



**SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION AND PERMANENT  
SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION, HERITAGE AND ARTS, FIJI**

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**STATEMENT  
UNESCO GENERAL POLICY DEBATE: 40<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CONFERENCE**

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**UNESCO**

**18 November 2019**

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**Mr President  
Chairperson of the Executive Board  
Director General  
Honourable Heads of State and Ministers  
Excellencies**

On behalf of the Honourable Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts of Fiji, I wish you, Mr President, a successful term leading UNESCO with the able assistance of the Director-General.

I bring you warm greetings from the islands in the Pacific which have shared the concept of “talanoa” with the world through our Honourable Prime Minister as the chair of COP23. We have also shared the idea that we are all in the same drua, or canoe, together as we paddle against the forces of climate change. It is that concept of mutual support, teamwork and multi-lateralism which has to be brought to bear to ensure that we roll back the devastating effects of climate change.

Mr President, many speakers contributing to the General Policy debate have mentioned climate change which we all experience in different ways. Coming from the Pacific, which we of course believe is the centre of the world, we experience it as small island states surrounded by millions of miles of sea water – sea water that is inexorably rising. In about 20 years’ time, we expect that the sea will rise by up to 1 metre and there is no doubt that this will have a profound effect on our lives and livelihoods.

Already, Fiji has offered land to our neighbours from Tuvalu and Kiribati in anticipation of the day when their homes are underwater and uninhabitable. Already, in Fiji, we have had to move over 40 villages from their traditional land leaving behind their ancestors in their resting places. Our young people have to wait for the tide to go out before they can play rugby on water-logged fields. We have to ban the fishing of certain species due to warming and rising seas and over-fishing affecting the ability of our people to earn an income and to feed their families.

Mr President, on the first day of this Conference, the outgoing President asked “is peace Utopia? Is it the absence of war?” From our perspective in Fiji, it is the ability for our young people to earn a living, for our people to live in harmony based on tolerance and respect and for us to live without

the fear of another Tropical Cyclone Winston wreaking havoc and causing the loss of 44 lives. In 24 hours, one-third of our GDP was wiped out. It has taken us four years to rebuild most facilities devastated by that Cyclone – in our schools, we have re-constructed over 400 buildings alone. I would like to pay tribute to those countries in particular which supported us through these trying times – in alphabetical order – Australia, China, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates, the USA together with the UN agencies including UNICEF and UNDP who helped in a number of ways.

Mr President, Fiji has a population of 850,000 and a relatively small economy. We do not have the population or economic might of many countries in the developed and indeed developing world. We do not have the industries which have contributed to the sorry state of affairs that we are all experiencing today. Indeed, we are reaping what we did not sow; we are in a position now which is not of our making. However, we are working hard with like-minded nations to make our contribution to combatting climate change. This year, we started a project to plant 4 million trees in 4 years. Our Honourable Prime Minister, ever one to raise the bar, has recently challenged us to plant 30 million trees in 15 years. Our Parliament will soon consider passing into law a Climate Change Bill as we continue to live our commitment to fighting climate change.

Mr President, throughout all this, we have also worked to educate our young people on climate change. We have developed a disaster risk reduction manual for schools with support from UNICEF and UNDP. Our young people have said: “we can see climate change, we can feel it but we do not know what to do about it” and this is part of our answer to them. We are happy to share this resource with other SIDS.

We have also worked in other areas of education to keep pace with technology. We have developed, as one of only 3 countries world-wide, a curriculum on anti-corruption which is embedded in relevant subjects in primary and secondary schools.

We are looking to address the 4 pillars of education – literacy, numeracy, physical and digital literacy. Many nations here today have revised their curricula to be contemporary and compatible with an overlay of technology. We do not want to re-invent the wheel as many aspects of the curriculum can only be presented in a limited number of ways. Here I mention the STEM subjects and indeed languages – Hindi, Urdu, Mandarin and English for example. These are all subjects which are offered by experts from particular nations and the curricula can easily be shared. Physical education can be added to this list with expertise from Cuba as an example. There is space for us to share on a more systematic basis and UNESCO can facilitate this process.

Mr President, the Pacific and indeed Fiji can be considered the Non-Communicable Diseases capital of the world. In Fiji, at least 80% of deaths in our country can be attributed to NCDs. On average, one of our citizens has a limb amputated every 12 hours. In 2015, following research undertaken by UNDP, it was estimated that NCDs cost the Fijian economy up to US\$180m a year. In this context, it is important that we get the nation to move, to exercise and this begins with physical education. Again, we are not alone in facing this crisis and again, we believe that UNESCO, as the custodian for physical education, activity and sport can play a central role in supporting nations to develop PE curricula which will embed an ethic of life-long activity in all our citizens.

Mr President, we note that there are particular priorities for the Organisation. We were delighted to hear you mention after your election the need to pay more attention to the needs of SIDS, to

hear our voice and to address climate change. We hope that UNESCO will make SIDS a priority in the near future. We steadfastly believe in the concept of “leave no-one behind” and we look forward to working with you to ensure that multi-lateralism makes its way to the Pacific. It is on this basis that we strongly support the proposed amendment to Article V to allow a forum through which the Pacific in particular can play an integral role in the decision-making processes of UNESCO once more.

I thank you.