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**Address to the 59th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr President, I extend to this august assembly the warm greetings and well wishes of the Government and people of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

I warmly congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the presidency of the 59th Session. I pledge to you our support and co-operation. This reflects our respect for your country with which we have enjoyed close relations through our common membership of the African, Caribbean and Pacific partnership with the European Union.

I also express Fiji's warm thanks to His Excellency Mr Julian Hunte of Saint Lucia for his very able leadership of the 58th Session.

Fiji and other small Island nations of the Pacific region applaud the fine example set by the CARICOM countries in their shared approach to managing the responsibilities of this high office.

Mr President, today we are confronted by events which cast a shadow over humankind and the United Nation's vision of peace. The humanitarian crisis in Sudan continues. As relief efforts proceed, our thoughts are with the refugees of Dafur. We urge the Government of Sudan to do everything in its power to bring this tragedy to an end.

We think of those whose lives have been devastated by the destructive fury of hurricanes in the Caribbean and on the US Atlantic coast. We extend to them our deepest sympathies for the loss of lives, property and possessions. The perpetrators of the slaughter of the innocents in Russia gave a new dimension to wickedness.

They defeated their own cause through the ruthless and indiscriminate shedding of the blood of children. Nothing can justify what they did. The UN must be united against such infamy.

Let us express our sympathy and solidarity with the ordinary people of Iraq caught in that country's terrible cycle of violence. Let this forum give them our full and unreserved support in the struggle for genuine democratic Government, and the regaining of their national sovereignty. May their hopes for a peaceful future and lasting stability find fulfillment.

We feel for the families of the people killed by terrorists outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. We want them to know that their pain is shared in this family of nations.

The plea from Fiji is for the UN member countries to strengthen their joint resolve to oppose political terror everywhere. This is a critical time in history; the UN is called to mobilize all its experience, its skills and its powers to create concord among nations. That was its founding principle. It is the principle that must continue to drive and sustain the United Nations.

Fiji, as always, is committed to the maintenance of peace and security, and to a world free of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

We want an end to ozone-depleting pollution and the elimination of other hazards to the environment.

The international community must continue to fight poverty and disease. HIV/AIDS has become more than a health crisis. For some countries, it is now a security threat. We, in the Pacific, have no immunity from this global epidemic.

We would welcome continued assistance from the Global Fund, to supplement our regional campaign to contain this scourge.

Mr President, the UN must continue to resist external interference in any form, which undermines the sovereign right of every member state to determine its own destiny. However, where there are internal crises and disorder and the UN mandates intervention for peace, we are ready to contribute.

We consider it an honour to serve the cause of peace, under the flag of the United Nations and regional organizations like the Pacific Islands Forum.

Fiji soldiers and police officers have been taking part in United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1978. This has cost us 35 precious lives, but we remain strong in our resolve to continue serving where we are needed.

Peacekeeping personnel from Fiji are working in Liberia, Sinai, Kosovo, Timor Leste, Solomon Islands, and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. NOW, my Government is giving careful consideration to requests from the United Nations to assist it with security personnel in Iraq.

I take this opportunity to express to the United Nations, and to those countries Which have assisted Fiji on a bilateral basis, our gratitude for their help in making it possible for us to honor our commitment to international peace and security.

Mr President, through the Pacific Islands Forum and with the assistance of Australia and New Zealand, we are currently preparing a Pacific Plan to pool resources and efforts for the strengthening of collective interests. We will come together to combat the threat of terror, to improve law enforcement and our defenses against terrorism and transnational crime.

There will be a co-operative approach to social and economic development and especially for advancing trade, investment and tourism. We will stand united to guard our Oceanic heritage, which is a treasure for all humanity.

Our region has the world's largest remaining, sustainable tuna fishery, an essential source of food for the global market. But more than 95 percent Of the value Of the mid- Pacific Ocean tuna catch goes to distant water fishing nations.

We look to the UN and other international organizations to help us get a just return from this major natural resource. Fiji commends those countries that have already worked with us to reach this goal.

We express particular thanks to the United States for its regional fisheries treaty with certain Pacific Island nations.

Our Island countries have now entered a new phase of co-operation in the tuna industry through the western and central Pacific Tuna Convention, which came into effect in June this year.

Mr President, in addition to reinforcing regional co-operation, Fiji and its neighbours are giving special attention to their relationships with countries in the wider Asia-Pacific region. We strongly support a role for Japan and India in an enlarged and strengthened Security Council. May I also add that Fiji would endorse the inclusion of South Africa and Brazil as permanent members.

Let me say that we greatly value the assistance of Australia, New Zealand and the United States in securing our region as a zone of peace.

It was heartening to see the two Koreas marching and participating under a single banner at the Olympic Games in Greece. It is our prayer that this

will lead on to more substantive progress in the re-unification of the Korean people.

We are glad to see the People's Republic of China growing in stature and developing so quickly. Fiji enjoys steadily strengthening relations with China and wants to see these expanded further. It is committed to its diplomatic recognition and official relations with the People's Republic Of China. At the same time, Fiji values its trade and economic ties with Taiwan. It is our fervent hope that their people will resolve their future peacefully through dialogue and consensus.

Mr President, for the past twenty-nine years, close to eighty countries of the African, the Caribbean and the Pacific Group have been the beneficiaries of a historic development partnership with the European Union. I pay tribute to the leaders of Europe and the ACP, who pioneered that unique international North-South arrangement. Generous assistance in trade, aid, and investment has contributed in very significant ways to the livelihood Of millions of people from poorer States.

Now, as we begin negotiations with the European union for the continuation of these arrangements, we are finding to our dismay that WTO's insistence on free and open trade will effectively mean for many ACP countries, including Fiji, a massive loss in export earnings from reduced prices. For our sugar industry, the direct consequence will inevitably be that the price the cane farmers receive will fall substantially below their production costs.

This is despite the urgent and comprehensive reforms we have embarked upon in our sugar industry to make It more productive, efficient and competitive.

These WTO hurdles are made more difficult by the loss Of competitive margins through the withdrawal of schemes like the Generalized System of Preferences. The consequence is that many Small Island Developing States, already disadvantaged by their smallness, distance from export markets, and regular devastation from natural disasters are now faced with serious uncertainty over their economic prospects.

We, therefore, welcome the staging by the United Nations of a special conference of small Island Developing States early next year to review the UN Plan of Action for these countries - the Barbados plus Ten Review.

I very much hope this Review will lead to new international commitments of assistance to the disadvantaged Small Island Developing States. These must underpin economic survival and a sustainable future, as the world moves inexorably towards a free and open trading system. It is also our hope that the Barbados plus Ten review will renew the call for those states that have yet to sign or to ratify the Kyoto Protocol to do so, for the sake of our Planet.

My Government commends the initiative taken by the international Labour Organization in its World Commission Report on the Social Dimension of Globalization. It is the international community's responsibility to ensure that for both developed and developing countries, and for big and small countries alike, globalization means a fair and equitable spread of opportunities - opportunities manifested in new investments, more jobs, decent work, and improvements in education, health and other social amenities.

For us in the Pacific, as small Island nations, there is another area of increased concern. We take great pride in our culture, customs and traditions. They give us our identity and oneness as indigenous communities and as Pacific Island peoples. I appeal to this General Assembly to bring before it for adoption, at the earliest opportunity, the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I request our distinguished secretary-General to expedite this process.

While we acknowledge the importance of the universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments in the promotion of human rights, we also recognize that they are primarily concerned with the rights of individuals.

Indigenous Pacific Island communities see a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as being vitally important for the international recognition and acceptance of our right to self-determination and, indeed, to our very survival as ethnically and culturally distinct peoples.

But that is not to say, Mr President, that we are unconcerned for other communities whose members are fellow citizens with equal rights and responsibilities.

Members of this Assembly are aware that Fiji has a multi-racial society. The ethnic Fijians and Rotumans are the Indigenous community.

Collectively and communally, they own close to 90% of all land in the country. Settlers from India came some 125 years ago and now comprise the majority of tenants of native land. Europeans, people of mixed ancestry, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders, complete Fiji's colourful, cultural tapestry. We are proud of this national diversity. It gives our country its distinctive character, and potential still unrealized.

Although we have learned to co-exist, without the racial violence and hatred common elsewhere, we are still a country divided, especially in politics. From Independence in 1970, we tried hard to create multi-racialism founded on mutual respect, mutual care and understanding. But, unfortunately, during elections, the overwhelming majority of voters still make their choices on ethnic lines. It is not because they are against

candidates from other communities. It is just that they find security and comfort in choosing representatives from their own community.

Since my Government came to office in 2001, we have been engaged in a new quest for unity. Our vision is for a peaceful, unified and prosperous Fiji. Politically, we wish to build on the concept of guaranteed representation for our different communities in Parliament. The challenge now is to extend this to representation in Government.

As a parliamentary democracy, we are committed to Government based on the free will and consent of the people. But, at the same time, we want to ensure that each community has a direct voice in national decision-making. It is this desire for Inclusion and equity which has led us to adopt measures to close the social and economic gap between the Fijians and the other communities and between the affluent and the disadvantaged and the poor. Increasingly, we are finding that faith in God is a powerful instrument for forming bonds across the racial divide. We may follow different beliefs but a common focus on the Divine is lighting the way forward.

When I return to Fiji, the country will be getting ready for eight days of prayer, forgiveness and reconciliation. The aim is to bring people together, to create a sense of national purpose and patriotism. All the great faiths represented in Fiji will be part of this. Each contains in their teachings those jewels of truth, which gleam for all humanity. Each has an important capacity for peacemaking; each can make a valuable contribution to increasing understanding and resolving differences.

So, in those eight days in October our religious leaders will join with other citizens of goodwill in this fresh search for togetherness. Promotion of unity has been a pressing national priority since my Government came to office four years ago. We understand that it will not come quickly. But we are determined to succeed. This Assembly will be pleased to hear that our communities themselves, through their religious and cultural organizations, are coming forward to join with the Government in the making of a unified State. The climax of our national week of prayer and forgiveness will be an inter-faith service. We recognize that human effort alone is not enough for what we want to achieve.

Mr President, just as this great organization seeks a world of harmony, bound together by common Ideals, we, in Fiji, want our own UN – a united nation where our citizens live together happily, and nationhood Is fulfilled.
