



HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2017 OPENING SESSION

**10 JULY 2017, United Nations, New York, USA
MGoS Statement Delivered by Viva Tatawaqa, Fiji**

Bula vinaka and good morning to the Session Chair, all Delegates, and friends. My name is Viva Tatawaqa, and I am from DIVA for Equality Fiji, and member of the feminist global alliance Resurj. I am grateful to be making this Opening statement as part of Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, the Women's Major Group, and part of many feminist and women-led social movements, networks and coalitions.

As a young woman from the global South, I am speaking to you at a time when we are experiencing climate, ecological and political crises. These crises are rooted in a social, economic and ecological model that is damaging people and the planet. That is increasing inequalities and violence. And that is increasing pressure on individuals and communities, who are struggling for sustainable livelihoods and access to resources. We have in our hands the possibility to address and end these crises. The High Level Political Forum must facilitate a robust, transparent and consistent process, that allows for real, transformative change as we work collectively to achieve the vision of the 2030 Agenda and go beyond it.

I am not alone. Grassroots communities around the world have been developing and sharing solutions to local needs for land, water, food and energy, with governments and each other, for many years; from anti-plastic campaigns led by Pacific Island women to the solar dryers of the Women's Environmental Programme in Nigeria, to the Black Mesa Water Coalition of Arizona, and much more. Through public-public partnerships, Governments, civil society and communities are already building sustainable, long term solutions to the crises we face.

The High Level Political Forum is where we should come together to share real strategies, like these, and to reject inadequate responses. It is where we should ensure that the roles of multiple actors, but particularly those of communities, social movements and civil society are clearly and substantively reflected in the Ministerial Declaration as well as in implementation. National experiences should be presented here - as a form of accountability. But this should also be the space where we hear about challenges and structural barriers that cannot be easily solved at national or regional levels, so that globally we can find ways to better achieve our common goals. But we fear that the HLPF is falling short of its mandate of being a space for accountability.

In this moment of crisis, the HLPF offers an opportunity to recommit to multilateralism. Now more than ever we need a strong United Nations, engaged in truly meaningful discussions and global, democratic decision making. The Major Groups and other Stakeholder Coordination Mechanism have worked to promote higher standards of participation and accountability into every step of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and we will continue to do so. Other groups and constituencies have also been extremely active and must be recognized and given space, including but not limited to fisherfolk, people with disabilities, people living with and affected by HIV, LGBTQI people, sex workers, people living in poverty, afro-descendents, people from nomadic societies, ethnic minorities, and many others.

How far are we from achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda? Far. Because governments are still not willing to address the structural barriers that keep us from guaranteeing dignity, rights, freedom and justice for all.

We live in a world where 8 men own more wealth than half the world's population; where 10 corporations have more revenue than 180 countries combined; where 90 corporations, including state-owned corporations, are responsible for two-thirds of man-made global warming emissions; and where 30 trillion dollars sit in tax havens across the world, far more than the 3 trillion we need to eradicate poverty.

Now, at this HLPF, with its theme of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity, we must ask ourselves, do we need more prosperity and wealth for a few, or a just and fairer, shared prosperity that benefits all?

If it is shared prosperity that we want:

We must address unjust financial, trade and investment governance, corporate capture and wealth concentration, land and resource grabbing, and unsustainable production and consumption. We must maintain the connection between the Means of Implementation and the big picture of the 2030 Agenda. We have to promote policy coherence with Financing for Development framework so that there is a shift away from a system that has prioritized corporate power and economic growth above the wellbeing of persons and the health of the planet. Addressing Means of Implementation is not about enhancing official development assistance, although we call for developed countries to fulfil their commitments in this respect. Means of implementation should be the entry points to fulfill at minimum the commitments of the Monterrey, Doha and Addis Ababa FfD Conferences for trade, financial, monetary and economic justice.

We must strengthen the role of the United Nations – with its universal membership, inclusive nature and human rights foundations – in global economic governance. As opposed to forums like the G20, where a few rich countries set policy that affects all of us. One important way to do this is through an intergovernmental UN tax body with universal membership.

We need to ensure coherence between the 2030 Agenda and binding instruments, including on trade and human rights to ensure that the public interest, and not corporate profit, is prioritized in development policy and practice. In this regard, it is particularly critical to ensure that governments meet their national and extraterritorial human rights obligations.

We must reaffirm our commitment to human rights. The 2030 Agenda is not just about achieving a set of development goals, it is about ensuring recognition, protection and implementation of universal rights, including to education and health, housing, water and sanitation, food sovereignty, decent work and living wages in the context of just transition of the work force, and universal social protection.

We must end fundamentalisms, patriarchy, discrimination, militarism, conflict, and sexual and gender-based violence. We must take real action to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights.

We must stop the narrowing of, and threats against space for civic participation and civil society. We need to be very clear that the 2030 Agenda is not possible unless gender justice, social, economic and environmental human rights defenders are safe from violence, harassment, and intimidation, including by ensuring justice and accountability for crimes and abuses committed against them.

We must have a clearer interlinkage and intersectional approach to all SDGs. And one of the issues that we have worked hard on throughout this process to elucidate this approach, is gender equality.

In regards to goal 5 we state strongly that what is required is both specific gender justice focus, and gender mainstreaming in national policy plans. This means recognising the interlinkages between gender equality and all SDGs across all three dimensions of sustainable development. It is a reality that women and girls of all ages are disproportionately impacted by climate change, disasters, and conflict, especially women living in poverty, with disabilities, LGBTI, older, chronically ill and indigenous women, therefore sustainable development models must be grounded in gender, environmental and economic justice.

Gender pay gap, under-representation in decision-making spaces, informal and precarious forms of work, attacks on bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive rights, and other obstacles impede the full realization of women's human rights. Gender equality is a macro agenda and the only way to achieve it is by guaranteeing women's human rights, transforming the sexual division of labour and eliminating patriarchy in all areas of societies. We should open our eyes and start seeing a gendered impact in all of our actions, rather than promoting instrumentalist business-as-usual interventions that women all over the world receive.

I would like to speak on SDG 14 and Oceans, and build on the increased momentum following the first UN Oceans Conference this year.

As the President of the General Assembly has said, “we can no longer say that we are unaware of the extent of trouble we have brought upon the Ocean”.

By 2030 it is estimated that there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans. Today, nearly 90 percent of global fish stocks are either fully fished or overfished. Meanwhile, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development forecasts a 17 percent rise in fish production by 2025, in part to meet the unsustainable over-consumption of fish in developed countries. At the same time, corporate-driven agendas are being moved in the Clarion Clipperton zone to begin unfeasible, experimental seabed mining. This, at a time when it is clear that we must quickly move away from further exploitation of the Ocean, which is already so depleted, dirty and emptied of so much life. In these facts alone, the urgency of this agenda is undeniable.

This is shocking to me as a young Pacific person. For most of my region of twenty two Pacific small island States and territories, the ocean is the source and enabler of our lives, and those of other species. For most of my people there is no alternative to oceans livelihoods and economies. In smaller Pacific and Caribbean States and tens of thousands of coastal villages in every region, we do not have other options of large-scale agriculture, even as those systems are also under severe threat.

This is about the right to life, and to just, sustainable and ecologically based economies. The health of our oceans, land and air will determine whether and how whole societies around the world will survive and thrive and experience sustainable development at all - whether we will live at all.

Finally, Chair and fellow delegates, there is precious little time left to tackle climate change head on and move into an equitable, just and safe transition to a sustainable development future. Our response to this universal challenge must be based on common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. And it must be of the scale required. The damage done to our planet, all species and our societies is now so great. As we break through more planetary boundaries, we cannot be speaking of sustainable development while advancing policies that roll back progress on climate justice. And in a spirit of accountability, there cannot be silence from other States when this happens. The 2030 Agenda applies to all countries, because they are as much about societal practice and economic policy in the global North as in the South, and when it comes to oceans and climate change, these are two clear examples where developed countries must also be accountable.

This is a time of urgency. It is a time for revolutionary and transformative change. Our lives and our planet now depend on this collective work, including during the ten days ahead of us here at the High Level Political Forum.

Thank you for listening Chair, delegates, friends - and good luck and best wishes for all of us, this fortnight and in the hard and necessary work ahead. Vinaka Vakalevu.