

Opening statement

Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement

February 11, 2021 (virtual)

FIJI PM Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama,
Chair of the Platform on Disaster Displacement

Bula vinaka everyone.

Internal displacement is the textbook term, one that describes the movement of people to escape disaster related risks.

But let's speak plainly for a minute about what that means for people here in the Pacific.

We are in the early stages of a mass climate driven migration across our region.

Every year, more of our citizens will be forced to leave their homes to escape stronger storms, rising seas, and swelling rivers brought by climate change. It is a crisis we did not cause but the consequences of which we bear nevertheless.

Some of our low lying neighbors face an existential threat. At the current rate of emissions, the displacement of their people won't be internal, but external, across borders as their entire nations slip beneath the rising seas. That is why Fiji has offered a permanent settlement to the citizens of Tuvalu and Kiribati, should they need it.

Meanwhile, we're focused on the complex challenge of relocating vulnerable Fijian communities. With 43 already identified, you can bet that number will rise. Six communities have been fully or partially relocated so far. And that's brought questions that only practical experience can hope to answer. How does the fisherman make a life for his family when he's moved away from the seas he has known all his life? The cruel irony of course, being that same sea has driven him from the home his grandfather built. You won't find that answer in a report. Some lessons you learn only by listening. And by actually doing the hard work. This challenge demands. Moving a community. Doing it sustainably, ensuring Fijians can live with both security and the dignity of good jobs and access to essential services.

That is how we can spark a sense of ownership among people who have endured the trauma of leaving the land they knew as home, a land where their ancestors are buried, and which they hoped their children would inherit.

At COP 24 Fiji launched the world's first planned relocation guidelines. Another world first followed in 2019 when we launched a relocation fund for people displaced by climate change.

Our national adaptation plan maps out a multibillion-dollar effort to strengthen our climate resilience, and we're looking to nature to fortify communities, create sustainable sources of income and yes, even help former fishermen take up farming.

Climate-driven displacement isn't some distant doomsday proposition. It is happening right now. In response, we have to change and adapt as quickly as the climate. To do that, we need support of the rest of the world. And as the Chair for the platform of disaster displacement, Fiji looks forward to leading alongside our development partners in organizations like the Pacific climate change, migration and human security, not by talking, but by doing.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.