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Marshall Islands
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Pacific Islands Forum Group

Palau
Papua New Guinea
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Pacific Islands Forum

United Nations Member States

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. AMRAIYA NAIDU,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP,
TO THE PLENARY ON ITEM 42 -
FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOME OF THE 26TH SPECIAL SESSION:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS:
REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
8 NOVEMBER 2002, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Mr. President,

I thank you for the opportunity to present this statement on this Agenda Item on the report of the Secretary-General on the progress towards the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and I am honoured to do so on behalf of the Pacific Island Countries with missions in New York, namely; Australia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country Fiji, as well as Kiribati and Palau. The PIF group also addressed the UNGASS on HIV/AIDS in May 2001 on issues which are also relevant to our discussions today.

Mr. President,

At the outset we want to note the reported successes that Cambodia, Thailand, Uganda, and Zambia have waged against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These successes give us hope and optimism that our concerted effort is the global way forward.

Despite these trends, HIV/AIDS remains the worst epidemic and one of the most threatening development, security and global challenges in human history. In some worst affected countries of the world, one quarter of the total population is infected by the HIV/AIDS virus. The consequential impacts of the epidemic in those countries are disastrous- the workforce is significantly reduced; millions of children are orphaned; their opportunities for social, economic, and other forms of development are seriously affected. With over 40 million people living with the virus and its continually alarming rate of infection of 5 million people every year, urgent action is imperative in order to stem the tide of this scourge.

For the Pacific region, the comparatively low rate of reported infections presents the danger of a false sense of security from, or immunity against HIV/AIDS. More realistically, Mr. President, the rate of HIV infection is increasing in the Pacific Region and it remains a high risk area. Since the Special Session on HIV/AIDS last year, positive cases have been reported in previously unaffected Forum member states. Statistics also show that the number of those infected in some Pacific states has doubled. The Secretary General's report on this global upward trend is sobering. However, we take

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comfort in the time bound quantifiable and targeted commitments in the UNGASS declaration. Those are the benchmarks that can guide member states today as we begin to respond to the projections, and to the new and deviating trends that the virus is now displaying. We recognize the important role that awareness raising and education plays in any prevention campaign.

While reflecting on the achievements and progresses we have made thus far in the battle against HIV/AIDS, the report reminds us of the mammoth tasks ahead in implementing commitments to combat the pandemic. We have indeed covered considerable ground in 16 months, notably in the areas of leadership, partnership, and resources.

Leadership at the global level has enabled the international community to be sensitized on HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS has been given due prominence and focus in critical international meetings for the decade, beginning with the Millennium Summit, the Doha Ministerial Conference, and the Johannesburg WSSD Summit.

Efforts at the regional level include the formulation of appropriate policy directions and mechanisms and the mobilization of resources and initiatives in the battle against the epidemic. The Pacific Islands Forum prioritized HIV/AIDS in its political communiqué of August 2002. In calling for additional measures at the regional level, the Forum leaders directed the Forum Secretariat to spearhead the development of a Pacific Regional Plan of Action Against HIV/AIDS. They also endorsed a concerted regional approach to accessing international financial assistance from sources such as the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS. On a broader scale, states within the Asia-Pacific region, particularly those more vulnerable small island states, have benefited from a more focused sub-regional approach.

Mr. President, Our regional efforts are hampered by compounding difficulties, such as lack of funding and technical capacity in our regional organizations to implement these regional initiatives. Hence, the urgent need for international support and assistance in our collective struggle against the epidemic.

A total of 91 countries have put in place National Strategies and established National AIDS Councils, as well as nationwide programmes and activities to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, other countries, including certain worst affected countries have yet to establish such national instruments to address the epidemic.

Most of our members have in place appropriate national HIV/AIDS policies as well as legal, administrative, and institutional mechanisms and programmes. The cross-sectoral involvement of all Government Ministries, NGOs, private sector and other relevant stakeholders in implementation of their policies and programmes needs to be harnessed and better coordinated. In our region, efforts to implement policies and programmes are often impeded by lack of financial resources and technical expertise.

Mr. President,

Greater involvement of young people as significant agents for positive change in this challenging area is being pursued in our region. We have started to look at improving media tools and perspectives in the handling of HIV/AIDS. A recent breakthrough in access to antiretroviral drugs in our region needs

financial backing for greater access. Most of our members have provided funding and technical assistance within our region.

Mr. President,

We acknowledge the valuable financial contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, including contributions of some of our PIF members.

The Global Fund has certainly assumed an important global responsibility in the provision of much-needed support and assistance to developing countries in their battle against HIV/AIDS. In particular, the Fund can assist in mobilising resources from the private sector, which is very important if the \$10 billion annual requirement from all sources to fight HIV/AIDS is to be achieved. The Fund's targeted disbursements of \$3 billion next year represent a 50 per cent increase on the amount available last year. We are therefore confident that resources will continue to be mobilised, and positive impacts to flow from its allocation to low and middle income countries. Our group reiterates that a small fraction of the \$3 billion figure would more than arrest the rate of infection in our small populations. We need to be assisted in this venture to lead to a very positive outcome, which is possible in the Pacific.

The achievement of our common objectives in the area of prevention, care and treatment, reducing vulnerability, assistance to children orphaned by AIDS, alleviating social and economic impact, research and development and so forth are contingent on the availability of adequate resource at the disposal of developing countries. The small populations and unique vulnerabilities that our small island developing member states face have prioritized prevention strategies in national action plans. In this connection the report favours our strategy in highlighting the significance of prevention, where it reports on the sustained rate of infection in high income countries despite all the advantages of access to care . '

Mr. President,

We would be remiss to not note the involvement of important partners in galvanizing our collective efforts. We commend the leadership provided by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the work of its member agencies or cosponsors system-wide. We appreciate their efforts to work collaboratively with national and regional civil society organizations and NGOs and private sector bodies to fight HIV/AIDS in their programme areas and activities.

In conclusion, these international achievements, including the establishment of the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, UN system-wide collaboration and partnership with the World Bank, NGOs, civil society, and other stakeholders must be sustained if we are to meet our common objective to reduce by 2005 HIV prevalence among young men and women aged 15 to 24 in the most affected 25 per cent and 25 per cent globally by 2010.

For developing countries, resourcing needs constrain the ability to make progress in the battle against HIV/AIDS. Recognising these special needs we encourage the international community to provide financial and technical assistance developing countries, such as the Pacific Island countries, to enable them to pursue both regional and national initiatives in the battle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

I thank you.

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