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Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE SECOND SUMMIT OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

Sheraton Resort  
Thursday 19th June, 2014  
DENARAU

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Your Excellency the President of Kiribati, Anote Tong,

Your Excellency the President of Nauru, Baron Waqa.

Your Excellency the Vice President of the Federated States of Micronesia, Alik Alik.

Your Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Marshall Islands, Wilbur Heine,

Your Excellency the Prime Minister of Tonga, Lord Tuivakano,

Ministers and distinguished delegates from the Pacific

Distinguished representatives of foreign governments and international and regional organisations,

Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors and High Commissioners, members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Representatives from civil society organisations and the private sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

Welcome to the Second Summit of the Pacific Islands Development Forum – our grand coalition of regional governments, civil society organisations and the private sector.

I want to extend a special welcome to our chief guest, His Excellency the President of

Indonesia. Sir, your presence in Fiji is a great honour and every Fijian joins me in welcoming you to our shores. My fellow leaders here also join me in welcoming you to the Pacific Islands. And I, in turn, also welcome them to Fiji.

Mr President, with your 250 million citizens spread out across 13-and-a-half thousand islands in the Indonesian Archipelago, you represent the most populous nation in our immediate region, as well as the most influential on the global stage.

Indeed, you are one of only three world leaders appointed by the United Nations to the high-level panel advising it on the global development agenda beyond 2015.

This makes you uniquely qualified to help steer our discussions at this Forum, where together we are setting sustainable development goals for our own region. We certainly look forward to the insights you will bring us in your opening address.

Mr President, for ten years, you have also presided over, and strengthened, the development of a genuine democracy in Indonesia. This is a singular achievement. And you have done so as a strong advocate of ethnic and religious tolerance and harmony in the world's largest Islamic country in a secular state.

On 17 September, we will emulate your lead here in Fiji when we hold the first genuinely democratic election under our new Constitution, with a common and equal citizenry – for the first time, one person, one vote, one value – and a predominantly Christian country in a secular state

We are determined that this election will be free and fair and express the genuine will of the Fijian people. And to that end, we are assembling a multinational team of observers, which will include Indonesia being a co-leader. And I want to take this opportunity to warmly thank you on behalf of every Fijian for participating in this historic initiative as we embark on our first ever genuine democracy.

Fiji regards Indonesia as a close friend and valued development partner. And we see you as an important ally in our joint effort to improve the lives of the people of developing countries the world over, whether it is through the United Nations, the G77 Plus China or the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Indonesia was a founding member.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I also extend a warm welcome to our other visitors from outside the region, who include observers from some of the world's most influential nations, all of whom have a keen interest in our deliberations.

And, of course Fiji welcomes its Pacific neighbours, the countries and territories who are either back in Nadi again after attending the first PIDF summit last year or are joining us for the first time as our grand coalition expands.

We especially welcome those representatives who have found a voice in the PIDF for the first time, having been excluded from the “governments only” Pacific Islands Forum. Whether you come from the private sector – the highly valued generator of jobs in our economies – or civil society organisations of all kinds, your voices are the genuine voices of the grassroots in our Pacific societies. For you represent the ordinary men and women whose welfare must always be uppermost in our minds and who we are all here to serve.

My Government has made service the cornerstone of its own program, whether it is providing ordinary Fijians with free education, electricity, water or telecommunications; serving our island neighbours through our program of sending them volunteer teachers and health workers; or serving ordinary people in troubled parts of the world by keeping them safe through our contribution to United Nations peace-keeping.

This concept of service underpins our commitment to work with you all in an inclusive and cooperative manner to improve the lives of all Pacific islanders through the PIDF.

My own philosophy about our organisation is simple: Without meeting the needs and aspirations of our people in a meaningful way, we are just another talkfest. Just another date on the annual calendar on which to make empty speeches and move on.

We have one Key Performance Indicator and one alone: to go beyond the rhetoric and take concrete measures to improve the lives of our people and provide them with a better future. If we fail in that objective, then little that happens here has any real meaning beyond this room.

Fiji’s vision for the PIDF – which I first enunciated last year – is equally simple: We don’t need expensive outside solutions in our quest for Green/Blue economies, in which our resources on land and our resources at sea are protected and sustained. We need an affordable, achievable and practical Pacific development model that not only serves our needs today but leaves our precious surroundings in a better state than we inherited for our children and future generations.

We don’t need big budgets and a bloated bureaucracy. We need big ideas to move our region forward and big arms and big hearts to deliver them. We need to be smarter and more imaginative, more open to new ideas, embrace solutions that are holistic and inclusive and that tap the common sense and problem-solving skills of our people.

We need Pacific solutions, by Pacific islanders for Pacific Islanders, forged in conjunction with our development partners but with genuine consultation. Working together hand-in-hand in The Pacific Way. Consensus. Inclusion.

Of course, we can only work within the realms of the possible. And I want to again stress our collective disappointment and dismay at the failure of the international community

to address the challenges that confront us as Pacific islanders because of climate change.

The rising sea levels caused by global warming threaten the very existence of some of our neighbours – Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands – and are already swamping the coastal areas of many Pacific nations, including Fiji.

Yet if anything, the collective will of the global community to adequately address this crisis is receding. This is certainly the case in our own region, where the election of the new government in Australia last September has seen a distinct change of rhetoric about cutting carbon emissions.

I appeal to Australia and other countries not to behave selfishly over the catastrophic prospect facing Small Island Developing States. History will judge you harshly if you abandon us to our apparent fate of sinking below the waves because you don't want to make the necessary adjustment to your domestic policies.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, on a more positive note, it is now my pleasure to give you a progress report on what has happened since we gathered here for the first Summit last August. And I say pleasure because I think we all have cause to be delighted by the strides we have made in building the PIDF virtually from scratch in just ten short months.

First, we have a new home – the Secretariat building provided by Fiji in Suva, which started out as a rather faded former colonial residence but which we renovated and transformed into an attractive and serviceable headquarters.

Second, we have an Interim Secretary General – Mr Feleti Penitala Teo of Tuvalu, a former Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum and one of the region's most senior and experienced public servants.

We have also established a proper governance structure for the organisation. This includes a Senior Officials Committee under the chairmanship of the Ambassador of the Federated States of Micronesia, His Excellency Gerson Jackson, whose job is to oversee the work of the Secretariat. And we have a Governing Council under my chairmanship to provide strategic guidance when this Summit is not in Session.

This Council had its first meeting yesterday and we made a number of major decisions. We approved a work program and budget for the PIDF and approved its new strategic focus and transitional governance structure. And we agreed on the terms of reference to begin preparing an agreement for the long-term institutional arrangements for the PIDF.

This will be ready to be adopted next year by all Pacific nations and territories wishing to formally join the organisation. A Host Country Agreement has also been approved by the Governing Council, which will now be signed by Fiji as host government and the PIDF

Secretariat.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the expanding membership and influence of the PIDF is extremely gratifying. Last year, we had 320 participants joining us here. This year we have more than 400. And the presence with us today of the Indonesian leader is ample evidence that we are a formidable and credible regional grouping and that our future potential is limited only by our imaginations.

Never before have we had a high level forum to sit down together – governments, civil society groups and the private sector – to chart a development path forward for all Pacific peoples. Until now, Governments have enjoyed a monopoly on decision making when they clearly don't have a monopoly on wisdom.

For the first time, we have brought into the room those most affected by government decisions – the grassroots through their representatives in civil society and business. And it's with you that we seek solutions to the challenges we face in keeping the Pacific Green and Blue.

I urge you all to set your sights on outcomes of the highest quality. Because we will contribute those ideas to the global debate in other Forums – the Pacific speaking with one voice based on the consensus we reach here.

The PIDF will be taking part in the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa, at the beginning of September and the Second United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York at the end of this month.

Delegates, this is about adding more building blocks to the foundations we laid last year, when we agreed on a broad range of measures needed for Green Growth in the Pacific. In essence, they include good governance, sustainability, how to pay for what we require, the need to forge genuine partnerships and capacity building.

This year, I urge you to bring those strands together to form a cogent narrative that is easily understood and easily explained. We need to take our people with us as we consolidate the work we are doing on their behalf. We need to give them a story they can understand.

With the diversity of national circumstances and different stages of development in the Pacific, there is obviously no "one size fits all" Green Growth formula and it is not our intention to develop one. But we can still come up with a framework that addresses the collective challenges we all face – sustainable economic growth and job creation, poverty reduction, the proper disposal of waste, the development of alternative energy sources to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

It is something that we have already embarked on in Fiji and are placing at the core of

our development effort. Indeed, only last week we held a national summit to consider a Green Growth framework of our own. As I told the 350 participants: “We need to reshape our development strategies away from the conventional growth model of exploiting particular resources in the here and now. We need to refine our existing approaches and forge a new development model – one that is more holistic, integrated, inclusive and above all sustainable”.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. We need to be smarter and more innovative but we also need our development partners to assist us in the process. We need their help to help ourselves. So I’m pleased to say that we are signing a number of agreements during this conference between the PIDF Secretariat and our development partners. They all recognise that successfully shifting to a growth model that sustains natural resources over time requires the engagement of countries beyond our region.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, you are all in Fiji at a very exciting time. There are now less than 90 days to our General Election, in which five registered political parties are vying for the votes of more than 550-thousand Fijians who have so far registered to vote.

We are on the cusp of a new era – a genuine democracy which will herald a new era of stability and prosperity.

Our economic growth forecast for 2014 is 3.8 per cent, greater than our larger neighbours. So Fiji is on the move and the signs are all around us.

We also intend to cement our position as the hub of the Pacific with major improvements to our infrastructure – our ports and airports – and the expansion of our national airline, Fiji Airways. And we also intend to work hand-in-hand with our neighbours on issues of mutual concern and making sure our collective voice is heard in the world.

Our Chief Guest, Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of every Fijian, I close by wishing you well in your deliberations and again issue a warm welcome to those of you who are visitors. As always, I urge you take time out to enjoy more of our beautiful country and the celebrated hospitality and warmth of the Fijian people.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.