



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

31 May 2017

Excellency,

In a few days' time, The Ocean Conference will be underway. As you know, "The United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" will be held here at United Nations Headquarters New York, from 5 to 9 June.

The purpose of this letter is to underline a few points made during the briefing convened by Secretary-General of the conference, Under Secretary-General Mr. Wu Hongbo on 26 May.

Firstly, delegates of the conference are invited to attend a Fijian cultural ceremony starting at 9:00 a.m. on Monday 5 June in the General Assembly Hall. Given the solemn nature of the ceremony, it is important that delegations attending the ceremony be seated in the General Assembly Hall before 9:00 a.m. The cultural ceremony will be followed by the formal opening of the conference at 10:00 a.m. In this regard, please see attached a letter from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, H.E. Mr. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, and the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate and Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, H.E. Ms. Isabella Lövin, Co-Presidents of The Ocean Conference.

Secondly, in addition to the conference's plenary meetings and partnership dialogues, there will be more than 170 side events, several exhibitions and a special event to celebrate World Ocean Day on 8 June. I encourage all delegations to actively participate in these events, by strategic division of available delegation personnel.

Thirdly, in relation to the seven partnership dialogues, I encourage all participants to present meaningful solutions to the many challenges at the heart of SDG 14. Such solutions will be captured in the outcomes of the conference.

Fourthly, while the number of registered voluntary commitments has been growing steadily in recent weeks, I am still encouraging States to keep registering commitments in the lead-up to and during the Conference. I stress the importance of being seen to be part of the solution for SDG 14's implementation by registering those commitments online at <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments>.

I note that all logistical details are available either in the UN Journal or on The Ocean Conference website (<https://oceanconference.un.org/>). I encourage all delegations to follow the logistical arrangements to ensure a smooth running of the conference next week.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Thomson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Thomson

To all Permanent Representatives
and Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



Government Offices of Sweden



Republic of Fiji

26 May, 2017

Your Excellency,

The high-level United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, "The Ocean Conference", to be convened at United Nations Headquarters on 5–9 June, 2017 is now a few days away.

As co-Presidents, the Governments of Fiji and Sweden are pleased to invite you and your delegation to attend a cultural welcome ceremony inside the United Nations General Assembly hall prior to the formal opening plenary of the Conference on Monday 5 June.

The cultural ceremony of welcome is scheduled to begin at 9:00 am. The ceremony itself is a sacred cultural tradition of the Fijian people that is accorded to high dignitaries to formally welcome and receive them into a community. It symbolizes the deep regard for communal ties and respect for the value of working together to achieve common goals or mutual benefit.

We are confident that the cultural ceremony will enrich the environment of the Conference and provide further impetus for greater global cooperation. We would be honoured with your attendance at the cultural welcome ceremony and look forward to meeting in person soon.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Isabella Lövin,

Minister for International Development
Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime
Minister, Sweden

Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama

Prime Minister, Fiji



THE
**OCEAN
CONFERENCE**
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 5-9 JUNE 2017



Cultural Ceremony of Welcome

This scenario note has been prepared in order to better appreciate the significance of the Fijian Welcome Ceremony to be performed at 9:00 am on Monday 5 June, 2017 in the United Nations General Assembly Hall.

Before the ceremony begins, all guests are expected to be seated and observe silence. In the Fijian culture, standing up, loud conversations or walking in the venue where the cultural ceremony is being performed is considered as highly disrespectful and extremely insulting. In the Fijian tradition, warriors in full ceremonial costume and armour would be posted at strategic positions to guard the dignity of the ceremony and ensure there is no disturbance from the moment the cultural performance begins until it ends.

During the ceremony, the chief or honoured guest says little, if anything. He or she is accompanied by a spokesman, a hereditary position known in Fijian as *matanivanua*. Those involved in the ceremonies of welcome are also silent and seated on the floor as it is disrespectful to raise themselves above the chief or honoured guest.

The heart of a Fijian traditional welcome ceremony is called the Yaqona¹ Vakaturaga². A tanoa (wooden bowl) carved from a trunk of the vesi (Intsia bijuga, a very hard wood with chiefly associations) is placed in front of the honoured guest at a respectful distance, with the sau (cord of plaited coconut fibre with white cowry shells attached) extended towards the position of honour. Men in traditional dress are arranged around the tanoa; the positions vary in different parts of Fiji, but there is always one seated directly behind the tanoa whose responsibility is to prepare the yaqona.

Water is poured, usually from a traditional earthenware vessel or bamboo container, and grated or pounded yaqona placed in a bundle of vau (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) fibre through which it is strained. At some point a chant is sung by the group seated behind the tanoa, on occasions to the accompaniment of a wooden drum (lali). The person preparing the yaqona then raises the strainer and wrings out the drink to allow the matanivanua to judge whether the consistency is

¹ Yaqona (pronounced 'yangonna') is known in other parts of the Pacific as 'kava' and scientifically as '*Piper methysticum*' is a large shrub, the roots of which are pounded or grated and then infused with water to make Fiji's national drink.

² Accorded respect as those accorded to Chiefs and honoured guests.

correct. If more water is needed, the matanivanua says “wai”, and if not, the word is “donu” (good).

The yaqona-mixer then hands-over or sometimes tosses the strainer to a person behind who shakes out the dregs and returns it to the mixer, who uses it to wipe the rim of the tanoa, announces that the yaqona is ready, and claps three times. Fijian clapping (cobo or obo) is done with hollowed hands as a sign of respect.

The yaqona is now ready to be served. The Server coils back the sau (coconut fibre cord), picks up the bilo (coconut shell cup) and holds it over the tanoa to be filled. He then turns, arms extended holding out the bilo, and sways and steps towards the honoured guest to the rhythm of the chant. The chant ends abruptly, he fills the chief guest’s bilo, the guest claps with cupped hands and drinks the yaqona slowly, in one draught, to the clapping of the chanters. When the guest has drunk, he or she places the cup on the mat, and all present clap independently. Next is the matanivanua’s turn to drink, followed by a select number of other guests and their respective matanivanua. The mixer announces that the yaqona has been drunk, claps and so ends the yaqona vakaturaga.

Much of Fijian culture is grounded in the concept of equilibrium that all things are done in pairs. This is why for every cup of yaqona drunk by a guest of honour, a corresponding cup (rabe) is drunk which does not count in order of precedence, usually by a *matanivanua*, but sometimes by anyone who wishes to honour the individual who has just drunk.

A more specific program outlining the sequence of proceedings for the Cultural Welcome Ceremony will be available in the General Assembly Hall at 9:00 am on Monday 5 June.

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