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For Immediate Release

High Level Political Dialogue between Fiji and the European Union

This is a joint press statement issued by the Government of the Republic of Fiji and the European Union following the third high level political dialogue between Fiji and the European Union held in Suva on 23 and 24 May, 2018.

Suva, Fiji - The third High Level Political Dialogue between Fiji and the European Union (EU) under article 8 of the ACP-EU Partnership (Cotonou) Agreement was held in Suva, Fiji on 23 and 24 May, 2018. The meeting was opened by the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and the European Union Ambassador to Fiji and the Pacific, H.E. Julian Wilson. Discussions were co-chaired by the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mr Ioane Naivalurua and Ambassador Wilson.

In his opening remarks, the Prime Minister acknowledged the importance of the high level Political Dialogue as a powerful tool to strengthen the relationship between Fiji and the EU and its Member States. The Prime Minister recognised the importance of Fiji and EU relations both bilaterally and in the work we are doing together internationally. The Prime Minister also highlighted Fiji's recent international achievements, with specific reference to hosting the first-ever UN Conference on Oceans and its presidency of COP23 last year and recognised Germany's support in hosting the COP23 negotiations. The Prime Minister strongly emphasised the need to address visa issues to facilitate travel for Fijians to the EU.

In his opening address, Ambassador Wilson appreciated the comments of the Prime Minister. He highlighted the key role of Fiji, EU and its Member States in advancing the fight against climate change internationally. He reiterated EU's strong commitment to continue this engagement far beyond COP 23. The second major opportunity for EU-Fiji relations is reaping full benefits of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). He recognised the need to ease travel between Fiji and the EU, especially as Fijians cannot apply for Schengen visas in Fiji. Another area of future engagement is international taxation matters. Building on the Prime Minister's statement, Ambassador Wilson reaffirmed the EU's interest to work closely with Fiji on strengthening EU-Pacific relations in the context of the upcoming negotiations on ACP-EU partnership after 2020. France, Spain and the United Kingdom also attended the dialogue as part of the European Union delegation.

The High level discussions focused on the political and economic developments in Fiji and the European Union as well as topics of mutual interest for both parties such as the short stay visa free travel to Europe, consolidation of democracy and human rights, Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the 2018 General Elections, strategic alliance on climate change and development cooperation.

The parties recognised the potential for expanding Fiji-EU trade and investment opportunities. The official dialogue will be complemented by business to business discussions including a seminar with Fijian industry on the potential offered from Fiji-EU trade. Both parties agreed on a number of concrete steps for the effective implementation of the EPA and its ratification. They also emphasised the potential use of global sourcing for boosting investment in the fisheries sector.

The Parties exchanged views on future cooperation after 2020, recognising the need to replace the Cotonou Agreement with an ambitious successor that would build on the success of the current Agreement and reflect the specificities and needs of the Pacific region.

The EU recognised and commended Fiji on the progress of its implementation of recommendations from the 2014 Universal Periodic Review. Fiji called on the support of the EU for its bid for the Human Rights Council candidacy. Both Parties recognised the value of continuous discussions with a view to enhance strategic cooperation in the multilateral fora.

Parties recognise the value of the development cooperation activities of the European Union bilaterally with Fiji and at the regional Pacific level. Both sides agreed schedules and actions to ensure fast implementation and impact including the move into budget support to improve rural livelihoods, notably in the sugar sector.

It is envisaged that the next Political Dialogue between the parties will be held in Brussels, Belgium 2019.

Background

The Cotonou Agreement offers a framework for the European Union's cooperation relations for the economic, social and cultural development of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP). Centred on the target of reducing, and in the longer-term, eradicating poverty, the cooperation must also contribute to the peace and security and the democratic and political stability of the ACP states.

Article 8 of Cotonou Agreement provides for a regular, comprehensive, balanced and deep political dialogue leading to commitments on both sides. The objective of the political dialogue is to exchange information, to foster mutual understanding and to facilitate the establishment of agreed priorities and shared agendas, in particular by recognising links in the various areas of cooperation between the Parties as laid down in the Cotonou Agreement.

Contact: Mohammed Nazeem Kasim, EU & Information Press Officer. Tel: +679 3313633. Email: Mohammed-Nazeem.KASIM@eeas.europa.eu

Contact: Izek Lal, Director for Information. Tel: +679 990 6034 Email: izek.lal@govnet.gov.fj



Delegation of the European Union for
the Pacific
Level 6, Tappoo City Complex
Corner of Scott & Usher Streets
Suva, FIJI
Private Mail Bag, G.P.O. Suva
Phone: (679) 331.3633
Fax: (679) 330.0370
URL:
<http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/fiji>



"The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders".