chair, both UK and Italy are heroically facing the COVID19 challenge. Our hearts are with the joint hosts of COP26. The COVID response by both these countries shows that when the chips are down; it is possible for Government's to focus the full attention of citizens; businesses; whole of Government and civil society on achieving single goals – in this case, containing and crushing COVID19.

The Climate crisis is an emergency that is not dissimilar. The climate emergency also requires an equally focused and cohesive response by all segments in society – within a country; regionally and at the international level.

During the Talanoa Dialogue that commenced in COP 23; Fiji and the PSIDS posed three simple question to the World: “Where are we now?”, “Where do we want get to?”, and “How can we achieve it?”. These three questions still frame our approach to fighting the climate crisis. To these, I will add a fourth – “what will inaction cost us?”

Even the sharpest critics now largely accept science. Global emissions at the current rates will lead to catastrophic climate shocks in the PSIDS region; across SIDS; across LDCs and across the globe. Emissions at the current levels will lead to rapid decline and collapse of biodiversity on land and in the oceans. Emissions at the current levels will lead to collapse of whole sectors of the economy and trigger large scale displacement of people's everywhere – and in the case of some PSIDS for the whole population of those countries.

Madam Chair, the COVID19 Pandemic is intricately linked to climate change. The Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum states that climate change exacerbates the COVID19 crisis. The supercharged Cateogry-5 Tropical Cyclone Harold which wreaked havoc, loss of dozens of lives in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga only a week ago is a wake-up call.

You cannot do social distancing in communities whose homes have been blown away. You cannot fly in emergency workers to provide emergency relief to communities in the path of destruction who are still COVID free. Small vulnerable countries cannot respond to their worst health emergency in a century and the fiercest cyclone in a century at the same time.

The climate crisis did not hit the pause button when the COVID19 crisis started. We have to confront both at the same time.

The net zero ambition that PSIDS has forcefully pursued, Madam Chair, is not an abstraction. This is as real and as fierce as it gets.

The climate and the health crisis are interwoven in yet another way. Climate change has induced extraordinary levels of stress on health systems across the PSIDS. Health capabilities are stretched to their limit across the PSIDS. Our health systems are responding to prolonged outbreaks of dengue because of prolonged droughts and excessive rains. More intense rains and floodings in Melanesia have led to frequent outbreaks of leptospirosis.

Our health systems are today responding to prolonged dengue outbreaks; large scale outbreak of measles; and leptospirosis at the same time – all in one way or another a consequence of slow onset climate change. The financial resources; staffing capacity are stretched to the limit. On top of these; these same health systems are today responding to the COVID19.

Climate change degrades health systems physically as well. Across the PSIDS; Governments are spending exponentially increasing funds to rebuilt; rehabilitate health infrastructures weakened by slow onset climate impacts and/or climate catastrophes.

Our net zero call is a call to the World to raise ambition to protect the health of our communities.

We are encouraged that the revised NDCs submitted by Chile, RMI; Denmark and so many countries are raising the bar. We support a rapid expansion of this coalition during the year.

The SG has reminded us last week that COVID19 is an opportunity to build better and rebuild more sustainably. We expect that more sustainable green and blue jobs will be prioritized as countries rebuild and reboot their economies. In 2018 alone, the world added 11 million new jobs through renewable energy.

To sustain the momentum in PSIDS; we call on countries to maintain their commitment to global funds such as the GCF so that it can become a part of the COVID19 recovery while supporting our zero carbon pathways.

We call on states to increase their commitment to GEF. The vitality of the Pacific economies has been built on tourism. Tourism is built largely on the strengths of a shared commitment across the PSIDS to maintaining ocean health such as through the large marine protected area in Palau and establishment of forest reserves in Vanuatu and PNG. With collapsing tourism incomes, PSIDS calls for increased support through GEF to protect and preserve biodiversity across the region.

All economies and regions are affected by COVID19. The social and economic impacts are especially magnified in small island states that depend on tourism; remittances and on a high level of imports of food and oil. SIDS do not have access to special concessionary funds. Middle income SIDS face particular challenges - especially when they have to compete for resources with much larger and often higher capacity developing countries for these same funds.

The UN's COVID social and economic response fund is one fund that is very relevant for SIDS. SIDS should be able to access these funds to rebuild their economies in ways that helps to rebuild their economies while enhancing their NDC implementation at the same time. I thank the UNSG for his leadership on this. I thank development partners already supporting this effort - Norway-UK- Denmark and others. I call upon other partners to support this effort and support this approach.

Madam Chair, Climate change is a complex development challenge that now requires a COVID19-adjusted approach. The IPCC report stresses the narrow time frame in which global emissions must be drastically reduced. Changes to long-term climate patterns have already begun to alter the environment trends and the integrity of vital ecosystems that SIDS have relied upon for generations. Climate change impacts are driving up the cost of development in SIDS, increasing investment uncertainty and further challenging efforts to achieve the SDG's.

The Pacific NDC Hub launched by Fiji's Prime Minister in 2017 is supporting PSIDS to:

1. Enhance and lift their already high ambition NDCs
2. Develop investment plans for NDC implementation
3. Leverage finance for NDC implementation

By supporting PSIDS to build their resilience; the Hub is enabling the PSIDS to forge forward on their low carbon pathways. Pacific leaders have declared that climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, wellbeing and security of the Pacific region. Maintaining momentum on low carbon pathways is so crucial to the reducing this existential threat across the PSIDS.

Madam Chair, in convening this virtual meeting; the Government and people of Belize has shown yet again why we in the SIDS need to lead from the front; maintain our own momentum; and through that increase the prospects for consensus internationally.

COP26 must move way beyond negotiation. The focus must shift to accelerating implementation of our enhanced Paris Commitments. The focus must shift to demonstrating to the world that climate action creates good jobs; creates wealth that is shared broadly and that expands opportunities for women and our young.

The global social and economic response to COVID19 also provides a strong opportunity for promoting green and blue climate actions as part of the recovery.

But, Madam Chair, COVID19 demonstrates one additional reason why accelerating climate action is so fundamental to humanity. The World today looks with great hope to the vast genetic resources locked in the biodiversity of our oceans and forests in its search for vaccines and cures for COVID19 and for many diseases.

If we allowed this biodiversity to collapse because of climate change; we may have destroyed the very foundations for human life when the next pandemic strikes. Having this meeting today, is a forceful reminder that ambition matters more now than ever before.

I thank you.