



**COMMODORE JOSIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF (Mil), OStJ, MSD, jssc, psc**  
Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

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**ADDRESS AT THE INAUGURAL PACIFIC ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT FORUM  
(PIDF) MEETING**

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**Sheraton Hotel,**

**Nadi: 5 August 2013**

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Theme: “*Leadership, Innovation and Partnership for Green/Blue Pacific Economies*”

- *H.E Xanana Gusmao, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste*
- *H.E. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati*
- *H.E. Baron Waqa, President of the Republic of Nauru*
- *Honorable Gordon Darcy Lilo, Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands*
- *Honorable Alik L. Alik, Vice President of the Federated States of Micronesia*
- *Honorable Ministers of Pacific-SIDS*
- *Fellow Cabinet Ministers*
- *Members of the Diplomatic Corp*
- *Special Envoys from China, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Russia*
- *Respective Representatives from Participating Pacific-SIDS*
- *Private Sector and Civil Society Representatives*
- *Invited Guests*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

Today, we come together to launch a new era of regional cooperation, solidarity and friendship.

We are building a new framework for Pacific islanders -wherever they live - to confront the many challenges and opportunities that face us.

And we are doing it in the Pacific Way – through genuine consultation between Governments, civil society groups and the business community.

It is a historic occasion. It has never been done this way in our region before. And I have the great honour to welcome you all to Fiji to the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum.

I extend a special welcome to our chief guest, H.E Xanana Gusmao, the former President and now Prime Minister of Timor Leste. He is an inspiration to us all for showing us the power of reconciliation and unity over division and conflict.

I also want to extend a special welcome to the world's smallest economy – Tokelau – which is the first place in the world to be entirely solar powered, leading the way in the Green Blue Pacific. So when it comes to renewable energy, Tokelau's voice must be heard and here for the first time, it will be heard.

This is why this gathering is so important, why the PIDF will be different.

I also welcome some of the world's biggest and richest nations, who are here as observers and regard this as an important initiative. To those who have contributed to the cost of staging the event – China, Russia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates – vinaka vakalevu. You have our grateful thanks.

Until now, Ladies and Gentlemen, sovereign governments have largely determined how the Pacific will respond to its many challenges. The small island territories, dependencies and protectorates haven't had a direct say. And neither have civil society groups and businesses. The people most affected by government decisions – the grassroots and their representatives – have largely been excluded from the decision-making process.

Not any longer. The PIDF recognises that Governments don't have all the answers. We cannot merely prescribe solutions to the challenges we face in keeping the Pacific Green and Blue.

We need to listen more to our people and the common sense towards problem-solving that comes with grassroots participation. We need to

listen more to our business communities, whose investment generates the jobs we need to raise living standards and improve the lives of our people.

So for the first time, we are bringing all these stakeholders together to discuss common solutions to our common problems in a practical and holistic way. And we will take those ideas and contribute them to the global debate in other Forums - including the United Nations -, the Pacific speaking with one voice based on the consensus we reach here.

The World recognises the underlying importance of this approach.

In June last year, governments and civil society groups gathered in Rio De Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

It concluded that Small Island Developing States have a special status in the debate about sustainable development because of their unique vulnerability. And it said that sustainable development, and I quote: “can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector, all working together to secure the future for present and the following generations”. Unquote.

In August last year, we took up the challenge ourselves when Pacific Island leaders attended the “Engaging with the Pacific” meeting in Fiji.

The final communiqué, and I quote: “endorsed the convening of the Pacific Islands Development Forum for the purpose of engaging leaders from key sectors in implementing green economic policies in the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (or PSIDS).Unquote.

A year later, ladies and gentlemen, here we are.

Why do we need a new body, a new framework of cooperation? Because the existing regional structure for the past four decades – the Pacific Islands Forum - is for Governments only and has also come to be dominated only by a few. In too many instances, it no longer genuinely represents our interests and needs.

We want to stand up as Pacific Islanders and with one voice send a clear message to the world at large; that Pacific-SIDS are vulnerable and face unique sustainable development challenges.

For instance, the international community must face up to its responsibilities to tackle the issue of climate change, which threatens the very existence of some of our nations. We are not interested in arcane debates about the cause of climate change. It is happening and rising sea levels are, for us, a real and present danger. We are not interested in the excuses of the carbon-emitting countries selfishly trying to protect their own economies by refusing to sign up to emission targets. They must act and act now.

We also recognise that we live in one ocean – the Pacific – and that its health is the most important thing to us all, whether we are city dwellers or feed off it directly in the most isolated maritime communities.

For our part, Fiji looked around the Pacific and came to one conclusion; that the world will only listen if we work in concert as Pacific Small Island Developing States to demand that our concerns about the state of our ocean are addressed.

We in Fiji now have bottles that are so biodegradable that they completely dissolve within a year. Imagine island coastlines free of discarded plastic bottles.

These are practical solutions to the most pressing of problems, to secure the Pacific's future as Green and Blue.

So our vision, Ladies and Gentlemen - is for sovereign governments, territories and dependencies, civil society groups and the business community, forming a grand coalition to protect our environment. To make sure that development is sustainable. To make sure that the common good comes before sectional interests, that we leave the Pacific to our children and grandchildren in a better state than when we inherited it.

The other Small Island Developing States around the world share many of the same challenges we do. We can also cooperate with them to address these challenges. That is why it is even more important for the Pacific island countries to speak with one voice.

Next September, the small island states meet for a global conference to discuss our common issues. As Pacific Small Island Developing States, we have begun the process of formulating positions to make our voices heard there. We are determined to generate worthwhile ideas that the rest of the world embraces and we'll be continuing that process here this week.

It is unfortunate that certain Pacific countries are not here with us. They have chosen to regard this Forum as a political event rather than grasp its true purpose – which is to address the very real threat that our people face and could be catastrophic if we don't act in a collaborative and unselfish manner. As leaders, we must always put our people first.

We are one ocean, one people, seeking common solutions.

And so today we join hands with each other and with our development partners from outside the region to strive for a Green-Blue Pacific economy.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, our time is running out. Too often, these gatherings end in fancy words and formal declarations that don't necessarily translate into action.

Therefore this Forum must deliver outcomes that are achievable, affordable and tailored to our specific needs.

Fiji is proud to have facilitated the alliance at the United Nations between the Pacific Small Island Developing States and the Asia Group.

Now with the PIDF, we bring together a grand alliance of sovereign nations, territories and dependencies with the political will to implement change, civil society groups with the passion to drive change, and businesses that are job creators for our people.

This is a winning combination. I wish you well in your deliberations on behalf of every Pacific Islander who looks forward to a better future.

Once again I welcome our visitors to Fiji. I hope you take time out to enjoy our beautiful country and the hospitality and warmth of the Fijian people.

Vinaka vakalevu, Thank you.