

Statement by H.E. Ms. Fekita 'Utoikamanu,
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on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States
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Madame Chair, Rural communities serve as guardians of the traditional cultural knowledge and pristine natural resources of small Island States. Rural development must be meaningful to them. Therefore, strengthening a full range of rural development strategies, and of course, implementing them, are two key priorities for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Madame Chair, Rural development, natural resource management and poverty reduction are closely linked in many SIDS. Our rural communities and pristine natural areas are not only an environmental and social asset, but also serve as a key focal point for visitors, given that tourism is a leading economic sector in many SIDS. Indeed, this integrated bundle of rural life and resource management for poverty reduction, form part and parcel of sustainable tourism and the growth envisioned in this sub-sector. Accordingly, it is important that diversified and sustainable tourism strategies and activities are incorporated into rural development plans; for example, linking local agro-industry with other rural development programmes could serve as a useful strategy in reducing rural to urban migration. In addition, eco-tourism strategies can support rural development, namely by reducing poverty and preserving the natural environment -- while also ensuring that future generations of rural communities and visitors will enjoy pristine but more secured natural resources.

Madame Chair, For SIDS, climate change is a truly cross-cutting sustainable development issue. Many of our rural communities are geographically isolated, posing barriers to the delivery of essential services and disaster response services. In addition, many such communities are closely dependent upon the sustained health of natural resource ecosystems, including subsistence agriculture and fishing. Thus we recommend that climate change adaptation strategies be up-scaled and mainstreamed with rural development actions. We also propose that climate adaptation should strengthen the resiliency of vulnerable rural communities, as well as improve infrastructure such as early warning systems.

With the intention of empowering women and youth, SIDS should be assisted in developing and implementing integrated sustainable natural resource management and rural development strategies which incorporate traditional cultural knowledge and land tenure systems. Rural development and land conservation strategies which take a "bottom up" approach by working closely with local

communities and traditional cultural strategies and knowledge, will potentially develop shared responsibility and local ownership of the development process.

Madame Chair, Rural development strategies and activities should be diversified to support economic growth in SIDS. For example, SIDS should be assisted in implementing strategies which directly improve the access of rural communities to markets and to financial services. Rural communities themselves should be actively involved in developing strategies to strengthen domestic agriculture, including the sustainable development of biofuels, in ways which also protects and expands food security. Naturally, too, sustainable agro-diversification strategies should be encouraged in a manner which broadens what in many cases is a traditionally-narrow export economy. Madame Chair, with these policy measures, we feel confident that rural development will be meaningful for SIDS in the context of climate change and making progress in sustainable development.

Thank you, Madame Chair.