



PACE-Net Key Stakeholder Conference Suva March 12th – 14th 2013

**Keynote Address, *Hon Col. S. Saumatusa*,
Minister of Local Government, Urban Dev., Housing & Environment (Fiji)**

**The Vice Chancellor and President The University of the South Pacific – Professor Rajesh Chandra,
Head of Delegation of European Union for Pacific Mr Andrew Jacobs,
Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology PNG -Hon. David Arore,
PACE NET Project Coordinator Professor Claude Payri,
Dean Faculty of Science Technology and Environment Dr Anjeela Jokhan,
Distinguish Conference Participants,**

PACE-Net examines possible synergies or complementarities with EU activities, especially with respect to challenges faced by developing countries. In particular, synergies with the European Development Fund shall be found.

In Pacific islands, people, agricultural land, tourist resorts and infrastructure, all are concentrated along the coastal zones, thus vulnerable to the impacts of climate change especially any rise in sea level. The impacts of climate change on the smaller Pacific island countries were estimated in a series of vulnerability studies. Ladies and gentlemen, rising sea level is not the only issue. Natural Hazards such as cyclone and floods are occurring at quite a frequent rate in the region, an example is the recent tropical cyclone Evan and major floods that we faced last year. These hazards certainly have a harmful impact on low-lying islands.

We may not realize, but there is a whole host of issues related directly as well as indirectly to climate change. With the impacts of climate change as well as natural hazards, problems such as non communicable diseases, inundation of sea water into the fresh water supply and poor sanitation to name a few are the emerging problems out of climate change.

While there have been tireless efforts made by various authorities and agencies to address these impacts, PACENET have not left any stones unturned. Thematic areas such as Natural Hazard, Water and Sanitation, Fisheries and Health in relation to climate change of this project are so relevant to the problems faced at this point in time. With this project offering many benefits to the region, authorities should make an effort to gain the maximum advantage out of this project, implement the plan and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

European Commission has long been supporting the region to address and find an amicable solution to our problems. ... E.U also provided 1.8 million Euros to those affected by TC Evan in Fiji and Samoa late last year. Apart from this, E.U's contribution has been in infrastructure development such as rehabilitation of Lami Rubbish Dump and construction of Rewa Bridge. Fiji Education Sector Programme which focuses on education needs and priorities of Fiji's rural areas and growing number of disadvantaged urban areas in terms of infrastructure and teaching resource also got a major boost last year after receiving 21 million Euros from the E.U. Some of the other areas in which we benefit from the Union are trade and energy.

One of the weaknesses in the PIC is good scientific capacity and fundamental scientific research. Governments have many pressing priorities and investment into this is not such a high priority. Governments look to academic institutions to provide leadership in this area. I am pleased to see the University taking a lead role in this and that the EU is supporting this initiative. Sustainable growth of the PIC in light of the many threats that they face in terms of climate change impacts, increased natural

disasters, loss of biodiversity etc is difficult without a good and fundamental scientific research and long term decisions and policies need to be developed based on this. We look to the EU's continued support in this area as we not only build our S&T research and development but try to build capacity throughout the communities for the appreciation of the need for fundamental S&T research.