



PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

UNITED NATIONS MEMBER STATES

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Statement to be delivered on behalf of PSIDS at 60th Session of the Commission on Social Development by Ambassador Fatumanava Dr. Pa'olelei Luteru

Chair,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the twelve members of the Pacific SIDS represented here in New York.

The countdown to achieving the SDGs has less than ten years remaining and the progress that has been achieved thus far has undoubtedly been set back with the outset of this global pandemic. It is our view that the priority theme for this 60th Session of the Commission for Social Development is timely, and we emphasize the need for urgent and coherent action towards eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and building back better together.

The pandemic has aggravated the inherent vulnerabilities and the developmental challenges faced by SIDS, with containment measures such as border closures creating more hardships on both economies and livelihoods. For the past two years our region has worked hard to keep COVID at bay whilst, at the same time, trying to prepare and strengthen national health care systems, social protection systems, bridging the digital divide, provide free education, all with very little revenue streams available. This is a high price to pay for vulnerable countries such as SIDS.

The educational gaps that existed before the pandemic- in access, opportunities, achievement and outcomes are widening. The disparities are a cause for great concern, especially when they interfere with students' opportunities to learn, grow and contribute to our countries futures. The shift to the online platform was challenging for the Pacific, notably the existing digital divide as well as leaving those with special needs at a greater risk of being left behind.

We must prioritize a gender-responsive recovery from COVID-19, particularly to account for women's and girl's specific needs. Social and economic inequalities have been exacerbated, undermining women's economic security and resilience against shocks. We cannot achieve the SDGs, if half of society continue to be at a major disadvantage because of their gender. Their meaningful participation and creation of equal opportunities are key steppingstones in reaching their full potential.

With low formal social protection measures, Pacific SIDS has a high dependency on cultural and familial ties to family and community members overseas, and has led to many of our communities, renewing their relationship with nature and subsistence agriculture for survival. The call by the Secretary-General for the reform of the global financial system is timely, as one of the five areas for emergency attention.

Re-opening our borders has been problematic amidst new strains of COVID 19 which are more virulent and harder to detect. Pacific nations with little to no access to on site testing facilities now have COVID-19 cases within its borders and there is a growing urgency in the need to provide more vaccines, medical teams and food aid especially to hardest hit such as Tonga and Solomon Islands.

Aside from these more immediate measures, the mobilization of adequate finance to enable SIDS to both recover and realize the achievement of the SDGs should also be given priority attention. We should not be placed in a position where we must choose between protecting our people from COVID and meeting our SDGs obligations. A sustainable economic recovery depends on immediate access to concessional finance. Addressing debt recovery as well as building back better requires cooperation at many different multilateral and international financial institutional levels. Small island developing states simply cannot support our SDGs and at the same time fund our core needs on our own. As the Secretary-General strongly argued, “No state should have to choose between rebuilding their economy and servicing their debt”. The development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for SIDS is essential in so far as it can be utilized to access concessional financing. The ability of SIDS to pay their national debts balanced against their efforts towards achieving sustainable development is an issue which requires an urgent global response.

We underscore the need for strengthened and coordinated support from the United Nations system and from the international financial institutions that take fully into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of small island developing States for the implementation of Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the SAMOA Pathway to achieve the SDGs and help us build back better together.

Thank you