POLICY STATEMENT – SESSION 2

MONDAY, 28 AUGUST 2023

REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE, CO-OPERATIVES, AND SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES, AND COMMUNICATIONS

HON. MANOA KAMIKAMICA

[check against delivery]

Honourable Ministers,

ITU Deputy Secretary General,

APT Secretary General,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I bring you warm greetings and well wishes of the people of the Republic of Fiji. Firstly, a big *Vinaka Vakalevu* to our host for their warm welcome and hospitality here in beautiful Port Moresby.

2. I understand that it has been eight years since Pacific ICT ministers met. Indeed, the technology landscape has changed drastically, and we are now on the cusp of rolling out 5G and that global technical conversations are already on foot for 6G. So, we see the rapid evolution and the relentless disruption that the ICT sector presents and how it cuts across every sector of the economy.

3. It is for this reason that an open, secure, stable, accessible, and peaceful cyberspace is crucial so that we can continue to reap its benefits for our people, fully realise the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure long term regional prosperity and well-being.

4. Today, through 3G, 4G, and 4G+ networks, 95 percent of our people have access to mobile internet connectivity and it costs US$1.50 for 10GB of data. We also established our national Internet Exchange Point in 2017 and are also looking forward to the establishment of the Pacific Internet Exchange Point. Like other countries, we have seen the benefits of having access to the Southern Cross and the Southern Cross NEXT which have enabled fast, reliable and resilient connectivity to the rest of the world, including between the two main islands – Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

5. The starting point is ensuring that all our people have access to meaningful connectivity. We connected a number of schools and medical centres which are at the heart of our remote communities and provided it with internet and renewable solar panels, and made it as Wi-Fi- hotspots for the community. Our priority is to connect the areas outside the reach of the infrastructure of the telecommunication providers which make up a 5 percent national digital divide.

6. Through internal consultations, a total of 240 sites were identified. What I also saw when I came into office, eight months ago, was that the areas that had been identified for the first phase of connectivity

were scattered pockets in different provinces. It makes more sense to connect surrounding communities in a province so that there is a pooling of resources and is fair to all the residing communities of a province.

7.   To address this, we are liaising with the relevant provincial office for the first phase of the programme (3 provinces), to ensure that all the communities are captured and if need be, to gazette and add to the 240 already identified areas. We will use the universal service fund and in close collaboration with stakeholders are also considering new and emerging technologies and low earth orbiting satellites.

8.   We have purchased eight emergency satellite equipment to be deployed to remote communities for disaster periods. We are also undertaking discussions for a second fibre cable landing station to be built in Fiji. As we expand our cable infrastructure, it is important that we have access to multiple cable networks and that prompt repair service is prioritised when there are cable faults.

9.   Studies show that about 70 percent of all cable faults are caused by human activities whereas 14 percent are caused by climatic events. We saw this – twice with Tonga and more recently in Solomon Islands. We have also seen the lengthy time it takes for a repair vessel to come to our region with the necessary parts and then to undertake the repair work. To address this, I encourage further detailed discussions as we ensure resilient infrastructure and

supportive infrastructure to ensure stable and reliable global connectivity in the region.

10. I will share about our digital transformation journey in session 4 today.

11. With these significant investments in ICTs and as we connect more of our people online, we must ensure that our information infrastructure is protected from the threat of cyber incidents. Fiji has a Cybercrime Act 2021 which is aligned to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, and we are progressing our accession to the Budapest Convention.

12. We are currently working on reviewing our National Cybersecurity Strategy due to evolving threats and are in the process of establishing a national CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) once we complete the Study Report. Strategic partnerships have been pivotal in progressing these efforts. We are also commencing discussions on a National Digital Strategy and Data Protection frameworks.

13. We must also ensure that digital literacy and online safety programmes are implemented in a culturally sensitive nature and customised to diverse audiences -- including our senior citizens, persons with disabilities, children, and women. This will also build trust in our digital economy. I am happy that this is captured in our

declaration and I look forward to more detailed approaches that we can collaborate on.

14.   To ensure that our ICT journey is tailored to our people's needs, we must have home-grown solutions and a robust and resilient workforce. To ensure this, capacity building programmes on these new and emerging technologies is needed, and with a focus on meaningful participation of women and girls.

15.   In closing, Fiji remains committed to this collective vision of a 'Smart Pacific, One Voice - Creating a Digital Future together for the Pacific'.

16.   I look forward to having detailed discussions with each of you throughout today.

Vinaka Vakalevu and Thank you.