**Pacific Islands Forum Statement at the Global Disability Summit**

**16-17 February 2022**

*Lasting Change for Persons with Disabilities through Joint Action*

Excellencies

1. *Bula vinaka* and warm greetings from the Blue Pacific Continent!
2. It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, a regional bloc of 18 Pacific countries and territories.
3. In recent months, the Pacific has dealt with significant challenges. We’ve experienced the effects of COVID-19, intense cyclones, flooding, and a volcanic eruption in Tonga — described as a ‘once-in-a-millennium’ phenomenon that has altered the geographical landscape and affected many parts of our Blue Pacific continent and beyond.
4. Events such as these not only alter the way we think, threaten our security, and impact our wellbeing, they also shape how we plan for the future.
5. The future is uncertain. While COVID-19 has dramatically altered our way of life, climate change continues to be the single greatest threat that the Pacific and its people face. Urgent global action is needed to keep us on the 1.5°C pathway.
6. Excellencies, effective, resilient, and inclusive development is critical for true and meaningful progress. The inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities are central to this.

*Commitment to disability inclusion*

1. Pacific Islands Forum Leaders commitment to disability inclusion is demonstrated through the endorsement of the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016. The Framework contextualises the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to the region and was developed by persons with disabilities through their representative organisations across the Pacific and supported by governments, civil society, and development partners.
2. The Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities supports countries in the region to promote, protect, and fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities as outlined in the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – putting the need for inclusion of persons with disabilities within the context of a shared challenge to survive and thrive. The framework also provides a regional platform to strengthen coordination and collaboration in support of national initiatives.
3. In the Pacific we know we cannot talk about disability rights without having persons with disabilities at the forefront and participating meaningfully in all aspects of development — keeping true to the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’. The Blue Pacific remains committed to these principles.

*2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific*

1. Our Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have endorsed the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent which will represent our region’s long-term vision to protect the people, place and prospects of the Blue Pacific.
2. Pacific persons with disabilities and their representative organisations have been involved in the development of the 2050 Strategy to ensure the voices of persons with disabilities were heard and their needs reflected. This confirms the commitment and recognition that inclusivity, equity and equality are fundamental to realizing the vision of the Strategy.

*Progress and achievements*

1. We are proud of our great progress in ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities are realized in the Pacific including:

1. CRPD ratification by 13 Pacific countries;
2. The integration of the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Framework (PRIEF) into the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF);
3. Strengthening disability-disaggregated data through the use of the Washington Group Short Set in national surveys and census and the establishment of the Pacific Group on Disability Statistics led by National Statistics Offices;
4. Strengthen disability legislation and policy across several Pacific island countries;
5. Commencement of work on ensuring accessibility in the built environment, demonstrating the lead taken by the Pacific region;
6. The inclusion and integration of disability-related concerns of women with disabilities in the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018 – 2030;
7. The inclusion of disability-related concerns in disaster risk management as well as climate change adaptation frameworks and strategies, and
8. The establishment of inclusive and disability-specific social protection programs across six countries in the region.
9. In 2021, partners collaborated on a review of disability-related legislation and the development of policy guidelines aimed at supporting Forum Island Countries to strengthen capabilities and build the capacity of national policymakers to develop CRPD aligned - policy frameworks and disability-inclusive and responsive legislation. Our partners will continue to build on this work in 2022.
10. Significant steps have been taken towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Disaster Risk Reduction and climate action. The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific stipulates that all national climate change adaptation strategies, disaster risk management plans, and legal frameworks must specifically address the needs of persons with disabilities, women and girls in all their diversity, children, and older persons.
11. Excellencies, as we all know, much more is needed to ‘make the right real’ and to support persons with disabilities to enjoy full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
12. Despite our progress, key challenges persist and new priorities continue to emerge. Political ownership of disability inclusion is still a challenge. Pacific Leaders have committed to disability inclusion, but we must all work together to progress it. Ownership also includes countries driving the inclusion agenda themselves, identifying national needs, and ensuring that it remains a national priority with the support of development partners.
13. The Pacific has some of the highest rates of non-communicable diseases, which can result in disability such as vision impairment, stroke, and amputation. This not only places additional weight on our health systems but places greater burden on Pacific families who must cover disability-related costs and on women and young adults who provide most of the care required.
14. We call on our development partners to support our region in progressing disability inclusion by supporting interventions that:
15. Continue to progress the implementation of the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
16. Strengthen the collection, collation and analysis of disaggregated disability statistics to inform policies and interventions including supporting the work of the Pacific Group on Disability Statistics;
17. Support the implementation and monitoring of Community Based Inclusive Development in the Pacific;
18. Recognise the impact of intersecting identities by improving participation, engagement and inclusion of all vulnerable groups within the disability community;
19. Improve accessibility to basic, essential and support services and communication including mental health services, assistive devices, and social protection.
20. Build the capacity of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations;
21. Improve the participation of persons with disabilities, their families, and their representative organisations in climate change and disaster adaptation, mitigation, and response interventions; and
22. Work towards the involvement of women with disabilities in mainstream, gender and disability decision-making processes, as well as the gender- or disability- programming processes.
23. It is critical to support Pacific countries to meet the pre-conditions for disability inclusion and CRPD principles and obligations so that persons with disabilities can meaningfully participate, effectively contribute, and enjoy quality of life.
24. We recognize that national and regional plans can only be made stronger and be effective if there is meaningful collaboration and partnership from across our region, the global community, and development partners with persons with disabilities at the forefront.

*Conclusion*

1. Excellencies, in conclusion, forward movement is not true progress if we do not address the needs of all persons, including persons with disabilities and leave no-one behind.

*Thank you.*