



UNCTAD 15
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General debate

Statement by:

Fiji



UNITED NATIONS
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UNCTAD 15-GENERAL DEBATE

“From inequality and vulnerability to prosperity for all”

Statement by Hon. Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport

Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka from Fiji.

Due to the time difference and other national commitments, I have not been able to join you virtually. Although I wish I was there in person, it is very important that I deliver this important statement.

And it is my pleasure to be contributing to these discussions, which will feed into the mandate of UNCTAD 15.

As we convene amidst the greatest economic crisis that small island developing states (SIDS) have ever faced, we must remember that the COVID-19 pandemic is not the only contributor to the crisis. We have the ever-present threat of climate change, causing record-setting wildfires, historic floods, severe hurricanes, droughts and punishing heat waves.

These are factors that have deepened inequality and vulnerability of SIDS, even though we are not the contributors of climate change.

Chair,

The Pacific Island Countries make up the “smallest” economies in the world. We are the most isolated from our key markets and connectivity remains a growing concern. Destructive weather patterns in Fiji have hindered the island’s economy and uprooted thousands across the island nation.

But with every crisis comes opportunities, these challenges have doubly strengthened our resolve to rebuild a resilient and robust economy, and allow it to its full potential. Our resilience and long-term sustainability is dependent on our ability to adapt and recreate our economies.

Chair,

In this regard, the fiscal policy intervention of individual countries is not enough to mount a full recovery. We need the collective support of international organisations, such as the UNCTAD to provide the backing and assist countries to transition towards an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery.

This means increased cooperation to halt further economic fallout, mitigate its impact on the livelihoods and health, and provide adaptation support to people, whilst we ensure continuity of trade, most importantly, integration of Pacific SIDS into global trade and undisrupted supply chains.

Chair,

Therefore, the question that we should address at UNCTAD 15, is how to stop permanent scarring of our development. How do small and vulnerable economies change their game plan from just surviving to thriving.

We believe trade is an important link to prosperity. We need global solidarity towards trade equity, and by having equity in the Multilateral Trading System, the most vulnerable amongst us would have greater access to world trade.

Therefore, having a fair and meaningful outcome on the fisheries subsidies agreement at the World Trade Organization is imperative. And to have fair outcomes, the issue needs to be targeted at the source, instead of threatening the livelihoods of SIDS.

Chair,

A well-functioning and climate-resilient infrastructure is important for sustainable growth. Building resilience of maritime and air transport infrastructure, which are the economic lifelines for SIDS, is crucial to support sustainable trade, tourism and development.

Trade can help create climate, economic and social resilience by promoting environmentally sound technologies, interconnectivity, diversified production and enhanced productivity. Therefore, to build resilience for and through trade needs to be part of the solution to the climate crisis and future-proof against any shocks.

Chair,

Fiji's Climate Change Act was passed by the Fijian Parliament yesterday, marking a historic milestone in Fiji's global fight.

But while Fiji and other SIDS are demonstrating leadership in tackling climate change and building climate resilience, we need urgent commitment to address the financial, technological and capacity gaps that hinder our efforts. This is where we see UNCTAD playing an important role in supporting the economic recovery of SIDS.

Supporting SIDS' resilience can provide opportunities in terms of overall national sustainable development, which should be the focus of the international community and UNCTAD.

For the SIDS to stay afloat and survive, we must re-innovate, re-strategise and reposition our priorities for the benefit of all, including the most vulnerable.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.