“Creating the Paris Path on Climate Change – From Paris through Marrakech to Fiji and Bonn, and Beyond”

Bula vinaka and warm greetings everyone.

Thank you, Dr. Svoboda, and through you the Goeth Institute and George Washington University for organizing this important platform to share some of the highlights of Fiji’s Presidency of COP23, and some takeaway concepts that we believe will take national and international climate change discourse and action plans towards achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

Fiji’s Presidency of COP23 was an important undertaking for us – it was the first time for a Pacific island nation to preside over the UNFCCC process, and we took this role with a strong desire to make it a visionary one by transforming what was initially expected to be a closed-door technical COP [focusing primarily on the Paris Guidelines] into an inclusive and inspirational political platform for implementation.

Through that vision, we put up a human face story to the reality of extreme weather events which we are no stranger to. At the opening of the High-level segment of COP23, Timoci Naulusala, a 12-year old Fijian boy shared a moving and thought-provoking story of the difficulties his family and village faced after a Category 5 cyclone tore through Viti Levu, Fiji’s largest island – This was the strongest cyclone to have made landfall in the Southern Hemisphere (stronger than Katrina in 2005 and Andrew in 1992). Such catastrophic weather events pose a lot of challenges to our families, our communities and our economy. Food and water shortages, homes and schools reduced to rubble, damaged infrastructure, and sadly coastal villages are relocated to higher grounds due to rising sea levels.

As President of COP23, the task ahead was not easy. Governments cannot do it alone. Through that vision again, Fiji introduced the “Bula Spirit”, a uniquely Pacific Island cultural concept which infused both the formal negotiations and the climate action zone with a warm and welcoming spirit that embrace inclusiveness, transparency and urgency.

By putting people first, and showcasing the human face to the impact of CC, we wanted COP23 to make a connection between these complex negotiations and the real, everyday concerns and aspirations of people living on the front-line of the impact of CC.

Fiji’s Presidency created that warm and welcoming environment to advance the political discussion for the implementation guidelines of the Paris Agreement through the consultative dialogue process now known as the “Talanoa Dialogue”. Premised on trust amongst participants, “Talanoa” is a Pacific Island construct where village elders gather to discuss important issues with a view to seeking a win-win solution for the community rather than individuals.

In the same vein, the “Talanoa” dialogue allows parties to share stories and showcase best practices on how to raise the ambition of nationally-determined contributions – NDCs. These NDCs outline the target or plan that a country has on climate change. (e.g. China will peak its emissions by 2030, Fiji will reduce GHGs by 30% by 2030 and increase resilience to the impacts of climate change). Current NDCs are not ambitious enough to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and must be scaled up dramatically.
On January 26 this year, (last Friday), the UN Climate Change Secretariat launched a new portal to support the Talanoa dialogue. Through this portal, all countries and other stakeholders including business investors, cities, regions and civil society are invited to make submissions based on three central questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? and How do we get there?

Recommendations and information gathered will assist in taking climate action to the next level to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the development of national policy solutions.

At COP23, some information shared gives hope to the process:

- China announced it will be creating a national carbon market, the EU has an ambitious climate legislation, Mexico and Canada are working to increase cooperation on climate change in the absence of the U.S, India is massively scaling up renewable energy, France has declared it will make up for the lost funding to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on CC)
- The U.S.’ announcement of its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, was a huge blow to this effort, however, it was encouraging to note that domestically, and according to America's Pledge, more than 2,500 non-federal actors representing a good size of the U.S. economy—including cities, counties, states, businesses and more—have pledged their support for the Paris Agreement goals. Together, this group would be equivalent to the world’s third largest economy.

A number of announcements made on the margins of the negotiations offer support to countries to deliver on their pledges:

- The Powering Past Coal Alliance brings together 25 countries, states and regions to accelerate the rapid phase-out of coal and support affected workers and communities to make the transition;
- The 42m euros NDC Support Program that was launched by UNDP, Germany, Spain and EU to assist countries deliver on their pledges under the Paris Agreement;
- An NDC Partnership Regional Hub in the Pacific was launched and will be based in Fiji to provide expertise for developing regional solutions to mitigate global warming and enhance climate change adaptation efforts;
- 13 countries and the International Energy Agency announced 30 million euros to the IEA Clean Energy Transitions Program to support clean energy transitions around the world.

At the High-level Presidency event on Insurance and Resilience, a global partnership was launched, known as the Fiji Clearing House for risk-transfer to provide millions of climate-vulnerable people over the world with access to affordable insurance against climate-related loss and damage, such as displacement.

COP23 also aimed to further strengthen the UNFCCC Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage, and under Fiji’s Presidency organized the Suva Expert Dialogue, which will be held in May this year, to explore options for mobilizing expertise, technology and support for climate-related loss
and damage.

The Ocean Pathway Partnership was also a major new initiative launched at COP23 to strengthen the link between climate change action and the health of oceans; to have this properly recognised both in the UN Climate Change process, as well as in national climate action plans.

COP23 adopted the first Gender Action Plan, and operationalized the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples’ Platform. These initiatives are to ensure that those who are traditionally marginalised have a strong voice in the climate change negotiations and victims of climate change are empowered to become agents of change.

After 6 years of intense negotiations, a historic agreement on Agriculture was concluded at COP23. The Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture will help developing countries reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector, the second biggest emitter after the energy sector.

These, ladies and gentlemen are some of the key achievements and highlights of Fiji’s Presidency of COP23. In essence, we believe that the way forward to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement is through an inclusive and consultative Talanoa dialogue, where people must come first.

Dr. Svoboda, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.