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Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs

**UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES 71st
SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
REPUBLIC OF FIJI**

Video Recording – Mon. 5th October – 11.30 am

High Commissioner;

Excellencies;

Distinguished Delegates;

Bula vinaka and Greetings from Suva.

The global refugee problem is growing in scale and complexity and — due in part to the worsening impacts of climate change — threatens to become an indefinite condition.

We see this in what seems like an endless stream of people crossing the Mediterranean Sea, displaced by war or natural disasters, fleeing repression and violence, or simply seeking better opportunities. This kind of desperate migration is repeated around the world and it shows no sign of abating.

Maintaining community health in refugee camps has always been a challenge, but the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened millions of refugees and migrants worldwide and hampered host countries' attempts to control the spread of the disease within their borders.

And it has hampered operations across the United Nations system, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), even as we have promised to do more.

The pandemic has also increased the financial burden of building national resilience for Small Island Developing States in the Pacific. We are already dealing with the need to strengthen infrastructure and relocate entire communities to higher ground to escape the rising seas, but now face gutted revenues due to the economic impact of COVID-19 on key industries, like Tourism.

Still, the first building blocks of a more resilient future are in place at the regional level. Our regional efforts are complemented by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), which has allocated seed funding for a project focused on Enhancing Protection and Empowerment of Migrants and Communities Affected by Climate Change and Disasters in the Pacific Region.

This project will enable Governments in the Pacific region to examine the multi-faceted challenges associated with climate change, disaster-related migration, displacement and planned relocation in the region and help us work together as a region to address some of these challenges.

Fiji has developed comprehensive national relocation and national displacement guidelines to ensure that there is consistency, coherence and justice as we serve people who are displaced by natural disasters or need to be relocated due to sea-level rise.

Fiji is also embracing the use of the latest science and technology and working with United Nations Operational Satellite (UNOSAT) Applications Programme and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to build our capability to forecast the effects of climate change.

We have experienced eight (8) tropical cyclones within four years, and this experience has taught us the importance of disaster preparedness. Government is investing in building-back-better with resilient infrastructure and ensuring that we have coping mechanisms across all levels of society to help us recover from natural disasters and adapt to climate change.

We commend the work of the UNHCR in pressing for a discussion of climate change as a new driving force for internal displacement. Climate-change factors have contributed to the growing number of internal displacement cases and now surpass those resulting from conflict and violence.

Fiji will continue to support the work of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) to ensure that we work with UNHCR in addressing disaster displacement issues in the Pacific region.

While countries like Fiji are working to adapt to the climate change, it is equally important that the UNHCR continue to ensure that the nexus of climate change and human mobility are at the heart of multilateral discussions. We must adopt a global approach to displacement challenges, even while we work regionally.

We are in for a long struggle with climate-related displacement, and we must take tangible steps now to create momentum for a great international effort to address the future of refugees across the world.

Thank you and Vinaka Vakalevu.