



**STATEMENT BY H.E. PETER THOMSON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI TO THE UN
AT THE 55th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
NEW YORK, 22 Feb – 4 March, 2011**

[Check against delivery]

The Fiji delegation wishes to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election and to assure you of our support in the work of this Commission.

We associate ourselves with the statement delivered on Thursday by the Permanent Representative from Nauru on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS).

Chair,

We welcome the theme for this year's session, believing it to be a fundamental step towards the realization of the Beijing Platform for Action. We wish to reaffirm that it is through the access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, and through women's equal access to full employment, that will ensure their empowerment and advancement in our communities. We believe this theme to be at the heart of economic growth and development in our global society.

The Beijing Platform for Action remains an essential tool in advancing the status of women and girls in Fiji. In this regard, our Women's Plan of Action is considered to have made significant progress in the area of reforms called for in the fundamental principles of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Chair,

Economic reforms in Fiji have encouraged women's equal access to the labour market and better and fairer employment practices, including a national policy on sexual harassment. Fiji's implementation of its target of having 30% representation of women in all Government appointed boards and committees is progressing smoothly, where women are now represented in all spheres of the civil service and better working conditions for all women are now guaranteed by law.

Fiji has also ratified ILO Convention 159, which calls for decent work for people with disabilities. Accordingly, our laws now require that 2% of the workforce where 50 or more people are employed must be reserved for those with disabilities. Our new laws also guarantee the increase of minimum wage by 20% across 9 industries, which are expected to have a direct impact on the livelihood of and opportunities for our women.

In accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Fiji continues to value the significant contribution and the role of our women serving in UN peacekeeping missions around the world.

Chair,

In her statement to the CEDAW Committee at the examination of Fiji's periodic reports in July last year, our Minister for Women admitted there are areas in relation to women where a great deal of work still needs to be done. In successive poverty reports, women are invariably found to be the most vulnerable and the most affected by poverty. Steady progress is evident in the economic participation of women in the rural and agricultural sectors.

In meeting these challenges, we have come to realise that our power to progress lies in education. To inculcate in people the theme of this session is to educate them of its importance. It is only through the education of our people, especially our children, that they are enabled to make the crucial value decisions we need in our society. In Fiji, we depend on parents as the primary nurturers and educators of their children, and regard the family as the fortress from which children depart as well-grounded and responsible adults. We depend on our formal education system to provide our society with knowledgeable, informed, and skilled individuals, fully equipped to live dignified lives, and more importantly, to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of the societal ideals and principles we aspire to.

Chair,

These are some reasons the Government of Fiji places great emphasis on the education of our children. Currently there is 99% school enrolment in Fiji. To sustain this high level, Government has put in place numerous measures that guarantee the education of all children irrespective of their economic background. We have put in place various schemes that provide assistance to those who qualify for the associated costs of education in the form of food vouchers, free transport costs and free primary school textbooks by 2012. There is compulsory and free primary level education up to Year 8. To ensure quality education, teachers are required to register every two years after satisfying the criteria that support continuing education. While students are free to choose the area of studies they wish to pursue, Government encourages

female students to consider fields of science and technology as well. Three universities exist in Fiji to provide students with more opportunities for tertiary education, where females outnumber males. At the University of the South Pacific in particular, female enrolment in science and technology programmes has increased steadily in the last 3 years, and in one programme exceeded the male enrolment. Government scholarships continue to be a major source of funding for students in tertiary institutions. We also recognise that NGOs and intergovernmental organisations play a complimentary role in these efforts. Several initiatives by NGOs and academic institutions in Fiji, in partnership with other local and overseas NGOs, have enabled young female students to be more informed about future education and career choices.

Chair,

We welcome the establishment of the UN Women and fully support its objective in accelerating the organisation's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Its role in bringing together the resources and mandates of the four previously distinct parts of the UN system is expected to forge greater effectiveness in the work of the UN and its partnership with Member States. In this regard, we anticipate the UN Women coordinating closely with Member States with renewed commitment in achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and the principles of the CEDAW Convention.

The Government of Fiji remains committed to and will continue to implement, the Beijing Platform for Action, and we look forward to the continuous support of all relevant partners including the civil society.

I thank you.

