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**High-level Dialogue on Climate Change**

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

**SPC Headquarters, Nouméa, New Caledonia**

***Roundtable Segment***

**Keynote Address of the Director-General of SPC**

We are here because of a global crisis: a climate change crisis that presents a real threat for all the societies of the Pacific. President Hollande's and Minister Fabius' visit is a privileged opportunity for Pacific leaders to highlight the tangible impact of climate change on the lives of Pacific people, and the significance of the 2015 Paris Summit for the Pacific. Indeed, the outcomes of the Paris Summit will, to a large extent, determine the fate of many Pacific island countries over the course of this century. Without an ambitious and binding commitment by the global community to reduce significantly greenhouse gas emissions, the livelihoods of a significant proportion of the Pacific community will be placed in jeopardy. In the longer term even the actual existence of several sovereign states is threatened.

It is simply unacceptable that Pacific Island countries and their people up to now seem to have been treated as unavoidable collateral damage. The Paris negotiations next year offer the opportunity to change this, and we should grasp this opportunity.

Even if the international community is able to limit warming to 2 degrees, the Pacific still will face a substantial negative impact. To be blunt, we are at a critical point in terms of the global response to climate change and we have a narrow window in terms of reducing emissions. If Paris fails to deliver substantial and meaningful reductions it will only worsen the emerging climate crisis globally and particularly in the Pacific: this is a fundamental message the world needs to hear.

I would like to highlight what I believe are 3 fundamental reference points for our discussions:

One: Why a crisis for the Pacific?

Two: What are the challenges for a Pacific response to climate change?

Three: What is ahead?

Let me turn to the challenges we face across the Region. The projected changes to the climate in the Pacific over the coming decades are likely to have a profoundly negative impact on the development aspirations of all 22 Pacific island countries and territories: no exceptions.

Of grave concern to the Pacific is the expected increase in extreme weather events that climate change will deliver. These are the devastating floods, droughts, severe winds and storm surges that periodically are visited on Pacific communities. Greater intensity of extreme weather events will have disastrous consequences for fragile Pacific economies. Extreme weather events already cause significant costs to the Region, and just one major event can result in major losses for a nation's GDP. For example, Cyclone Heta cost Niue the equivalent of its entire annual GDP. The Pacific simply cannot absorb losses of this magnitude.

The impact of climate change on food and water security, health and tourism also present a range of difficult challenges that could undermine the economies and livelihoods of Pacific island communities, particularly considering our high dependence on fisheries and agriculture. SPC's recent publication on the impact of climate change on Pacific fisheries, and its forthcoming one on agriculture and forestry, clearly identified some very serious negative changes that could emerge due to climate change, especially for coral reefs and coastal fisheries. Irrespective of the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on global temperatures, one insidious issue that has not received sufficient attention to date is the growing menace of ocean acidification. The Region is highly dependent on the ocean for food and foreign exchange earnings. Any reduction in ocean productivity and the health of coral reefs will have major implications for Pacific island economies. Many of the Region's major commodity export crops, such as coffee, copra and sugar, are also likely to be seriously affected. Dramatically, the longer term rising sea levels could even result in the potential loss of entire countries and also their current sovereign rights to the oceanic resources that currently lie in their exclusive economic zones.

These are real issues. They are hard issues. And at heart they are issues with deeply human consequences. It is essential that the global community recognise that at stake is the fundamental right of the Pacific people to a dignified, productive and healthy life.

While countries are already putting in place measures to accommodate the emerging impact of climate change, we must also recognise that they have very limited human and financial resources to deal effectively with the challenges they face. The Pacific is caught in what I would call a situation of double jeopardy: the geographic and economic characteristics of Pacific islands make them particularly vulnerable to the negative impact of climate change. But, additionally, their ability to manage these destructive effects is severely limited by weak institutional, technical and financial capacity.

In such a context, countries and territories will need the continuing support of Regional organisations such as SPC, SPREP and others, as well as the broader international community. SPC in particular, as the Region's leading scientific and technical development organisation has a central role to play in assisting island member states build their resilience to climate change. SPC already implements a comprehensive climate change support programme of over 100 million dollars across all sectors, and houses a broad range of technical skills across some 26 sectors that countries will need to continue to access.

The Region will do its best to cope to the extent that it can. But it is clear that the need for external financial and technical assistance to support their climate change response efforts will grow substantially over the coming years.

We are deeply grateful for the support our development partners already provide. Excellent work and solid results are being achieved thanks to it. But we need to work together to expand the support and make it more cost-effective. We need to put in place a mechanism that is strategic and adapted to the needs of the Pacific. From fragmented project-based financing we need to move to a cross-sector programmatic approach, resourced more predictably, and spanning at least a decade or more. This is what is required if we are after impact. Such an approach would also provide far better value-for-money for the taxpayer in donor countries.

On their side, Pacific island countries and territories must redouble their efforts to put in place more effective governance mechanisms, policies and support measures. While increased resource flows are clearly required, Pacific countries also should strengthen their capacity to present a sound business case for these increased finance flows, highlighting the social and economic costs of failing to act, and the demonstrable benefits of investing. But I cannot overemphasize it: first and last, political commitment is what will make it all possible.

Turning to the Paris Summit, and the road ahead, I think we can all readily agree that this will be a meeting of defining importance for the Pacific. It will provide the global community with a sterling opportunity to deliver a substantive commitment to limiting climate change.

An inadequate outcome could set us back many years before we get another chance to address the issue. The findings of the Fifth Assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are disquieting, and leave no room for doubt: Paris must deliver an outcome that ensures that global warming is kept to 2 degrees or less. And along with that, Paris21 needs to deliver the appropriate commitments to support developing countries with extreme vulnerability and very limited capacity to cope. Failure to do so basically relegates the Pacific to oblivion: for us, here, climate change is a very real, and very human, emerging crisis.

A key concern is the low level of ambition that appears to be on the table in terms of emission reductions. The reality is that current commitments are likely to be woefully inadequate in terms of limiting warming to below 2 degrees Celsius. We must aim for at least a 40% reduction in global emissions by 2030 and 80% by 2060 if we are to have any hope of containing climate change to manageable levels. Under the Kyoto Protocol industrialised nations committed to modest binding emission reduction targets. But the reality is that global emissions are now 30% higher than they were when Kyoto was signed. Less than half this level of ambition is currently on the table: this does not augur well for us in the Pacific.

The final major constraint I will mention is the limited ability of the Pacific to engage effectively and influence the broad and complex negotiation process under the UN Framework Convention. The voice of the Pacific is often lost in the din of international climate change negotiations. We need to ensure that our views and concerns are given appropriate attention and weight in the discussions.

I have spoken to the potentially devastating impact of climate change on the Pacific. Our people are strong and resilient, but the economies are small and fragile, and the force of nature overwhelming.

France is a trusted and long-standing member of the Pacific Community and potentially has a legacy role to play in both assisting the Region to respond to climate change, and in ensuring that the agenda of the Region is understood and protected in the post-2015 international climate agreement. The presence of France in the climate change response efforts of the Region could be truly in the forefront, and could be Pacific-wide.

I would like to call on France, as host of the 2015 summit, and as a Pacific island country itself, to bring to bear the full weight of its global leadership and the full weight of its solidarity with the Pacific, to project the cause of the Pacific internationally, to help our countries and territories gain the recognition and political traction we so much need globally and at Paris21.

We are on the threshold of great hope: the climate accord between China and the United States, and the American pledge of \$3 billion to a new climate fund are extremely encouraging developments. And in the same spirit I must salute the vision and courage of President Hollande's announcement at the New York climate conference that France will commit a fresh \$1 billion dollars to climate response efforts in developing countries. France is a nation known for its social solidarity and global leadership. It is also a nation in the Pacific and of the Pacific. The Pacific Community would welcome a commitment from France that a percentage of this pledge would flow to the Region. Just 10% of these pledged funds would make a decisive difference to the efforts of Pacific island states and territories to cope with the climate change crisis they face. It would be a legacy decision that would leave a historic imprint in the Pacific and in the hearts and minds of our people.

Thank you

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