

Statement by

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to the United Nations

On Behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Development States

at the

Thematic Discussions on “**Agriculture**”
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On Sustainable Development (CSD-16)

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) comprising Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

We wish to associate ourselves with the statement made by Barbados on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States.

At the outset, we would like to thank you for convening this meeting on the thematic issue of agriculture. As we are at the mid point of the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, it is important to note that for Pacific SIDs, agriculture is intrinsically linked to the eradication of poverty, gender empowerment, food security and sustainable development in our region.

Mr. Chairman,

Access to agricultural and forestry resources in Pacific SIDs are essential to the health, development and culture of Pacific Island communities, underpinning their subsistence and commercial production sectors.

Due to limited land availability, improving agricultural productivity depends on improved land management and the transfer of advanced agricultural technologies. It is imperative for us to work with member States that have expertise and the willingness to assist our region in capacity building, particularly in the area of water management, soil preservation and the cultivation of cheap yet healthy crops for public consumption.

Mr Chairman,

Pacific SIDS has historically managed to avoid acute food shortages. At a national level, countries manage to procure sufficient food through domestic food production and importation

The challenge for Pacific SIDS is maintaining food security in the face of a number of short term and long term threats. In the short term temporary food insecurity can arise due to the vulnerability of PICs to natural disasters. This can disrupt production, reducing the quantity of locally available produces and damage infrastructure such as roads and storage facilities resulting in problems in accessing sufficient quantities of both local and externally sourced food.

Generations of Pacific Islands have adapted to their environments and have a number of coping mechanisms to help protect against food insecurity. These include a relatively egalitarian land tenure system, traditional food preservation techniques and the supplementation of diets with wild crops. The long term sustainability of these coping mechanisms is under threat.

Most Pacific SIDS is showing worrying rates of dependency on imported foods. Basic staples such as rice and wheat for flour are key substitutes of traditional diets. This is a critical situation in terms of food security, given the volatility of international commodity prices. Deteriorating terms of trade, rising external debts and inflation plaques the capacity of Pacific islanders to adequately meet their nutritional requirements from imported foods alone.

Knowledge of traditional farming practices and food preparation techniques is diminishing as people move from rural to urban areas and or enter formal employment and rely less on their own production and more on imported foodstuffs. This rural-urban drift also has the potential to weaken the social institutions that can help alleviate temporary food insecurity at a household level.

The Pacific SIDS with the assistance of regional organizations, donors and international agencies has been working towards improving their food production and economies. In 2002, FAO launched an initiative to help Small Island Developing States review and update their national policies and strategies for food security and agricultural development. In conformity with the FAO Plan of Action on Agriculture and Sustainable Agriculture in SIDS, Pacific Island Countries have to move towards more intensified, diversified and sustainable agricultural practices in order to create an enabling environment for agricultural intensification and diversification, remove production constraints, and improve domestic and export marketing and processing in the years to come with a view to build and/or strengthen national capacities and institutions to accommodate and take advantage of the new international trade regime, strengthen support services to agriculture, forestry and fisheries and provide a coherent framework for sustainable natural resource management and environmental protection in a rapidly changing world. This indicates that even before the threat of climate change came to the fore, food security challenges were already entrenched in Pacific SIDs; and some win-win adaptation measures have been implemented. However, these adaptive efforts need to be invigorated and strategically targeted to avoid mal-adaptation.

Mr Chairman

We cannot ignore the impact of climate change on agricultural development. Climate change is already affecting Pacific SIDs. Climate variations and extremes have disrupted agriculture, food production, water supply and economies of Pacific SIDs. Climate projections for the future are bleak, with reduction of food security especially at household level. The primary food sources (agriculture, fisheries and forests) will all be affected by climate change and in most cases, these impacts will be negative. It is therefore imperative to strengthen the adaptation of the environment. This can be done through legislation and policy adjustments relating to food sources, coordination amongst and across key stakeholders and research and development. Further adjustment can also be made in implementing adaptation measures such as expanding seed banks and increasing investments in primary food sources. The process must start now and we must do so with a focus on win- win measures.