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Prime Minister of Fiji and Chairman of Pacific Islands Forum

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**Joint Statement by the Parties to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the Pacific Islands Forum to the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

**New York – 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2022 – 10.30 Hours**

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Mr President,

It is an honour to be providing the first statement of this 10<sup>th</sup> Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, on behalf of the Parties to the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga)*, and as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, together representing Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Fiji.

It is now 36 years since the entry into force of our *Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*. This was a proud moment, but one that was borne out of the devastation of decades of nuclear testing and growing concerns about burgeoning nuclear weapons stockpiles.

This experience made clear to our countries the risks of the nuclear arms race, and of catastrophic nuclear war. It made clear the ongoing importance of the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (NPT), including its disarmament obligations under Article VI and its non-proliferation provisions which have drastically limited the emergence of new nuclear possessor states. Our *Treaty of Rarotonga* reinforces our commitment to these vital objectives.

Fast forwarding to now, 35 years later, the threat posed by nuclear weapons continues. This has been made all too clear by recent events, and we condemn unequivocally Russia's thinly-veiled threats to use nuclear weapons. The slow pace of disarmament is of deep concern to our Pacific community.

We are particularly concerned by increases in nuclear weapons stockpiles, modernisation programmes, the development of new types of weapons, and reductions in transparency. The disarmament obligation contained in Article VI remains vital. We strongly call on all nuclear weapon States to implement their nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT and honour the commitments they have made, including those emanating from the NPT Review Conferences.

For us, the ongoing struggle with the legacy of nuclear testing, from trans-boundary contamination of homes and habitats to higher numbers of birth defects and cancers, gives rise to an acute awareness in the Pacific region of the threats posed by nuclear testing and dumping. This is why the *Treaty of Rarotonga* was the first nuclear weapons free zone treaty to include a dumping provision for radioactive waste and radioactive matter, a provision that was later emulated in the *Bangkok Treaty*. It reflects our collective responsibility for, and shared stewardship of, our Blue Pacific. We hereby reaffirm our determination for a region free of environmental pollution by radioactive wastes and other radioactive matter.

Mr President,

Given our shared heritage and collective responsibilities for the natural environment, we attach great importance to achieving the entry into force of the *Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty*. We reiterate our calls for the remaining States to sign and ratify the Treaty, in particular those States whose ratification is required to bring the Treaty into legal effect.

We note the entry into force of the *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons* in January last year and the first Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty in June 2022, which adopted the Vienna Declaration “Our Commitment to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons”.

For our own Treaty, the *Treaty of Rarotonga*, we welcomed the announcement by the United States in 2010 of its intention to ratify all Protocols to the Treaty. We call on the United States to now take the necessary steps toward ratification so that our Treaty can have its full effect.

Mr President,

Our *Treaty of Rarotonga* includes a specific provision requiring parties to “support the continued effectiveness of the international non-proliferation system based on the NPT and the IAEA safeguards system”. In including this provision, we recognised the interplay between the three pillars of the NPT, and the importance of each of them. Our commitment to them stands today.

The safe and secure shipment of radioactive material is of importance to our region. We strongly urge all Non-Nuclear Weapon States to fully comply with the NPT requirement to accept safeguards on peaceful nuclear activities, and all related international law obligations relating to nuclear safety, to ensure the prevention of harm to our ocean and our Blue Pacific, particularly from radioactive disasters and the trans-boundary spread of radioactive material and radioactive waste.

Mr President,

We see the *Treaty of Rarotonga* as a living document and a symbol of our region's long-standing opposition to nuclear weapons. We stand together ready to support your efforts at this Review Conference, in support of a credible, ambitious outcome, that reflects the ongoing importance of the NPT to the peace and security of our region and the world.

I would now like to speak in my national capacity as the Fijian Prime Minister.

Generations of Pacific Islanders have waited in vain for an apology; for health support; for reassurances that there will be no repeat of testing, for reassurances that there will be no waste disposal; and for reaffirmations that nuclear weapons will never be deployed in the Blue Pacific again.

Mothers of deformed babies in the Marshall Islands, have waited. Families in French Polynesia who have lost loved ones too soon, have waited. We are still waiting. And we look to this 10th review for greater commitment — far greater commitment — by all countries to show us that they are taking actions to reduce their stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

So long as the nuclear powers maintain these arsenals, no one can sleep soundly. That is because any person anywhere on the planet can potentially experience the same suffering the people of the Pacific have known—and still know. Let's be clear: Mutually assured destruction is no assurance of peace. Ask the people of Ukraine. Ask the people of Syria. Ask every victim of conflict anywhere in the world about the false peace these weapons promise. Yes, we have seen no mushroom clouds, but we have seen relentless destruction and devastation—cities like Aleppo and Mariupol levelled to the ground.

Ask the victims of climate-driven disasters about the resources we waste on these weapons; the Public funds, the ingenuity, and the human capital that could and should be spent improving and protecting lives. Responsible use of nuclear energy could be part of the solution.

And ask Fiji's peacekeepers who serve in conflict areas around the world what true peace really entails. It is not forged at the end of a rifle or within the sights of a missile — it comes from understanding, it comes from equality, and it comes from opportunity.

Mr President, we know these weapons won't disappear overnight. And we also recognize the beneficial peaceful uses of the atom—for energy and medicine, for example. But it is common sense to recognise the complete and senseless waste that existing nuclear arsenals represent.

We are here to urge the nuclear states to put forward comprehensive and transparent reports on their disarmament efforts, efforts that must be designed to point away from any new technology that would make these weapons more effective, more efficient, more powerful, or easier for more parties to acquire. They owe this to their citizens as much as they owe it to us. These aging relics are a danger to everyone — whether they are pointed at you or siloed in your backyard. No one should live one accident or one move of aggression away from annihilation.

Mr President, our commitment to a Pacific that is free of nuclear weapons is defining for our region. This is a commitment that I have also made as a Prime Minister. But it is also personal—a commitment that I have made as a son. Because I have waited a lifetime for someone to take responsibility for deliberately exposing my late father, Ratu Inoke Bainimarama, and the sailors he commanded, to the testing of a nuclear bomb.

We welcome initiatives by the Non Aligned Movement as well as the proposals advanced by Canada, Nigeria and others. No nation can pick and choose when it cares about human life and when it advances multi-lateralism. And we cannot leave here without a final document. It is our shared responsibility as Leaders to make this conference count for the peace-loving people we represent.

Thank you.

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