

COUNTRY STATEMENT (FIJI)

**12TH ENVIRONMENTAL CONGRESS FOR ASIA AND THE
PACIFIC (ECO-ASIA 2004)**

**YONAGO CONVENTION CENTER (BIG SHIP), TOTORI,
JAPAN**

19-20 JUNE, 2004

Mina Sama Konnichi wa,

I wish to congratulate the Hon. Minister Yuriko Koike for being elected the Chair of ECO ASIA 2004.

I take this opportunity to thank the Government of Japan, for hosting this ECO ASIA 2004, and yet again, making it possible for the Ministers of the ECO ASIA Region to meet for the 12th Congress.

I am privileged to represent the Hon. Minister and offer his sincere apology for not attending this meeting due to the heavy commitment especially when the Parliament is currently in session and I make the following statement on his behalf.

The primary purpose of the Statement is to briefly demonstrate that Fiji acknowledges the aims of this Congress, and expresses its utmost appreciation of the invaluable initiatives that emanate from it. These initiatives are necessary to follow-up, towards sustainable development and the safe and healthy natural environment for our ECO ASIA region. These are

the initiatives that provide us with basis for our national environmental management programmes.

Hon. Chairman, Fiji appreciates fully the aims of this Congress to assess the region's efforts towards sustainable development since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), and to discuss the future direction of cooperation in the region by recognising ECO ASIA as one of the important forum to address opinions on sustainable development at the ministerial level in Asia and the Pacific. In accordance with these aims, the Fiji Government has committed its relevant ministries and stakeholders to coordinate the development of national environmental programmes of activities that would promote the concept of sustainable development.

On Environmental Education, Hon. Chairman, we believe that Environmental Education should be focussed on promoting good governance in environmental management and sphere of responsibilities. In Fiji, we are encouraging this with the involvement of Chief Executive Officers of line ministries, in steering the implementation of the various environment-related programmes, through their respective senior officials. This participatory approach would include the promotion and exchange of relevant experiences and information, that otherwise would have remained un-tapped.

Hon. Chairman, Fiji is currently finalising the formulation of its Environmental Management Bill which is expected to be passed in Parliament by the end of this year 2004.

Through this legislation we will establish a National Environment Council under the Chairmanship of myself as CEO and will be responsible to bring all relevant heads of government and non-government organisations and institutions, together to initiate the formulation of environment management policies. It is envisaged that through this involvement of officials at the highest level, that good governance in environmental management would be promoted.

Hon. Chairman, furthermore, the responsibilities for the implementation of the two pillars of sustainable development, namely; economic and social, have been allocated to the Ministry of National Planning. This approach would get the relevant ministry involved in the promotion of sustainable development.

Hon. Chairman, we have reached the stage of accepting that our country, as a small island nation, is very vulnerable to all forms of human-induced environmental degradation activities, therefore, we can no longer afford to sit back and let this degradation take its course to the fullest and just hope that the degradation would heal itself over time. The approach currently taken, is the Integrative and participatory approach, of all resource management authorities in the environment education programmes.

Towards the establishment of a Sustainable Society, Hon. Chairman, we strongly feel that the following actions are important and need to be facilitated towards implementation:

- the integration of environmental policies into national economic and social development policies;
- the sound implementation of measures relevant to natural resource management, including forests and water, as well as waste and recycling policy and transboundary environmental issues in order to establish a sustainable society;
- the promotion of partnerships and participation among stakeholders and enhancement of cooperation, notably cooperation on capacity building and improving finance-related partnerships in Asia and the Pacific region and at the global level.

Hon. Chairman, in Fiji, we strongly believe that the enactment of the Environment Management Bill would establish the implementation of these integrated environmental policies, natural resource management, and multi-stakeholder participatory processes. These are already in place, however, the legislation would further re-enforce our commitment and participation of other ministries.

On Climate Change, Hon. Chairman, specially when realizing our vulnerability to all climate change effects, we see the need to address the importance of enhancing measures to tackle global warming in Asia and the Pacific region, notably in small island states in the South Pacific.

We again would like to emphasize that islands in the Asia and the Pacific region are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Hon. Chairman, it is our wish that the countries of ECO ASIA reaffirm the importance of the Kyoto Protocol in facing the challenge of global warming and should agree that ECO ASIA should continue to follow up on efforts to be made by countries and institutions.

Hon. Chairman, we see the need to follow up the progress and the future plans of the two projects initiated by ECO ASIA: (1) the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED); and (2) the Asia-Pacific Environment Innovation Strategy Project (APEIS).

APFED is invaluable in articulating an agenda for the Asia-Pacific region. There is high expectations for APFED's on-going contributions, particularly with regard to action-oriented output well-focussed on a limited number of priority issues. Fiji, as with other participating countries, should state their determination to support APFED's efforts in any way possible and express desire to enhance interactions with APFED activities.

Hon. Chairman, with regard to APEIS, we emphasize that the success of the project would depend on the extent to which its products and results are of practical value to policy-makers. To this end, ECO ASIA participants should be encouraged to participate in interactive demonstration activities, which would be

launched in close collaboration between policy-makers and scientists.

Hon. Chairman, to conclude this opportunity given to my Government to make its statement, I would again through you, thank the Government of Japan for this opportunity, and wish the deliberations of the 12th ECO ASIA 2004 all the success.

Thank you, Hon. Chairman.