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Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

PLENARY STATEMENT

Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States
1 – 4 September, 2014
Thursday 4 September

Mr President,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; the premier policy organisation in the region, which since 1971 has been allowed the privilege to the political interests of independent and self governing states of the Pacific region.

Mr President, this Conference is a special and rare opportunity for the global community to articulate its support for the diverse needs and special case of SIDS. We, in the Pacific region, have welcomed this global attention to highlight the challenges, our priorities, and our achievements. We are well organised to implement the S.A.M.O.A. Pathways, and member countries have been involved in the global debate on sustainable development in the context of SIDS. The endorsement of the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* by Pacific Leaders' at their meeting in Palau this year reinvigorates the agenda for regional integration and cooperation. Pacific regionalism ensures that high priority initiatives that contribute toward regional integration are identified and overseen by our Leaders, and these would supplement national efforts to achieve sustainable development. As the permanent Chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, my office is working with all our technical agencies to implement Pacific priority actions.

This Conference is also the occasion for the world to look more particularly at the role of the Ocean, for the Pacific and for SIDS from other regions. In this region, the role of the Ocean in driving sustainable economic growth, or the blue economy, is critically important. It has been the reality for Ocean and island communities for hundreds of years. We must unlock the economic potential of the Ocean to support the modern development of our people while ensuring good governance, and its sustainable development, management of the Ocean and conservation – and this is clearly articulated in our *Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape*.

In my role as the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, at this Conference I had the honour of launching the Pacific Ocean Alliance. This open and inclusive partnership will provide a space for the diversity of stakeholders with ocean interests. Pacific Leaders at their meeting in Palau also endorsed the Declaration "*The Ocean: Life and Future*" – underlining their high level political commitment to ocean policy and practice, including the need for a stand-alone sustainable development goal on Oceans.

Mr. President, sustainable financing for SIDS must be central to our thinking going forward. We must review criteria for the graduation of Least Developed Countries to better reflect the vulnerabilities of SIDS to external economic and physical shocks. In the Pacific, we witness regularly the devastating impacts of sudden extreme events such as cyclones, floods and tsunamis and slow-onset events such as sea- level intrusions and droughts.

While SIDS may have relatively high ratings measured by income per capita, the truth is that development benefits can be extinguished by a single major disaster event. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat stands ready to work with UNCTAD, OECD-DAC, UNDP and other regional SIDS organisations to redefine vulnerability indexes for SIDS.

Financing the sustainable development needs of the Pacific will also require identifying and accessing new sources of funding. This must include a range of options that are fit-for-purpose for the financing needs and absorptive capacity of diverse Pacific island countries. Domestic resources, such as taxation and pension funds must be one option, in addition to aid flows, climate financing, private trusts and philanthropic organisations. In addition, the complicated nature of accessing climate financing must be addressed and addressed effectively.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat will continue to work with Pacific island countries and partners to implement the *Forum Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination* to strengthen the enabling environment of strong political leadership, institutions and instruments for effective implementation. Implementation will only be effective through inclusive, genuine and durable partnerships, and this will require a heightened and more strategic involvement of the private sector and civil society.

Mr President, this conference and its outcome the S.A.M.O.A. Pathways are momentous steps towards better support from the international community and partners to SIDS. The energy and purpose generated at this Conference must be maintained. It must reinvigorate negotiations around climate change, it must inform the post 2015 development agenda and for its truest value it must make a difference to SIDS – the stakes are simply too high for us all to accept anything less.

Thank you.