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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE TO PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM
Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 28 August 2012

*Delivered by Ms. Michelle Bachelet,
Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women*

Your Excellency Prime Minister Puna,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to send greetings to this year's Pacific Island Forum. Last year I was honoured to be the first Secretary-General of the United Nations to attend your meeting. My visit gave me a better understanding of the challenges you face. I saw first-hand your vulnerability to climate change as well as the vast isolating distances that create obstacles to trade and development.

This is the first meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum since the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Rio+20 recognised the importance of ecosystems for economic and social well-being and the preservation of invaluable cultural heritage. For Pacific islands, this particularly means sustainably managing the marine environment and marine resources, including through implementing the Mauritius Strategy for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Barbados Programme of Action. My Oceans Compact, launched this month to promote "Healthy Oceans for Prosperity", is designed to enhance the UN system's capacity to support your efforts.

Rio+20 also highlighted the importance of engaging women in sustainable development. The Pacific has some of the world's lowest levels of women's participation in elected positions, as well as disturbing levels of gender-based violence. As we look ahead to the 2014 international conference on sustainable development for Small Island Developing States, I encourage you to prioritize the inclusion of women, as well as youth, indigenous peoples and other major groups, in all aspects of policy-making, legislation and planning. Advancing the equal rights of men and women creates healthier and more sustainable societies and economies.

Sustainable development also entails reducing vulnerability to disasters and the impacts of climate change. Last year, I was briefed on the new Adaptation Fund project in the Solomon Islands. And in Kiribati, I joined hands with the President and young people to plant mangroves near the shoreline. I urge Pacific nations to adopt regional frameworks and integrated approaches to mitigate risk, and to secure the full participation

of all citizens in decision-making and implementation. The United Nations stands ready to provide full support.

Let us also work together to realize the objectives of the Pacific Plan, including its commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Looking beyond the MDG deadline, I have appointed a High-level Panel to advise on the post-2015 development agenda. We look forward to collaborating closely with the Pacific Island Forum to ensure that our goals and activities are closely aligned, and, in particular, to address the special needs of Small Island Developing States.

Finally, I commend your work for peace and stability in the region. Peace is tightly bound both to economic development and the commitment of Governments to devote the necessary resources to improving the well-being of their citizens. You can count on the United Nations – and me personally – to continue to support your efforts for peace and sustainable prosperity throughout the Pacific.

I wish you a successful meeting, and I look forward to our continued dialogue in the margins of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly.