



Permanent Mission of the Fiji Islands to the United Nations

Hon. Kaliopate Tavola

Minister for Foreign Affairs & External Trade

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Madame President,

I extend to you Madame President the congratulations and best wishes of the Government and the people of the Fiji Islands. The General Assembly is to be commended for accepting your candidature to become the third woman to assume the post of President of this august Assembly.

This recognizes the critical role women play in the development of humanity in our global village. We assure you, of the support of my government during your tenure.

We also extend our gratitude to your predecessor His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson for his tireless efforts in the reform process of the United Nations, to which he applied his personal skills and knowledge.

While a lot is still to be resolved, his contribution thus far in the reform process has started the ball rolling and it is up to us to maintain the momentum.

Fiji, its government and people, wish to honour and express our appreciation to the outgoing Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan. His tireless efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation in the world are recognized.

Ghana should be justly proud of its son. As a national of the developing world, we are just as proud that you are able to project our hopes, most prominently in the development agenda of the organization. We respect your achievements in the leadership of the United Nations during your tenure of office.

Your services to peoples around the world and the patience, courage and determination you exercised daily to face the world despite the barbs and criticism thrown your way is commendable. We ask that you accept our deepest gratitude and profound appreciation for all you have done. We extend best wishes to you and your family and for the future.

Madame President,

I am pleased on this occasion and after our successful General Elections in May of this year (2006), that I am able to report to this august Assembly that all international observers who attended the holding of the General Elections in Fiji have concluded that the result was democratic and a fair reflection of the popular will of the people. The rebuilding of our nation after the disaster that struck us in 2000 is going well indeed. It was strengthened following the formation of the multi-party Government in accordance with the requirements of our Constitution.

We now have Cabinet comprising Ministers drawn from the majority SDL Party, and the Fiji Labour Party, as the party that qualified to be invited to be represented in Cabinet. We also have Ministers drawn from the Independent members of our elected House of Representatives. This means that for the first time in its history, Fiji has a Cabinet that is truly representative of its multi-ethnic communities.

Ministers from the two major races in the country, and those from the minority groups, are working well together in collaborative and consultative decision making.

We are united by the common purpose of taking our country forward, for the benefit of every citizen.

This multi-ethnic arrangement for good-governance has received overwhelming approval and support from all our communities. It has given our country reasons to be optimistic. People from all races now feel more confident and secure about their future. We believe that in forming a multi-ethnic Government, which is representative of our different communities, and making it work, is the approach that has eluded us for a long time, but one which will ensure long term peace and stability in Fiji.

This new form of inclusive government is also underpinning our drive for continued improvements in Fiji's economic performance.

Madame President,

The plea from Fiji is for the United Nations member countries to strengthen their joint resolve to oppose terrorism everywhere in the world. Fiji is committed to a world where peace and prosperity is the cornerstone of all societies and communities. We consider it an honour to serve the cause of peace, under the banners of the United Nations and other peacekeeping arrangements including that under the Pacific Islands Forum. Where there are potential internal crisis and disorder, we support the Secretary-General's concept of conflict prevention.

However, where the UN mandates intervention for peace, we are ready to contribute.

Peacekeeping personnel from Fiji are working in Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Sinai, Solomon Islands, Sudan and Timor Leste. We would like to thank the United Nations and all those countries that have assisted Fiji honor its commitment to international peace and security.

We welcome those other countries that are intending to assist us in this matter. We do this with humility, knowing that there is more peace to keep and to build in the world today, and that we have acquired competence to offer to humanity.

Peace and Security initiatives have undergone a number of reviews recently, to benefit peacekeeping operations. Fiji notes the creation of the Peace Stabilization Force in Lebanon and the consultative process that preceded it, as an example where an existing organization was tailored to suit a given situation. We should not be afraid to make changes for the better. The best practices derived from Bougainville and Solomon Islands are examples that can be utilized elsewhere.

The Peace-building Commission was primarily established to ensure that countries that have emerged from conflict do not regress to their status quo ante. Fiji commends this initiative and appeals for everyone's support. I thank the support given to Fiji to be an inaugural member of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Madame President,

We in the Pacific remain committed to ensuring that our region remains one of permanent peace and stability.

Next month, Fiji will host the meeting of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum. The finalization of the Pacific Plan will be the main focus of the meeting. The Plan provides a framework for co-operation and mutual assistance in development, good governance and long term peace and security. We commend those countries from outside our region, who have pledged to work and to assist us in the implementation of this Plan.

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders welcomed their summit meetings earlier this year, with China, Japan and France. We commend them for their developmental support and their leadership in promoting lasting peace in the region. We maintain that these initiatives ought to be sustained; and can be ensured by engaging all parties in constructive dialogue.

Madame President,

The United Nations is renowned for accepting and finding resolutions for problems of the small and marginalized. Fiji is a small island developing state with a highly vulnerable economy. Our economy is open and is over 70% dependent on export trade to earn foreign exchange to meet its development needs.

We find that the multilateral trading rules emanating from the WTO are not fair and equitable, given our developmental status, geography and size. WTO proposals that have tended toward a “one-size-fit-all” approach have not fully benefited from an honest and creative application of the Special & Differential Treatment clauses of the WTO. They have not effectively addressed the multiplicity of problems we are facing.

They only serve the interests of countries that are developed, big and already established traders globally, and of course are already well off. The fact that these proposals are formulated with little regard for our concerns has manifested itself in widening disparity and greater marginalization, and worsening global poverty.

However, we do not advocate the removal of the multilateral trading arrangement. We just need to make it better. The suspension of the WTO talks on the Doha Development Agenda, has further deepened our concerns regarding the need for the multilateral trading rules to show some flexibility, so that the development concerns of countries like Fiji can be addressed in the current round of negotiations.

We call on the membership of the United Nations to work towards an early resumption of the suspended WTO talks. There is far too much at stake for all of us, especially for the small islands developing states like Fiji.

We acknowledge the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments in the promotion of human rights. We note that they are concerned primarily with protecting the rights of individuals. Fiji like other Pacific Islands indigenous communities welcomes the decision to bring the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to this august Assembly for discussion and adoption. This instrument is vitally important for the recognition and acceptance of the right to self determination, as indigenous peoples, and of the right for their survival as ethnically and culturally distinct peoples.

On the International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, Fiji, like others, has recognized the special needs of persons with disabilities and already has enacted the relevant legislation and subsequently established the Fiji National Council of Disabled Persons. A National Policy on Disability for 2006 - 2016, a requirement of the Act, is currently being finalized. Fiji strongly supports this International Convention and would be in favour of its adoption.

Fiji acknowledges the vital role women play in development. To ensure women’s active participation in all facets of development, the monitoring of the Rights of Women contained in the Beijing Platform of Action has to be reinforced. One effective way is to ensure that domestic policies and legislations are in place to drive gender mainstreaming. This must be a priority target for us all.

Madame President,

Improving world security must be accompanied by appropriate reforms in our organization. A goal of the current reform of the UN is the need to ensure that the voice of the small and vulnerable countries like Fiji is given equal treatment in the membership of this global body.

One of the goals of the UN reforms is to achieve democratization. Without this, it will remain an organization driven by sectarian interests, where might is right, and moral ethical considerations fall by the wayside. We must not be deterred from this momentous task we have set for ourselves. The outcome of our concerted, and committed effort in these reforms, will be a just and stronger organization, better prepared to address the world's multiplicity of challenges.

Madame President,

A lot has been achieved since we last met in Plenary. New challenges have emerged. However, there are still far too many people whose needs and voices that are still crying out to be heard. The United Nations remains a beacon of hope for them. These cries ought to be listened to and people empowered so that they can firmly and confidently take charge of their destiny.

We must all undertake to assist and participate in the work of the United Nations, commensurate of course with our respective size and economic standing.

I thank you, Madame President.
