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**Draft Statement on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States  
for the High-Level Thematic Debate, 'Galvanizing Momentum for  
Universal Vaccination'  
Friday 25 February 2022**

*[Check against delivery]*

**Mr. President,**

I am pleased to deliver the following remarks on behalf of the 12 members of the Pacific Small Island Developing States represented here in New York.

The Blue Pacific family stands in solidarity with the rest of the world in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and we convey our profound condolences to those that have lost loved ones. We also take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the frontline workers who are risking their lives to bring COVID-19 under control and to save lives.

**Mr. President,**

As Pacific SIDS we align ourselves with the statement delivered by AOSIS.

The COVID 19 pandemic is an unprecedented global phenomenon. It has further exacerbated barriers and stunted economic growth, especially for Small Island Developing States. Border closures and mass vaccination programmes were key actions implemented by our governments to protect the region. Unfortunately, these measures have not entirely been successful in keeping the virus out. The emergence of new variants such as Delta and Omicron have now made its way into the Pacific and we have had to focus on the immediate health challenges of mitigating the community spread of the virus, with the aim towards safely reopening our borders to the world.

The closing of international borders- transitioned this pandemic from a health

threat to an economic threat, exposing many structural weaknesses and fault lines-notably in health and social protection systems, in addressing digital connectivity and countering mis-information on social media platforms. In addition, we have been greatly impacted by continuous disruptions to the global supply chains due to the pandemic and our geographic remoteness which has affected food security and our reliance on nature-based solutions. Along with these health and economic concerns, we cannot forget that climate change still poses an existential threat to our island nations.

The uncertainties we are facing have tested the determination of our people and governments, but we have not faltered in making the hard choices. We hope to build back better together and trust that our partnerships within the region and in our multilateral and international institutions will provide a pathway to both our economic and COVID 19 recovery.

The launch of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID 19 in April 2020, is aimed at coordinating the humanitarian response and providing for urgent health and socio-economic needs that are essential for post-pandemic recovery for the Pacific. Through PHP-C, the process of expediting medical assistance, customs clearance of medical supplies and facilitating clearances for chartered flights and commercial shipping were streamlined. However, the pace of recoveries will hinge on equitable and access to reliable vaccine supply and distribution, which requires external environment and domestic policy support. The goal is equitable and universal access to affordable, safe and effective vaccines.

Without a globally coordinated system, and efficient approach in combating the pandemic, a reduction of cases in any one country will not be sustained over time. We must urgently bring all countries to a high level of vaccination rate as inequitable vaccine distribution is not only leaving millions of people vulnerable to the virus, but it is also allowing new variants to emerge. With the current influx of cases across the different regions of the world, vaccines are absolutely central to curtail the number of hospitalizations and deaths.

We support the efforts undertaken by The COVAX Facility which has been able to assist the Pacific region with vaccine delivery and distribution and it

continues to do so despite the continuous supply and transportation difficulties. However, we remain deeply concerned with the gap in vaccination rates between developed and developing countries as the pandemic continues only slightly abated into a third year. Comprehensive vaccine coverage requires global cooperation and the financial support of our global partners as well as the technical expertise of the UN agencies such as the WHO, UNDP, and UNICEF. The coordination efforts of our national governments, the UNRCOs and others are essential, and we encourage all parties to remain committed to this goal.

While border closures were observed, climate change knows no restrictions and respects no boundaries. Natural disasters from hurricanes, floods and drought continues to persist in the region. These environmental considerations require our nations to look at ambitious recovery plans, that align with economic stimulus initiatives to low carbon growth and improved resilience. Our recovery efforts must take into consideration the need for blue and green recovery policies so that we can maintain momentum in the implementation of the 2030 agenda and achieving our development aspirations as outlined in the SAMOA Pathway.

Thank you.