



SOLOMON ISLANDS

Speech by Honorable Stanley Festus SOFU (MP) on the occasion of Asia Pacific Ministers Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, Brisbane, Australia, 19th – 22nd September 2022

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and People of the Solomon Islands, I wish to extend my delegation's sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government and People of Australia for hosting us here in this beautiful city. I also extend our appreciation to UNDRR and your partners for the arrangements put in place for this meeting.

The Solomon Islands is an island country of more than 700,000 people located in the south-west Pacific with a total land area of 28,900 km² spread over 1.5 million square kilometers of ocean and encircled by the Pacific ring of fire. Our economy is narrowly based on forestry, agriculture, fisheries and a modest service sector. Consequently, we have an elevated baseline disposition to disasters arising from hydro-meteorological hazards, geo-hazards as well as man-made driven disasters, and climate change. In the World Risk Index 2021, we have been ranked as the second riskiest country in the world in terms of exposure to natural hazards.

Today I would like to update on the progress on implementation the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction in the Solomon Islands.

In terms of progress to better understand disaster risks, Solomon Islands have embarked on a journey on establishing and updating our national baseline datasets on the disaster risk parameters to support understanding the hazards, vulnerabilities and copying

capacities given Solomon Islands has an elevated baseline disposition to natural hazards. Since 2017, we started a nationwide vulnerability and adaptation assessment led by our Climate Change Office called Solomon Islands Integrated Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment (SIIVA) with focus to establish our vulnerability and adaptation baseline. This SIIVA tool aim to establish a national dataset and information to support the government with planning and decision-making on appropriate interventions and actions. Also, this year 2022, with the support of Pacific Community, World Bank and Asian Development Bank we are currently updating our exposure dataset under the Pacific Catastrophic Risk Assessment and Financial Initiative (PCRAFI) phase 2 project. These two tools have been utilized for risk informed planning and decision making.

In terms of progress on strengthening our disaster risk governance system. The National Disaster Council Act (1989) provides the legal framework for disaster risk management complimented by our National Development Strategy (NDS: 2016 – 2035) under objective 4 ***“Resilient and environmentally sustainable development with effective disaster risk management, response and recovery”*** which sets the direction and provide an enabling environment for economic development, capacity building to assess and understand risks, and respond to and recover from disasters, and address climate change.

For an effective and sustainable approach to disaster risk management (DRM), We have opted to define DRM as a sum of Disaster Management (DM) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and recognized that both must be addressed differently and to be approached by separate frameworks. In addressing the former, in 2018, we have adopted a new National Disaster Management Plan 2018 (NDMP18) replacing disaster management component (part 1-4) of our National Disaster Risk Management Plan 2010. The NDMP18 addresses disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The Plan enacted under section 10 of the National Disaster Council Act (1989), sets a special arrangement to deal with imminent threats and disasters as they eventuate and also in accordance with

any instructions deemed necessary by the Cabinet to deal with national disasters. The plan recognizes that implementation success of any response must be led by sectors and local government. The special arrangement under the NDMP18 informs the way we organize and coordinate to holistically address national emergencies and disasters. In this connection, the national disaster arrangements have been used to support a whole of government response to COVID-19 for the past two years, as well as coordinate from the government side, the response to a major oil spill (749 cubic metres of heavy fuel oil was discharged to the environment) caused by the bulk carrier MV Solomon Trader.

The framework for disaster risk reduction is set out under part 5-6 of the NDRM Plan 2010. However, we recognized for any effective and integrated implementation, DRR must be realigned with climate change adaptation (CCA) as both are developmental in their outlook for implementation. They are both to be addressed under a new proposed resilient development framework that is yet to be developed which remains a gap.

Though remain a gap, our work to ensure “in-streaming” of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation by “working within” government ministries/sectors to promote risk reduction and climate change adaptation in their programmes. One of the tools that used is through incubating positions with organization to instill demand for risk reduction and climate change adaption. This has generated positive impacts including enhancing collaboration and cooperation within and between sectors. Some of the results includes, the development of draft National Building Code that instream climate and disaster risk considerations as prerequisite for development, the establishment of the climate finance and resilience unit within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury and my ministry’s partnership with the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthen to factor in disaster risk reduction and climate change actions to the

development programmes of the nine provincial governments in the Solomon Islands using the Provincial Capacity Development Fund.

In terms of investment in Disaster risk reduction for resilience, the Solomon Islands has access to various financial supports in terms of loans and grants to support its infrastructure development and other disaster and climate risk programmes including support to boost our economy during COVID-19 pandemic. However, investment has shown a decline over the past years and needs to be ramped up given our heightened predisposition to natural disasters. We have also noted that development partners and donors tend to provide financial resources during the response phase of disasters and not so much on risk reduction programmes as well as on the recovery phases of disasters. This bias on response must be evened out with enhanced financial flows for risk reduction and adaptation.

In term of enhancing our preparedness and response, we have recognized and acknowledged our challenges being attributed to tyranny of distance and scatteredness, difficulty in communication and limited financial flows for risk reduction. Since 2010 we have worked with our development partners to strengthen and contextualized our early warning system into a dual system utilizing both modern technology and through creation of simplified community based early warning system. This is to ensure we bring the early warning system close to the community to support their preparedness and response. This resulted in development of two types of localized Early Warning Systems; one for Flood Early Warning System for Communities utilizing simplified water level gauge and siren system that are installed in flash flood prone communities and another one is Flag based weather Early Warning System for Small Boats and crafts. We are also calling on our partners and donors to directly support disaster risk reduction efforts at all levels in

partnership with government sectors and NGOs under the coordination of the National Disaster Management Office.

In addition, since 2010, we have focus on reaching the last mile through our community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) programmes. The CBDRM has been a tool we use that focus on strengthening community knowledge and understanding on disasters risks, promoting and supporting development of village disaster response plans through setting a special arrangement utilizing existing leadership structures to address their risk as first responders to any impact of disasters. This process was standardized for implementation with our local partners including NGOs and Red Cross Society. It is a holistic approach to enhance community disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response to disasters.

While progress has been noted in terms of implementing the Sendai Framework, following review of our implementation progress we have noted that there is still more work to be done to promote policy coherence and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement in the following thematic areas including strategic, operational, institutional and financial. The government leadership is there, but needs augmentation in terms of enhancing national budget allocation for disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.

Consequently, following the mid-term review for Solomon Islands, there are priority areas identified for us to work on which includes, strengthening our community preparedness, strengthening our multi-hazard early warning, development of standard operating procedures, enhancing our capacity to access to funding, improvement of critical infrastructure to be more resilient, and dedicated and increased financial flows for risk reduction, preparedness and recovery efforts. Lastly but not the least, is on strengthening

our policy and legal framework through establishment of our legal and policy framework for climate change, resilient development and review of our National Disaster Council Act 1989.

Distinguished delegates, the Solomon Islands is very prone to natural hazards. Although we have made some progress in implementation of Sendai Framework through strengthening our baseline for understanding disaster risk, our governance arrangement for disaster management and to align risk reduction and climate change adaption, and internalize them across sectors within government, the private sector and communities throughout the country. We still have a long way to go as well to strengthen our work alignment to the SDG and Paris Agreement and work on addressing identified priority work areas to meet the targets of Sendai Framework. In order to meet and address the existing challenges, this will require continuous collaboration and cooperation across jurisdictions and at the national, regional and international arena.

Tagio Tumas!