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**Fiji Ministry of Housing, Land Settlements and Environment**

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Saka

A very good evening to you all. On behalf of my Prime Minister, Hon. Laisenia Qarase, I wish to sincerely thank the President of Palau, His Excellency, Tommy Remengesau Jnr., for his kind invitation as host, for Fiji to be a part of this exciting event tonight. Let me also thank the sponsors and organisers of this event.

Firstly, congratulations to the leaders of Micronesia. Thank you for bringing to the attention of our global leaders and international community in this COP8, your commitment and contribution to global targets as set out at the World Summit on sustainable development, the millennium development goals and the convention on biological diversity, this mighty 'Micronesia Challenge'.

Small countries like ours you may be, but your political, moral, and courageous initiative and commitments are certainly visionary and admirable. You have enhanced the leadership needed to successfully implement the CBD Programme of Work on Island Biodiversity, Protected Areas, and Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, and towards building a Global Island Partnership to meet the great challenge ahead of all of us.

The fact that, as part of a greater global group of islands that support more rare, endangered and threatened plant and animals species than anywhere else on the planet, is testimony, and justification for recognition and support of your commitment.

For islands like ours, the marine and coastal areas are critical to the health and well-being of our peoples and communities, and we therefore recognise, that in addition to our government's responsibilities, the commitment of our local and indigenous communities, civil society, and each citizen is crucial to effectively preserving our marine and coastal biodiversity.

In terms of Fiji's commitment, and after many years of consultations and consensus building, Fiji declared its commitment in Mauritius in 2005, that "at least 30% of Fiji's inshore and offshore marine areas will have come under a comprehensive, ecologically representative networks of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which are effectively managed and adequately financed by 2020". This is in line with the global target of 10% of world seas being managed and governed through MPAs by 2020. We strongly believe, given our progress to date, that we will meet our target in good time.

In terms of legislation, Fiji's parliament passed the Environment Management Act in 2005. The Act ensures that monitoring mechanisms are put in place, such as the periodic review of a State of the Environment Report, Natural Resource Management Plan, and a Natural Resource Inventory.

Furthermore, a draft regulation, the Fisheries (Conservation of Archipelagic and Territorial Waters) Regulations 2006, has been finalised for cabinet approval. The intention of the regulation is that all areas of seas within Fiji's Archipelagic waters and Territorial Seas, other than Customary Fishing Rights Areas, determined by the Native Fisheries Commission (NFC), are declared Conservation and Protected Areas for all fish stocks in such areas of seas.

Fiji has 800,000 islanders responsible for the sustainable use and management of its marine resources.

Briefly, let me outline the MPA initiatives and progress of work to date in Fiji.

- In 1982, Fiji was the first country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), with declaration of its EEZ a year earlier. Fiji's contribution ever since has been a reflection of its commitment to the principles embodied in the Convention, representing the best arrangement for proper and equitable development of the resources of the ocean.
- Fiji has declared itself as an archipelagic state according to the provisions of the Convention and has drawn an archipelagic baseline that joins the outermost islands of the archipelago.
- Historically, indigenous communities have long practiced traditional management systems such as seasonal bans and temporary "no-take" marine and coastal areas. A good example is the traditional seasonal ban on the consumption of turtle meat.
- In fact, MPAs or Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) as we call them in Fiji, that are based on strong principles of co-management, weave these traditional measures into a broader Marine and Coastal Protection Strategy. In Fiji, established LMMAs that have involved biological monitoring from the outset are showing impressive gains in benefits from marine areas.
- Fiji has an EEZ of 1.29 million square kilometres outside its baseline. Within four (4) years, about 10% of the 2020 target for waters under reservation of protected, has been achieved. There is a good indication that Fiji is progressing towards its 2020 targets when it is noted that:
  - Our EEZ is already declared a whale sanctuary;
  - Our archipelagic waters will become a protected area when cabinet will endorse a Cabinet Paper on the New Fisheries (Conservation of Archipelagic and Territorial Waters) Regulations 2006, which is currently before it;
  - Our internal waters are already a protected area of 7,000 square kilometres.
- In our internal waters which are the critical conservation area (high water mark to the outer edge of the reefs), we have 109 Locally Managed Marine Area sites, covering an area of 7,000 square kilometres, distributed over eleven (11) of the fourteen (14) provinces of Fiji, and spread over 57 of our 187 districts, and involving approximately 100,000 or 10% of our coastal population in their management. It is also important to note that around 50% of Fiji's population live in urban centres and all major centres are located on coastal areas.

Tonight, I wish to share with you, in particular, one of our MPA or LMMA network projects. It is called the Fiji Seascape/Ecosystem-Based Management project.

Now, we in Fiji have long recognised that the persistent degradation of our coastal marine systems call for an approach that focuses on the entire ecosystem, meaning the inclusion also of people who live there.

So based on this premise, the Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) approach or model is designed to restore and sustain the health, productivity, resilience, and biological diversity of coastal marine systems, and promote the quality of life for our communities who depend on them.

Some features of the approach are:

- The EBM project utilises MPAs as the main tool to conserve biodiversity and sustain fisheries;
- Terrestrial environments and watersheds are considered along with the marine ecosystem and the protection measures implemented;

- Biological and socio-economic baselines are obtained and reassessed over time to study effects of management activities and to streamline and adapt effective management plans;
- The overall LMMA network project has strong government (political will) and community (chiefs) support.

The seascape EBM project in Fiji is currently funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, for a period of two (2) years from April 2005 to April 2007.

The partners working on this project are: The Fiji Government; World Conservation Society; WWF; Wetlands International; and the University of the South Pacific.

On the slide, you will see the red dotted boundary indication the overall area of the seascape/EBM project, which includes five (5) provinces in Fiji.

However, the two (2) main networks of MPAs that I want to show you as examples of our current MPA work are the Kubulau MPA Network and the Macuata Reserve Network.

The Kubulau MPA has been carefully designed by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) based on scientific approach together with traditional knowledge from the resource owners or members of the communities. This network design is the first to be designed and implemented in Fiji. After four (4) months now, communities are experiencing changes within their fisheries and this has indicated success to the network in place. Together with the network, there is also a community-based management plan with a working committee.

The Macuata Reserve Network, comprising the Great Sea Reef, the third longest reef in the world, is currently designed based on the communities' traditional knowledge and experiences.

The Tui Macuata, Ratu Katonivere, is the paramount chief of the Macuata Province in which the Macuata Reserve Network is situated. We are fortunate that he is present here with us today to participate in the Community taba. Ratu Katonivere is currently playing the lead role in the management and the implementation of the network.

Now, in this slide of the Kubulau Marine Network, you will witness the:

- Management of watershed areas;
- Management of freshwater resources;
- Establishment of forest reserves.

In the next slides on the Macuata Reserve Network, you will witness the:

- Sharing of traditional knowledge and the mapping out of resources by the community members (resource owners), which shows chiefs and their community members taking the lead role;
- Community engagement, where communities are engaged in the processes, decision making and the implementation of the project;
- Chiefs taking the leading role in learning and the decision making process;
- Chiefs and community members, traditionally marking their 'tabu' areas (traditional marking of MPA boundaries);
- Members of the communities mapping out their resources, based on their traditional knowledge and experiences.

These indigenous communities in Fiji have traditionally depended on coastal marine resources for their livelihoods and they have first-hand knowledge of the status of these resources and the problems facing them. This traditional knowledge, practices and innovations have been passed down through generations and provide strong incentive for biodiversity conservation. It must also be noted that the coastal population is rapidly

increasing through urban drift and tourism, and these have many influences on the degradation of the resources, when their actions are not controlled.

### **The results**

The impact of MPAs or LMMA networks and success stories are that, over a short period of time of the projects, members of the communities are experiencing the replenishment and abundance of their marine resources, and which has direct benefit to their livelihoods.

Some of the notable examples are:

- The Humpback wrasse or 'varivoce' as we call it in Fijian. In COP13 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species held in Thailand in 2004, Fiji proposed the conservation of the species under the convention and today it is illegal to fish the humpback wrasse for commercial purposes.
- We in Fiji are now seeing a great number of species in our EBM project as you can see there on the slide.
- Monitoring data gathered by the community teams in one site between 1997 and 2004 show the number of clams increased dramatically in both the 'tabu' and adjacent areas.
- In one village, a 'tabu' or ban was imposed on a mangrove island by counting 'active holes' in the mangroves; they found that the numbers of the mangrove lobster *Thalassina anomala* increased by roughly 250% annually, with a spillover effect of roughly 120% outside the 'tabu' area.
- In another village, one year after creating a 'tabu' area, the community harvested approximately eight (8) tons of their food total, the rabbit fish in one week. While this catch coincided with the high season for rabbit fish, the village had not seen such abundance for such a long time in forty-seven (47) years.

### **The challenges**

- Political will towards Fiji's long-term commitment to the implementation of the CBD;
- Integration of conservation activities in the National Strategic Development Plans;
- Enforcement of appropriate legislations;
- Sustainability on conservation programmes through community participation in the planning, awareness, consultation, implementing, monitoring and reviewing stages of the programmes;
- Accessing international funding mechanisms and provision of funds in national budgets;
- Capacity building in government and civil society, including local communities;
- Coordination of partnerships and actions of stakeholders at international, regional, national and local community levels.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our long-term vision for Fiji is for sustainable biodiversity conservation, and we are willing to work with our island nation partners and developed nation partners on whom we will rely heavily for investment to progress our Island Biodiversity Programme of Work, so we can meet our 2010 and 2020 targets.

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I wish the Micronesia Challenge every success.

God bless you all.

Vinaka Vakalevu  
Thank you