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STATEMENT AT THE 56th SESSION OF THE ISO COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM 7 - NATIONAL POLICIES

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Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
The Executive Director,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I'd like to begin by thanking the British Government for hosting this 56th Session of the ISO Council Meeting and by expressing my gratitude to our ISO members for voting

Fiji in as Vice Chairman of the Administrative Committee for our meeting next July.

Fiji may not rank among the world's largest sugar producers, regardless, our experiences hold invaluable lessons. As a Pacific nation, we've overcome challenges of geography to build global networks of distribution for Fijian-made, sewn and grown products. As a climate-vulnerable economy, we are fast becoming a global hub of innovation in building agro-resilience. And, in the face of rising volatility in the sugar market, we've deployed smart policies to grant our cane growers stability and help them seize new opportunities. We look forward to sharing our perspective in depth through our Vice Chairmanship next year.

Fiji has built a proud reputation among world buyers for producing high quality sugar. But we all know that quality alone cannot guarantee success in a market where global supply is ominously outweighed by demand. To secure sustainable prosperity for our growers – and every family

that relies on the success of Fijian sugar – we must not only build resilience to the impacts of a changing climate but to the changing dynamics of the world market.

Adapting to these realities means completely re-imagining how we grow cane and how we run cane farms in Fiji, doing away with tradition in favour of innovation.

- We're achieving a more competitive scale by transitioning away from smallholder farms to large scale commercial cane farming, bringing smaller growers together through Joint Venture Systems.
- To address our aging farmer population, we're incentivising young Fijians to enter the industry by directly assisting them with the acquisition of land.
- To combat labour shortages, we plan to mechanise over 70 per cent of cane farms in Fiji. We've poured new investment into a "Co-op" system whereby groups of farmers can pool together to procure large machines, such as mechanical harvesters. We have nearly closed the existing labour gap in flat-land areas, it's only the hillier cane farms left to worry about. We're currently modifying our mechanical harvesters to suit those rougher regions.
- We're also placing a new focus on improving food and financial security for our farmers by adopting intercropping farming models. Essentially, we're supporting farmers – at all scales – to plant a wider variety of

crops on their land, rather than putting all of their eggs in one basket and placing themselves at the mercy of global price swings.

But the work isn't only happening on the cane farms themselves. Behind the scenes, we have an army of researchers working to lift the standard of our industry as a whole, from the resilience of the seeds we plant to the efficiency of the mills that crush our cane.

Every sugar mill in Fiji now adheres to Good Manufacturing Processes – enforced by Integrated Quality Management Systems – and when our crushing ends in three weeks' time, we forecast a total of 1.8 million tonnes on the year. That is up from around 1.6 million last year and in 2017. To cement our progress, we're investing in the next generation of mill operators, affording young graduates the opportunity to gain hands-on experience training in our mills under the Apprenticeship, Trainee Tradesman Stream and an Engineer Training Program.

Recently, we established a Tissue Culture Laboratory that paves the way to larger scale production of clean seed material that we can rapidly distribute across our cane

farms. We're introducing natural mill mud and green manuring techniques in favour of chemical fertilisers and herbicides, and we've outright banned Paraquat and Imidacloprid insecticide. And as we make these transitions, we're dramatically reducing the cost burden on our farmers, subsidising input costs as well as the costs of mechanisation, harvesting and of transporting cane to mills. In an unprecedented move to benefit our growers, we introduced a guaranteed price per ton for all cane growers in Fiji and we've also introduced a bundled insurance initiative which, at no cost to our growers, provides insurance pay-outs to them, and their families, in the event of personal injuries, fire, or death.

I'm deeply proud of my government's commitment to Fijian cane growers. But our industry reforms will mean little if the world doesn't get serious about addressing the ravages of climate change. I've addressed this Council in the past on Fiji's leadership abroad to sound the alarm on the climate emergency. This isn't a Fijian problem, this isn't a Pacific problem, this is a global crisis the likes of which

humanity has never before seen. No nation and no person on earth will be spared the consequences. Certainly, no cane farmer can count themselves exempt.

I will be in Madrid next week to attend the UN climate negotiations at COP25 where once again Fiji will join the world's climate champions in demanding the full implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. For us, the goalposts of these negotiations have not shifted an inch. We must limit global temperature rise to the 1.5-degree Celsius target to ensure the survival of the world's most vulnerable economies and long-term prosperity and security for our farmers and the families who rely on their success.

But even if we succeed, even in our best-case scenario of securing decisive cuts in carbon emissions, we know that climate impacts will continue to worsen in the short-term. Our cities, our communities and our cane farms must all adapt to that reality.

We're working with our development partners, including Australia, Japan and the UK – along with international experts and investors — to build our research capacity and make Fiji a hub of climate resilient crop production.

It is Fijian cane farms that are seeing some of the most brutal climate impacts, and it is in Fiji and in the minds of the Fijian people where some of the boldest and most impactful solutions can be forged. Fiji is fast becoming an incubator in the adaptation space, putting resources to work implementing innovative measures to strengthen our climate resilience. With every challenge we solve, with every stride we make in building resilience, we secure a more certain future for cane growers – and all farmers – whether they are on our main island of Viti Levu, or in India, Mauritius, the Caribbean or Brazil.

Fiji stands ready to lead and ready to listen in working with our fellow ISO members to confront the challenges on the horizon for this industry and we're grateful to our development partners for their continued assistance.

No industry in the world operates with absolute certainty of what the coming years will bring. But I can say with total confidence, that my government's commitment to the wellbeing of our farmers – whether they are growing cane, cassava, yaqona or any other crops – will remain unwavering, for the sake of our economy, our food security and the livelihoods that sustain Fijian families.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.
