



Statement by Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Pacific Technical Experts and Ministerial Consultation on Strengthening Climate Change through Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health, 26-28 October, Sofitel, Fiji.

HRH Princess Sarah Zeid

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ni sa bula vinaka and a good morning to you all. It gives me great pleasure to address this important consultation of the Pacific Technical Experts and Ministers Consultation on Strengthening Climate Change Resilience through Reproductive, Maternal, New Born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH).

Let me start by congratulating the Minister for Health of Fiji Hon Jone Usamate for hosting this meeting in collaboration with the UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office.

I understand that this is the first meeting of its kind and addresses gaps in climate change resilience. Admittedly, much of the focus and publicity in the Pacific has been on the construction of physical structures like seawalls or relocation for entire communities. I understand this meeting is a result of a rethinking of strategies in the last few years to build climate change resilience in communities.

I must add my appreciation for Fiji's selection to host the first Pacific regional consultation at such an important juncture following the endorsement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals only last month.

The Sustainable Development Goals are more ambitious and bolder than the MDGs. They focus on major development priorities including the eradication of poverty, hunger, and gender inequality.

Alongside this, they aim to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the integration of this ambitious global development agenda into national plans, policies and programmes is of the utmost importance.

Fiji has been proactive to incorporate this into our Constitution. Fiji's constitution is in line with constitutional benchmarks in some of the world's leading liberal democracies.

The Fijian Constitution provides a framework for the development of a modern and progressive state. Among the Constitution's major provisions is the Bill of Rights guaranteeing a range of civil and political rights and for the first time in Fiji's history, provision for social and economic rights. Embodying the SDGs, these rights include the right to education, housing, food and water, health and social security and environmental rights guaranteeing every person the right to a clean and healthy environment.

Strong Pacific leadership is crucial to ensure the full implementation of climate change resilience strategies.

One way of achieving this development goal is through reproductive, maternal, new-born, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH).

There is a need to articulate Pacific concerns on this issue, loudly and clearly, across international conversations preceding the UN climate change conference in Paris next month, the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey in May 2016 and the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador, October 2016.

This year, in particular, several key declarations have championed this very issue.

The 2015 Abu Dhabi Declaration upholds RMNCAH and well-being for women, newborns, children and adolescents in humanitarian and fragile settings for every woman every child everywhere (EWECE).

The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recommends that we ‘strengthen the design and implementation of inclusive policies and social safety-net mechanisms, including through community involvement, integrated with livelihood enhancement programs, and access to basic health care services including maternal, newborn and child health, sexual and reproductive health, food security’.

The 2015 Hiri declaration draws attention to the regional challenges including health issues and recalls past declarations of Forum Leaders that re-affirm the importance of health needs in the region.

The 2015 Suva declaration on climate change affirms the need to address gender-based inequality and discrimination as key drivers of effective action on climate change.

It also addresses increased support for adaptation measures that address the health sector.

At a country level, Fiji in 2012, we launched the National Climate Change Policy. The policy provides a platform for co-ordination among sectors, and direction on national positions and priorities regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation. It is clear in this policy that we all have a part to combat the adverse impacts of climate change.

I note that the interface between climate change impacts on the Pacific, the Pacific populations rights and resilience and the Pacific’s Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health has not been fully developed.

Also, the specific elements of disaster risk reduction and emergency planning are yet to be fully integrated into national and regional RMNCAH planning.

Therefore this consultation should be utilised to the fullest as it provides an opportunity for bringing together all development, humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and climate change technical experts to share their experiences and provide constructive inputs into the whole process.

Climate Change and Health

The Pacific region, faces significant challenges in dealing with the adverse effects of climate change because of our widely dispersed populations, limited resources and fragmented health systems.

Notably, there has been an increase in international aid for health-related activities in the Pacific that aims to consolidate adaptive measures to the threats of climate change.

Fiji's Second National Communication (SNC) to the United Nation Convention on Climate Change indicated that a healthy and productive population was a key for sustainable economic development.

In this regard, climate change is widely regarded as a serious threat to the public health sector. Fiji is vulnerable to adverse climate change impacts due to its small geographical size, exposure to extreme climatic events and small economy.

Direct impacts of climate change on health include injury, disease and death from extreme heat and cold, cyclones, floods and droughts. Indirect impacts include increase in vector-borne, water-borne, cardiovascular, respiratory and renal diseases.

There are also psycho-social impacts from an increase in the range and number of disease spreading vectors, compromised food and water sources, livelihood losses and population displacement.

A growing body of research literature shows a clear link between climate change and the re-emergence of infectious diseases such as typhoid and dengue fever, leptospirosis and diarrhoeal illnesses.

The re-emergence of these infectious diseases provides an extra burden on the already incapacitated health system.

On top of this, climate projections for Fiji have shown that the country's climate will continue to change. The temperature in Fiji will continue to rise by at least an estimated range of 0.4-1.0 degrees Celsius by 2030. There would be very hot days and warm nights and a decline in cooler weather. It is predicted that extreme rainfall days are likely to occur more than often in Fiji.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, with these forecasts in mind, the onus is on us to plan and implement interventions that will strengthen the resilience of our communities and more importantly the most vulnerable in our community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge all fellow ministers and technical experts to contribute as much as you can and share your experiences so that we can derive the following outcomes:

- (i) key lessons from current resilience, humanitarian and development approaches especially those related to natural disasters and climate change;
- (ii) recommendations on steps towards investments and implementation of the new Every Woman Every Child Every Adolescent Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and importantly;
- (iii) and an Outcome Document with key messages about Pacific Island country realities and recommendations for resilient populations, particularly from the standpoint of women, adolescents and children, for the purpose of strengthening their advocacy and political positioning.

This as I have alluded to earlier, would then be presented at the 21st Session of the COP in Paris next month, followed by the first World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey next year as well as the Habitat III – the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Ecuador.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

Vinaka and hope you all enjoy your short stay in Fiji.