

Statement by the Solomon Islands government at the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and Pacific, 1-4 September 2020

Presented by Honourable Minister Levi Senley Filualea, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock

Honourable Chair,
Honourable Ministers
FAO Director General
Distinguished Excellences and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to present to you on behalf of my Minister the Solomon Islands Country Statement at the Thirty-Fifth Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific.

Honoured guests, the Solomon Islands government wishes to first of all congratulate our Distinguished Director General Mr Qu Dongyu on taking up the role of FAO Directorship. Your selection to the position demonstrates the trust our FAO community has in you to lead this prestigious body. We pledge our support and look forward to your leadership and role in uniting us to get through these trying times.

Solomon Islands also wish to thank the former FAO Director General Mr Graziano da Silva for his great leadership, dedication and commitment to this united body over the last 7 years and for the many achievements of the FAO under his leadership.

Solomon Island wishes to first of all bring the issue of climate change to the forefront in this thirty fifth Asia and Pacific Regional meeting because of the increasing incidents and intensity of natural disasters destroying our livelihood and our ability to grow our economy. Honourable chair, if no drastic measures are taken by our industrialised developed countries our Small Islands States will continue to live with these ugly impacts and bear the costs of adaptation and continue to lag behind in delivering our SDG goals. We therefore call on FAO to advocate aggressively for greater global actions to reduce developed country fossil fuel consumption and continue to strengthen the resilience of food systems and to continue to recognise importance of enhanced climate action in the agriculture sector as core elements in its Nationally Determined Contributions and implementation plans under the 2030 Agenda. Suffice to say that effective implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures depends very much on availability of financial and technical resources in a timely manner.

Honourable chair, Solomon Islands is tracking behind in attaining its Sustainable Development Goals and we believe impacts of climate change are contributing heavily because instead of expanding our economic infrastructures we keep diverting resources to repairing natural disaster

damaged infrastructures. Fear is the current impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will retract any moderate progress made over the years and we fear worsening of situation in the years ahead.

Solomon Islands faced many challenges in ensuring sustainable food supply for our growing population because of distance from our global markets, remoteness and geographical isolations, vulnerability to natural disasters, fast growing population and excessive dependence on international trade and support. Like other neighbouring countries growing incidents of non-communicable disease killing three to six Solomon Islanders a day is a very worrying trend. Solomon Islands therefore call on FAO to do more to support our region cope.

Honourable chair, zoonotic diseases is a great concern because it not only threatens our food and nutrition security but because of our inability to cope. Solomon Islands is still trying to reduce the spread of the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle across the country destroying our coconut industry and have basically lost the fight to control the spread of the Giant African Snail, the Asian Bees and the domesticated European bees destroying of Honey Industry. Solomon Islands calls on FAO to take the lead in addressing these issues.

Degradation and depletion of our natural resources including fisheries are occurring faster than expected due to increased population, logging and mining activities around the country. Aging farmers and low uptake of young people is a threat to our agriculture sector growth and food security. Grooming a new generation of farmers who will take agri-business to new heights is urgent therefore requires holistic partnership efforts as success in this space will help our region address our growing unemployment rate. Agriculture and fisheries sector offers many opportunities for our young people to earn income, Solomon Islands therefore urges FAO to be a leading partner in our efforts to find solutions to address these issues.

Solomon Islands being a large ocean state will continue to rely on fisheries sector for government revenue, livelihood options and food and nutritional security. However, there are high threats continued to be experienced from IUU fishing, impacts of climate change, and impacts of the COVID-19 and marine pollution. Collective collaborations efforts regionally and globally to find better solutions is key. While these threats are actively pursued by our regional fisheries and environmental organisations, we call and encourage FAO to engage actively with these fisheries organisations of the Pacific region to effectively address these threats as these threats require both technical and financial resources to be effectively addressed.

Honourable chair, the COVID-19 pandemic is still intensifying threatening the existences of societies and economies increasing the rate of inequality at a global scale and the most vulnerable in our society today are those in the informal sector who live on daily sales.

Solomon Islands acknowledge FAO assistance provided through its Programme as reflected in the Solomon Islands-FAO Country Programme Framework 2013 – 2017 and current CPF 2018 – 2022. The various thematic areas that FAO has and is assisting Solomon Islands with includes Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Health, Environment, Disaster Management, and Emergency Response. The COVID-19 pandemic response by countries through State of Emergencies as reflected in international travel restrictions has negatively impacted on implementation of regional and national FAO programmes, thus it is only fitting that FAO consider extensions for current projects timelines in order to accomplish all project activities. The Solomon Islands Government and collaborating agencies acknowledge the continual assistance that FAO and funding agencies provides through the FAO Programme in the country.

In closing, Solomon Islands understands that countries are taking unprecedented actions to fight the spread of the COVID-19 harming their own economies in the process yet this pandemic situation teaches us more about life and therefore offers us an opportunity to rethink, re-strategise and redirect our efforts into the future around what matters more; the lives of our people. As Pacific Islanders, life means our people, our communities, our land and sea, therefore our actions must always be about protecting these key foundations that make us who we are.

May God Almighty continue to watch over us as we navigate ourselves through these trying times.