



The Republic of Vanuatu

Statement By:

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70th Session Commission UNESCAP.

"Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity"

7 August, 2014



Mr. Chairman
Madam Executive Secretary
Excellency's
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure in joining my other distinguished delegates to congratulate you in taking up the Chairmanship of this 70th Session of the Commission.

We also welcome the 70th Session of ESCAP's theme in "Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity" and acknowledge that this theme could not have come at a better time as we all embark on national, regional and international initiatives of connectivity in key specific sector to ensure we reap the fruits of prosperity for our people's livelihood and our future development sustainability.

Vanuatu an archipelago of some scattered 83 islands has experienced the geographic isolations between villages, islands and nations. Without any form of connectivity development, our peoples face the challenges of ever rarely receiving any of the basic needs to live happy and peaceful lives. We are all experts on the challenges we individual countries and regions are facing, we all know and have continued to speak out to the world on how we as Small Pacific Islands Developing States and Least developed countries are vulnerable and face challenges in all spectrum of live. Yet we need to identify in our own ways and mechanisms to harness the existing gaps.

It is only recently that Vanuatu is able to step up and embark on a number of initiatives for connectivity in order to link up with regional initiatives, these include:

1. Launching of Vanuatu's National ICT Policy, Cyber security Policy and Universal Access Policy in May, 2014. It is envisaged that this policy sets out Governments commitment to maximize contribution, efficiency and effectiveness of ICT in achieving our vision of a "Just, Educated, Healthy and Wealthy" Vanuatu. Access to ICT is now radically expanded and will transform government services and public administration, to the socio-economic development of our country.

The Policy will enhance relevance of ICTs for the Vanuatu population by promoting availability of locally relevant content, as well as our ability to develop and utilize ICTs through capacity building programmes as well as sector coordination and collaboration.



2. Vanuatu's first international submarine fiber optic cable system linking Vanuatu to Fiji was launched earlier in the year January 2014, the milestone cable project links Vanuatu directly into the high capacity Southern Cross cable between Sydney and the United States; This improved and speedy connection has seen rapid and explosive increase and expansion of technological usage. Work is now underway for a 3000 km cable system to link Vanuatu to Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.
3. Increasing use of and access to mobile telecommunications has seen almost 90% coverage in comparison to the last 10 years with less than 50% coverage.
4. The Vanuatu Inter-island Shipping Support Project to be implemented from 2012 – 2016 from a joint partnership between New Zealand, the Asian Development Bank and the Government, to wish I would like to express our gratitude. The said project will improve port facilities and expand much needed shipping services to remote islands of our archipelago.
5. Vanuatu's hydrographic survey currently underway to ensure connectivity of key rural wharfs in order to open up access to the thriving cruise tourism that Vanuatu is enjoying.
6. In April 2014 we also launched our much anticipated National Energy Road Map 2013 – 2020 with the vision to energize Vanuatu's growth and development through the provision of a secure, affordable, widely accessible, high quality, clean energy services.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Whilst we acknowledge our slow advancement in several areas, Vanuatu realizes much work is needed to improve progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Though access and connectivity have improved, Vanuatu has mixed results for MDGs 1, 2, 3 and 5 and off track on MDG 7 and 8. Vanuatu's working-age population continues to grow at a faster rate than the growth in total employment, whilst unemployment is rising and is of much concern. Malnutrition and lack of knowledge of the importance of healthy eating for young children will continue to worsen in contributing to the non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

We call on ESCAP, other UN institutions and development partners to scale up its efforts in assisting countries in the region that are lacking behind their MDGs whilst also bearing in mind



that these unfinished business should and must be taken on board when developing the post 2015 development agenda.

Least Developed Country (LDC)

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

Vanuatu was considered eligible for graduation in 2006 and 2009; conversely, Vanuatu opted to maintain the status quo after considerable differing point of views. In 2012 we revealed that we continue to be susceptible to extreme external economic shocks, distance and dependent on external markets and were one of the most disaster prone countries. Last year at the 69th Commission Session we stated that Vanuatu continues to put out a strong case to delay its graduation, however, in November 2013, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation of the Committee for Development Policy to graduate Vanuatu and provided on an exceptional basis, an additional preparatory period of one year.

With Vanuatu graduating in the next four years, Vanuatu is seeking the continued support of the UNESCAP, its other UN agencies and development partners to assist with our transition into 2017 taking into account the loss of special and differential treatment we access as a LDC.

Macro-economic policy and inclusive development

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Vanuatu continues to slowly recuperate and adapt towards the on-going global economic crises. Our economic expansion strengthened in the first half of 2014, with growth rising to 3.7 per cent, after a soft patch that began in late 2010. Annual real GDP growth is expected to increase to 4.3 per cent in 2015. Investments are also likely to pick up, reflecting announced government plans of investments in infrastructure projects, with this the country needs to remain on a progressive growth path, and further economic reform and sound fiscal management is very significant.

Social stability underlies Vanuatu's steady advancement, though a tradition of political instability exists, however, fundamentally, underlying social stability in Vanuatu, and its ability to make transitions of power peacefully have helped lay the foundations for growth, including by enhancing the country's reputation in tourism and by promoting its prospects for inclusion in seasonal workers programs.

Vanuatu's future is not assured; all small island economies are volatile and easily destabilized, we have a long way to go, whilst facing a wide range of reform challenges, these include: improving health and education indicators, promoting further structural reform, reducing



corruption, maintaining social stability, ensuring law and order, and promoting equity. Failure to implement these structural reforms will put us on an unsustainable path for development.

Environment and Sustainable Development

Excellencies and Distinguished delegates, to assist with the reforms Vanuatu has embarked on the development of its National Sustainable Development Strategy (2016- 2030) which highlights the stewardship of the environment and culture as integral to the livelihoods for our people. This process will draw too from our 2011 - 2012 piloted “Alternative Indicators of Well-being”, indicators that will be integrated into our national framework as well as improving our national development vision and better tracking of our progress. In addition, Vanuatu has also commenced the development of its National Oceans Policy as well as our National Environment Policy in line with the strong call for the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on Oceans, blue carbon initiative, green growth and marine spatial mapping.

Conclusion

Excellencies and Distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, in order to overcome our challenges and vulnerabilities, it is imperative that we coordinate, monitor and support each other in an accountable process to attain an effective, efficient and improved “Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity” for our Asia-Pacific Region.

I thank you.

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