



**MINISTER FOR LANDS AND MINERAL RESOURCES
HON. FILIMONI VOSAROGO**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS – 2026 CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM ON
CLIMATE CHANGE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND BUSINESS IN THE PACIFIC**

Suva, Fiji

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SALUTATIONS

- Distinguished representatives of the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP),
- the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO),
- the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),
- The Executive Director of the Fiji Council Of Social Services (FCOSS),
- Colleagues from Government, Civil Societies, and the private sector,
- My fellow Pacific Islanders,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Ni sa bula vinaka—and good morning to you all.

It is a genuine privilege to be here in Suva, to join you in opening this vital capacity-building program. I extend a warm welcome to every participant who has travelled from across the Blue Pacific to be part of this work.

What brings us together is nothing less than one of the defining challenges of our era: **how the Pacific responds to climate change.**

Your presence here demonstrates not just commitment, **but real leadership—the willingness to confront difficult realities head-on.**

Our Pacific Reality

In Fiji—and across the Pacific—climate change is not a distant risk or a theoretical debate. **It is an experience – lived 365 days a year, every year.**

We see it in the erosion of coastal communities. My own village is one of the ones identified in Fiji as existing below sea level. A half king tide on any given day sees a quarter of it under seawater. We feel it in the mounting intensity of tropical cyclones. We witness it in the hard choices families face when relocation is no longer avoidable.

Farmers contend with increasingly unpredictable seasons. Communities grapple with mounting pressures on water and food security. Just this morning I read of an eminent scholar in middle eastern conflicts that food security is going to be one of the most scariest collateral out of this US/ Israel – Iran conflict. Imagine what that would mean for us.

This is not merely an environmental matter. Climate change represents the single greatest threat to human rights in the Pacific today.

When land is lost, identity is undermined. When homes are displaced, dignity is put to the test.

In Fiji, climate impacts are challenging the very foundations of how we define, manage, and govern land itself. And we are not the worst affected. I hope to hear of stories from Kiribati, Tuvalu and other large ocean states who are in imminent danger of identity oblivion should their islands be overtaken by the raging seas.

Vanua: More Than Land

As someone who has spent much of my career focused on systemic risks, I recognise that land in Fiji is far more than an economic asset. It is vanua—our identity, our culture, our inheritance, our deep connection to past generations and those yet to come.

When we discuss climate mobility, we must be clear-eyed about what is truly at stake.

We are not simply relocating people. We are navigating the profound loss of belonging.

That is why our approach must be anchored not only in science and policy, but in deep respect for human rights and cultural integrity.

Equity and Inclusion

We must also face an uncomfortable but essential truth: women, girls, and the most vulnerable communities bear the heaviest burdens, yet their voices are too often marginalized. For a side bar – recently, a Vanua decision directed a Kava ban for their women. During the past few days, I have read with interest differing views and opinions on the subject. Views generated range from the strictest application of human right to equality before the law to views that asks us to examine the intent behind the decision. I am sure that this topic will fill the side discussions of this meeting. All in confidence if I may add.

But for our responses to be effective—and just—**they must be inclusive from the start.**

Policies that overlook these inequalities will not only fall short; they will **compound injustice.**

Gender-responsive planning, meaningful consultation, and equitable access to remedies must therefore be at the core of land governance and climate strategies.

This means:

- Equal participation in decision-making.
- Fair and accessible protection and redress.

True resilience is measured not just in physical infrastructure, but in the strength and dignity of people.

Reform and Responsibility

In Fiji, deliberate steps are being taken to align laws and policies with these realities.

These land reforms are about more than efficient management—they are about justice, stronger governance, and sustainable development that upholds human rights.

Fiji will host the COP31 Pre-COP meeting from October 5th to 8th this year—a significant milestone in building momentum for the negotiations ahead.

Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, shifting landscapes: these are already reshaping land boundaries, land-use planning, and lease arrangements.

These are practical, immediate challenges for landowners, tenants, and communities right across Fiji.

As we prepare for global discussions, the work in this room takes on even greater importance.

Strong international representation must rest on robust domestic systems—informed stakeholders, inclusive policies, and effective land governance.

We are working collectively to ensure our legislation is climate-ready: protecting Indigenous communities, safeguarding vulnerable groups, and minimizing unintended consequences as we advance adaptation and mitigation.

This aligns directly with the purpose of this program: to equip participants with the knowledge and tools to integrate human rights into government and business practices alike.

The Role of Partnership

No single actor can address these challenges in isolation.

Governments cannot act alone. Civil society cannot shoulder the burden unaided. The private sector must be part of the solution—not an afterthought.

In mining, infrastructure, and land development, business decisions carry long-term consequences for both environment and communities.

Compliance with regulations is necessary, but no longer sufficient.

Programs like this succeed because they bring all voices to the table and forge lasting networks. No one here can meet this challenge in isolation.

Pacific Leadership and a Shared Future

The Pacific has always led not by scale, but by the loudness and clarity of its voice.

You have consistently demanded greater global ambition on climate action.

But leadership also starts at home: in how we protect our people, uphold rights, and ensure no one is left behind in development.

A Call to Action

Over the next five days, I urge you to engage fully.

Ask the hard questions. Share your lived experiences. Challenge one another with respect.

Above all, carry this forward. Take it back to your communities. Translate it into concrete action—stronger advocacy, better policy, more effective practice.

The work does not conclude here. It begins here.

Conclusion

Let me close by thanking the organizers for their sustained dedication to building capacity across our region.

Your efforts are helping shape a more resilient Pacific future.

To every participant: I wish you a meaningful, impactful program.

It is now my honor to officially declare the 2026 Capacity Building Program on Climate Change, Human Rights and Business in the Pacific—open.

Vinaka vakalevu. May God bless you all.