

**UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES  
69<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL DEBATE  
REPUBLIC OF FIJI – H.E. AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN**

Mr/Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

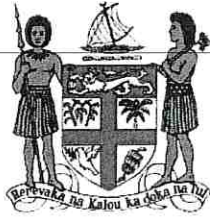
Bula vinaka and good-afternoon.

In his opening statement to this sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee, the High Commissioner discussed his vision for how the global compact on refugees, presented as part II of his annual report to the General Assembly, can leverage more humane, comprehensive, predictable and solutions-oriented engagement in support of the forcibly displaced and their hosts.

Fiji echoes the High Commissioner's call for all states and relevant stakeholders to tackle the root causes of large refugee situations, including through heightened international efforts to prevent and resolve conflict; to uphold the Charter of the United Nations, international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the rule of law at the national and international levels. Migration sees a close inter dependent relationship between development and human rights.

Fiji and the Pacific region as a whole is currently dealing with an emerging issue in relation to the projected increase of climate-displaced people in the Pacific, and the urgent need for not just the Pacific community, but the global community to offer adequate accommodation and assistance to those seeking refuge from rising sea levels and land and water sources which can no longer sustain populations. National boundaries have become less significant and displacement is now a regional and global responsibility.

It was only a decade ago that the notion of displacement caused by rising sea levels and extreme weather events was a vague possibility. Something that was to play out in the distant future. However, climate displacement is now a reality for many Pacific Island States. The prospect is a tragedy for our



communities, most of which are being forced to leave the land of their ancestors leaving behind the source of their communal identity.

The issue of forced migration and displacement is complex, and the work of the UNHCR has been critical in developing our understanding of risk monitoring and preparedness.

In Fiji, we estimate that 63 communities will need to consider relocation in the near future. An early example of relocation in Fiji was the relocation of Vunidogoloa Village in Vanua Levu, our second largest island. This relocation took place in 2014, after almost 3 decades of contemplation. The elders of Vunidogoloa stated that plans to relocate began in 1956, but due to the reluctance of the elders to leave their ancestral grounds, they had to wait until 2006 to start the process of relocation. These discussions took several years because the people were not ready. The hold of the land was so great that it bound the villagers for almost half a century, until it reached a point where relocation was the only and last resort.

In 2014, the entire village was relocated. In fact, the villagers refused to leave the remains of their ancestors at the cemetery in which they were originally buried for fear that they would be washed away with the rising sea levels, so the cemetery was moved as part and parcel of the relocation strategy. Although relocation was planned and executed with the consent of the villagers, the entire process created a profound spiritual predicament. This was the first successful project of its kind in Fiji and in the South Pacific.

Fiji currently has a draft Relocation Guideline, which is still undergoing an extensive consultation process. The draft Guidelines draws heavily of the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and is based on community consent and includes a participatory process of consultation and the empowerment of the community.

With forced relocations, there is a danger of communities being broken apart, for people who have grown together through generations losing their collective identity, ownership of land including their spiritual link to indigenous land. What we must remember is that any forced detachment from the cultural land is a sensitive issue which can complicate any relocation policy, therefore, the

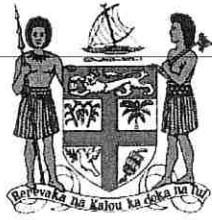


consultation process for the Relocation Guidelines is so important. It must be people centred, holistic and it must ensure that any relocation is done in a way that protects and upholds the rights and dignities of the people involved. Climate change has a very real impact on indigenous persons and local communities and these relocation efforts are a clear example. The best strategies would necessarily require active involvement and leadership from the communities to be relocated. This is the approach that Fiji is taking.

Fiji also recognizes that embracing innovative technological solutions is vital to planning, decision making and will help us better address issues that affect our nation in terms of socio-economic growth whilst protecting our islands and oceans in a sustainable manner for the benefit of future generations. On this note, three Pacific Island countries, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji have embarked on a journey with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme in a CommonSensing Project. The Project aims to leverage earth observation data to provide our nations with access to vital information regarding disaster and climate risks to help us better address our needs in terms of supporting better access to climate financing, enhancing food security and developing evidence-based Disaster Risk Reduction strategies which in turn contributes to the sustainable development of our nations.

We also take note of the Recommendations resulting from the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage of the UNFCCC (UN Climate Change), to strengthen coordination, coherence and collaboration across relevant UNFCCC and Paris Agreement bodies, institutional arrangements, programmes and platforms, with a view to enhancing understanding on human mobility (including migration, displacement and planned relocation), both internal and cross border, in the context of climate change, as they undertake their work, and in collaboration with the Executive Committee.

In conclusion, we believe that reinforcing strong partnerships whether it be old or new, is necessary in bringing about stronger commitments for solidarity, support and protection for the collective good, so that both refugees and host communities are not left behind. We urge a greater partnership between the UNHCR, IOM and UNFCCC in this context.



I thank you Mr/Madam Chairperson.