



Honourable J.V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc,
psc

Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Foreign Affairs,
iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry and Waterways

REMARKS ON ASSUMING THE PRESIDENCY OF COP-23

Bonn, Germany

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Bula vinaka and a very warm welcome to the Bula Zone.

It is a great honour for Fiji to receive the baton from Morocco of the presidency of COP. And assume the responsibility for implementing the Paris Agreement and prepare the way for more ambitious climate action.

From one of the most climate-vulnerable regions on earth, I bring you the greetings of the Fijian people

and all Pacific Islanders. And our collective plea for the world to maintain the course we set in Paris.

The need for urgency is obvious. Our world is in distress from the extreme weather events caused by climate change - destructive hurricanes, fires, floods, droughts, melting ice, and changes to agriculture that threaten our food security. All consistent with the science that now tells us that 2016 was a record year for carbon emissions.

All over the world, vast numbers of people are suffering - bewildered by the forces ranged against them. Our job as leaders is to respond to that suffering with all means available to us. This includes our capacity to work together to identify opportunities in the transition we must make.

We must not fail our people. That means using the next two weeks and the year ahead to do everything we can to make the Paris Agreement work and to advance ambition and support for climate action before 2020. To meet our commitments in full, not back away from them. And to commit ourselves to the most ambitious target of the Paris Agreement. To cap the global average temperature at 1.5 degrees Celsius over that of the pre-industrial age.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates: By aiming for 1.5 degrees, we are setting ourselves a serious challenge. But it provides us with a mission. It

engages our capacity for ingenuity, for organisation and sheer hard work. And who knows what we might achieve when humanity's capacity to innovate is unleashed? What we do know is that if we don't rise to this challenge, we will definitely fall short and expose our people to more risk. More destruction. More suffering.

That is why Fiji has been so determined to help build a Grand Coalition of governments at every level, civil society, the private sector and faith-based organisations. And to connect this effort to as many of the 7.5 billion citizens of the planet as possible.

We must make this effort more relevant to people's lives. Which is why in the next two weeks, we are giving much more emphasis to the climate action zone - the Bonn Zone. And to enable me to be present there and meet the many thousands of non-state actors who are also part of this Grand Coalition, the formal negotiations in this room will be conducted by our Chief Negotiator, Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan.

We are not only bringing our Fijian Bula Spirit to Bonn with our cultural performances. We hope to infuse these negotiations with the Pacific Talanoa Spirit of understanding and respect. Because the only way for every nation to put itself first is to lock arms with all other nations and move forward together.

Talanoa helps us to understand that essential truth. And I am very gratified that so many of you have begun referring to the Talanoa Dialogue as the best way to raise ambition and accelerate our response to this challenge.

I also appeal for a lot more resolve to assist the more vulnerable to adapt to climate change. And as President of COP23, we are launching an Ocean Pathway to ensure the ocean is an integral part of our UNFCCC process by 2020.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates: this is our moment of truth - when all of us in this room will be tested. We must not be found wanting.

We are all in the same canoe, which is why we have drua – a Fijian ocean-going canoe – in the foyer. To remind us of our duty to fill its sail with a collective determination to achieve our mission. So let's make the hard decisions that have to be made for the sake of ourselves and the generations to come. Let's use the next two weeks to get the job done.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.