

Keynote Statement by Dr Tausi Taupo for the Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement

11 February 2021

Honorable Prime Minister of Fiji,

Members of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement,

Esteemed Chairperson,

Excellencies, colleagues, and all participants,

Talofa from Tuvalu.

It is a distinct honour and privilege to be invited to address you at this virtual Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement. On behalf of the Government and People of Tuvalu, I warmly extend our warm greetings to you, Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Officials, and colleagues.

I would also like to acknowledge the important role of the joint work by the Pacific Resilience Partnership Technical Working Group on Human Mobility and the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Internal Displacement, in promoting dialogue and consensus at the highest level leading to where we are today. It is with high hopes that we continue to progress on preparing and responding to the devastating impact of climate change and disasters. Recent years have presented unexpected challenges for all of humanity which calls for innovative mechanisms for coordinating and articulating humanitarian response in the Pacific region.

I would like to **reiterate and further emphasize** what we have raised in our previous statements:

- the important nexus of climate change and internal displacement in Small Island Developing States and the importance of sharing and promoting successful policies and best practices on this important issue;
- the vulnerability and unique characteristics of SIDS with high exposure to climatic disaster including sudden and slow-onset hazards that are intensified and accelerated by climate change;
- the contribution of the impacts of climate change and disasters on internal displacement, including on livelihoods resulting in increased social, cultural and psychological tensions and the lack of capacity to cope if unmanaged properly;
- the need for collective responsibility to devise future solutions for internally displaced people from the adverse impacts of climate change;
- the need to carefully manage community relocation to minimize economic, cultural, traditional and social impacts;
- the need for displaced people to access the necessary services regardless of their status;
- ensuring the United Nations continued support for regional efforts to protect and empower those affected by climate change and disasters in the Pacific region;
- the need to access and be supported by development partners, climate change finance and other trust funds;
- the importance of the Blue Pacific Continent, the Boe Declaration and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific that recognizes the human mobility elements

and the need to be integrated into national policies and actions for preparation purposes in anticipation of future displacement;

- our commitment to promote preventative efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions;
- reaffirmed our support for proper arrangements for people displaced by climate change and disasters, even though Tuvalu does not pursue climate-change relocation as a national strategy.

To put all this in the context and drawing on my country Tuvalu as an example, Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 with its center more than 1,000 kilometers away from Tuvalu did not need to make landfall to create havoc. Tuvalu's low ground elevation, and narrowness in land-width was unable to withstand the side impacts of TC Pam with an estimated loss and damages of over 10% of GDP. The damages would have been higher if the event had coincided with the 'king tide' that would have boosted the storm surge which would have worsened the consequent flooding and coastal erosion. Bear in mind that in Tuvalu, 70% of households live less than 200 meters from the coastline and with an elevation of no more than 5 meters above sea level. The survey conducted following TC Pam highlighted that 41% of households have already considered moving away from their current homes to safer places, while 86% of households will consider moving if given an option of relocation by the government. This is the reality we face as Pacific small island developing nations.

The Pacific is one of the most at-risk regions globally with Vanuatu topping this list for at least the past six years according to the World Risk Index. In the context of the internal displacement and relative to our population size and per capita terms, we have higher levels of displacement risk than other regions and countries on average.

Disaster risk is typically conceptualized as a function of hazard, exposure, and vulnerability, which is acutely high in the Pacific context, so focusing on these components of risk is particularly important in building resilience and reducing risks in the Pacific region. Despite actions on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, people will be forcibly displaced by floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, droughts, and other natural hazards. While for some they will find alternative places to move in their own country, others will have no choice but to move beyond their borders. The breach of human rights and scale and severity of humanitarian problem in the region requires more systematic attention be given to internally displaced persons in need of support in the Pacific. It is imperative to converge in our commitment to enhance cooperation on this issue to maximize learning from our shared experience of addressing risks and challenges.

Collective action can be realized by adopting a regional approach. It is important to have a **regional framework as a guide to how internal displacement can be integrated into policies and processes of participating countries.**

Our regional cooperation and engagement are crucial in fulfilling commitments to displaced populations and to avoid policies that intensify displacement. We should also realize the benefit of addressing internal displacement through policy discussions, working groups, dialogues, reports, and other necessary interactions. A whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach are key to

1. ensuring an inclusive implementation process,
2. charting plans of actions from integrating of viewpoints relevant to add value in priority setting as well as
3. follow-up and review of implementation at both national and regional levels.

We call on the international community to work with us in providing humanitarian assistances and the necessary level of required funding to support the internally displaced population of our Blue Pacific.

To enable regional outcomes, there is a high need for collaboration, harmonization, and integration. Besides providing guidance for country-level action, **national assessments and risk-mapping should serve as a robust evidence-base for the development of and outline a Pacific consensus on priority regional actions.** The regional dimension is an important one as it can improve Pacific readiness through a number of different approaches such as:

1. **Regional collaboration** to identify common national challenges that can be effectively addressed by uniform approaches, to be undertaken as regional programs;
2. **Regional harmonization** to identify common national challenges that can be addressed through the development of regional initiatives suitable to harmonize processes and create a critical frame; and
3. **Regional integration** to establish common rules, standards and institutions to address common challenges more effectively.

In closing, it is my belief that an open and interactive discussions in recognition of the value of collective actions in addressing common challenges, will steer a coordinated response that addresses priorities for this endeavor. It is our collective role to identify, develop and advocate for strategies that can be further developed into actionable regional interventions that effectively complement national, regional, bilateral and multilateral efforts designed to accommodate internal displacement.

Excellencies, Colleagues and Participants. Thank you and Fakafetai lahi.