

**Pacific Islands Forum  
with United Nations Missions**

Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,  
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,  
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,  
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.



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**United Nations Water Conference 2023**

**22 March 2023**

**Pacific Islands Forum General Debate Statement**

**Delivered by Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau, Fiji Minister for Public Works,  
Transport and Meteorological Services on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum**

Excellencies,

I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum with presence at the United Nations, namely Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Fiji. We acknowledge the guidance and support of the Cook Islands as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Our Forum members refer to our beautiful Pacific region as the Blue Pacific Continent – our cultures, economies and development aspirations are fundamentally intertwined with the water that sustains us.

Our first inhabitants were among the world's great seafarers. Our maritime communities provide sustenance to our families, our islands and to the world. Our children grow up with an intimate relationship

to our rivers and ocean. Water flows through our people's lives and livelihoods. Where Pacific people reside – there is water.

Throughout our history this relationship has also borne risks, indeed we have always known that the waters that flow in and around us must be respected. Our isolated communities are at risk of drought and flood, our coastal peoples face king tides, tsunamis and storm surges and we feel the impacts on our water sanitation and economies when extreme weather events strike.

These events are increasing, both in number and severity as climate change continues to disrupt our precious environment. Our Leaders have identified climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and declared a climate emergency in our region.

Our governments are undertaking the urgent work of adaptation and indeed mitigation despite the negligible contribution to global emissions many of our small islands states make.

At this conference we again state plainly, the world must act now to secure the 1.5 degree target by drastically cutting carbon emissions and by greatly accelerating our path to a global economy that is not reliant on fossil fuels.

This week's IPCC AR6 synthesis report is unequivocal. Human-caused climate change is affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Widespread adverse impacts on vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to the crisis are being felt now. The science is clear and the impacts are part of our daily lived realities. The time to act was yesterday.

Excellencies,

The health of our peoples is being severely compromised by a lack of access to clean water. The Blue Pacific Continent has some of the lowest levels of access to safe water and sanitation of any region in the world. 43% of Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) peoples lack access to even basic drinking water facilities and 65% lack access to even basic sanitation facilities.

Over two million people in the Pacific Islands lack access to safe drinking water. The IPCC has projected that climate change is projected to cause a 50% reduction in water availability in some PICs by the year 2100.

While other regions face similar concerns, we are falling behind in our efforts to improve conditions in Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) as our population growth outstrips our ability to maintain and improve water sanitation. More must be done to safeguard our water for the sake of our and our children's health, socio-economic development, food and energy security, environment and human rights.

While our governments and development partners are progressing water security across multiple fronts, we must innovate and redouble our efforts particularly in rural and remote areas and with a focus on our marginalised peoples. Like climate change, water security is a cross-cutting issue which requires a whole of society approach and meaningful cooperation among various sectors.

Our region has many initiatives in this regard, from the *Pacific Resilience Partnership*, which is developing a Regional Engagement Strategy on Water Security and Resilience, the *Pacific Water and Wastewater Association*, which supports intergovernmental coordination and capacity building, the *Pacific Meteorological Council* which provides technical analysis and support and the *Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility*, which supports information sharing and coordination of development partners.

The Pacific Community (SPC) 2023 Water Security Update has identified that these and the many other partnerships active in the region are providing much-needed support to Pacific Island Countries. According to the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, the water sector in the Pacific Islands requires an estimated \$1.2 billion in investment to meet the water-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Gaps remain in the synthesis and communication of critical learnings to leaders at all levels and in connecting this critical work to existing regional ambitions and reporting frameworks including the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific*, the *Boe Declaration* and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

At the 6<sup>th</sup> Pacific Water and Wastewater Minister's Forum held in Fiji in November 2022, ministers acknowledged the importance of the UN 2023 Water Conference in addressing our region's water and sanitation challenges. They agreed for the forum communique to be presented to this conference on behalf of members and we accordingly include this in our written statement submission.

Excellencies,

Despite our hard work, the Blue Pacific Continent as a whole continues lag behind the world in achieving the SDG6 targets. Half of the Pacific population lives without access to basic drinking water facilities, and more than two thirds live without access to basic sanitation. We must do better. We must do more. We must change today to ensure our survival tomorrow.

While there has been progress in many countries, stark inequities across the region and within countries remain. Our COVID experience has heightened the urgency of improving WASH standards and we know that we face a future of ever more complex

and interactive challenges as climate change further impacts our region.

We hope that this conference will allow us to listen, to share and to learn from others' experiences in tackling this most pressing issue and we stand ready to engage with and work alongside you all to secure a future of clean, sustainable and accessible water for all.

Excellencies,

Allow me to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

Let me reiterate that my country, Fiji, has similar water issues and challenges to other island states not only in the Pacific but other regions such as the Caribbean.

Some of our key challenges include:

Our national coverage in terms of water is 82%. It is 98% in the urban areas and only 58% in the rural;

We have 158,000 water connections but only 33,273 waste treatment connections hence wastewater is a huge issue as far as the environment is concerned.

On non-revenue water, we experience 200 bursts per 100km whereas the global benchmark is 13 bursts per 100km for a system in good condition- indicating a seriously degraded system.

Climate change and our annual cycle of two to four cyclones seriously impacts supply and the well-being of our population every year, not to mention setbacks in any infrastructure developments. We also face an ageing and non-resilient infrastructure.

I must stress the need for us all to work together to address these challenges in all facets, including climate change and infrastructure financing for the sake of humanity.

Vinaka vakalevu - I thank you all for your contributions.