



**Minister for Defence, National Security, Policing and Rural and Maritime  
Development and Disaster Management  
Honourable Mr Inia Seruiratu**

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**OFFICIAL STATEMENT AT THE 2022 ASIA PACIFIC MINISTERIAL  
CONFERENCE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

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**The Chairperson,**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings from the Fijian Government and the people of Fiji. I am pleased to provide an update on our achievements and challenges on the mid-point implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

**IMPACTS OF DISASTER CLIMATE CHANGE & PANDEMIC**

Like most of the world, Fiji has not been spared the brutal economic and social impacts of climate-related disasters and the severe economic fallout due to the global pandemic.

Our Pacific Small Island states are among the most exposed and vulnerable in the world to disaster and climate risk<sup>1</sup>. These risks continue to escalate and are having a negative impact on individual lives and livelihoods, as well as on the overall prosperity and wellbeing of our citizens.

Every year, tens of thousands of people across our region are pushed into poverty as a result of the impact of disasters and climate change. In Fiji, an average of 3% of the population are propelled into poverty annually due to this.

In the past decade alone, Fiji has experienced the brunt of over 14 tropical cyclones with cascading hazards amounting to more than \$3 billion in damages and 67 fatalities. The pandemic has claimed 878 lives and contracted our economy by upto 17.2 percent in 2020.

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Given our vulnerability and exposure to the slow onset impacts of climate change and increasing intensities and frequencies of disasters, implementing risks mitigation and adaptation planning will be the only way to cushion some of the impact and protect our development gains.

The pandemic has taught us all significant lessons on the interconnectedness and vulnerability of our economic, social and

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<sup>1</sup> Risk Governance for Resilient Development in the Pacific.

natural systems, and of the importance of addressing systemic risk in all its dimensions.

## **FIJI – ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AGENDA**

Despite these setbacks, the Fijian Government remain committed to pursuing the achievement of the Sendai Framework.

In that regard, we have localized the Sendai Framework targets by formulating our National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy which has 122 action items in total. These action items are broadly categorized into four thematic areas that Government Ministries are currently working on to implement with a wide cross-section of stakeholders including Civil Society Organisations, development partners and communities.

Whilst our current progress levels have been modest, our highest implementation rate pegged at 53 percent for the overall achievements across all thematic areas. Fiji will continue to pursue the disaster risk reduction agenda using existing partnerships and developing new initiatives such as a Monitoring and Evaluation framework for the NDRRP; initiating the review and modernizing Fiji's disaster legislation and developing hazard management and response plans.

## **ENHANCING POLICY COHERENCE**

Fiji has recognized the importance of integrating development, disaster risk reduction and climate change agendas now aligned to our Climate Change Act of 2021.

The Act ensures a whole-of-government approach toward climate and disaster-related relocations and strengthens our efforts to build resilient infrastructure and implement policies, measures, adaptation planning processes and actions with the purpose of increasing Fiji's resilience to disasters and climate change.

## **ENSURING INCLUSIVITY**

Ladies and gentlemen, inclusivity is a cornerstone of disaster risk reduction and we have ensured that the voices and concerns of vulnerable groups are reflected in our key policies and strategies. Our Evacuation Centre Guidelines ensure children, women and disability friendly spaces for all our Evacuation Centres.

Our Community Based Disaster Risk Management training promotes the participation of vulnerable groups in designing community resilience strategies and in disaster response processes.

We also recognize the stress and trauma suffered by disaster victims and have formulated a Psychological First Aid Manual to guide first responders in applying the first alleviating measures for mental trauma caused by disasters.

We will soon embark on the establishment of the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme that will strengthen our tsunami hazard assessment, preparedness and response arrangements at all levels.

## **WAY FORWARD TO ACHIEVE SENDAI FRAMEWORK BY 2030**

We have made significant progress in securing the buy-in from Government agencies in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction. We have also made strides in the technical monitoring and assessment of hazards for disaster risk assessment and have moved towards streamlining and digitalizing our systems and processes for disaster responses and damage assessments.

Similarly, we are focused on institutional strengthening of our Early Warning Systems, in particular hydro-meteorological and geological hazards which will in turn better inform and strengthen our disaster risk reduction framework.

## **KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS**

Fiji has made progress in risk informing development for rural development projects and we are working to incorporate climate change and disaster risk considerations in rural planning and in all major development projects.

We are currently revising our building code to include standards for resilient infrastructure and revising our disaster legislation to cover

provisions for a coordinated and Whole-of-Society approach to disaster risk management.

Recently, we invested in the upgrade of the National Seismic Network to strengthen monitoring and detection of earthquakes and tsunamis.

However, much work remains in putting together end-to-end multi-hazard early warning systems and investing in data and technology that is critical for accurate risk analysis and information. Moving forward, we will continue to invest more into the monitoring, detection and dissemination of hazard information and warnings.

## **WAYS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS**

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are fortunate that we have vibrant regional mechanisms in the Pacific in the form of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Pacific Island Development Forum through South-South Cooperation that spearheads the regional effort to tackle disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific sets the regional direction for the integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and the recently endorsed Strategy 2050 for Blue Pacific Continent highlights the pathways by which the goal of a resilient Pacific may be achieved.

We, therefore, call on the global community and partners to work with us in tackling the root causes of vulnerability and in

strengthening institutional and technical capacities for identifying and mitigating disaster risk.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

One of our concerns in Fiji particularly for Small Island Developing States is the significant barriers of accessing international finance.

The availability of disaster and climate finance is finite, and finance available for SIDS often lacks flexibility and isn't proportionate to the vulnerability of its people to disasters and risks.

If we are going to be able to implement these policies, we need appropriate financing. We need insurance cover and other types of risk financing instruments that are proportionate to the economic losses always incurred after every disaster. When Tropical Cyclone Winston wiped out one third of our GDP in 2016, with impacts equivalent to FJD1.96 billion, we were only able to recover FJD274.1 million (13.9%) through insurance.

In addition to these instruments, DRR financing needs to be flexible enough to allow us to link disaster risk reduction to wider development policies, plans and national budgets. In Fiji, we can use this to leverage broader development finance.

Our inherent economic disadvantages make investment in hazard monitoring, detection, prevention and disaster mitigation a challenge and we require appropriate assistance from partners to strengthen resilience and implement the necessary structural and

systemic changes required for a transformative approach to the way we deal with disaster risks here in Fiji.

Finally, I wish to convey our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Australian Government and UNDRR for convening the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction.

This event is an important opportunity to engage on issues that are critical for protecting each other and our communities. Fiji looks forward to being part of this important dialogue and finding solutions through disaster risk reduction approaches in the region.

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