SOPAC Intervention at HFA Meeting on June 4th 2007 - Cristelle Pratt

Thank you for inviting SOPAC – the Pacific's Regional Inter-governmental Organisation with mandated responsibilities for coordinating regional disaster risk management activities, to this meeting.

Leading up to and since the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe; we in the Pacific have been discussing how our region can address the challenge to manage disaster risks due to the high frequency of extreme natural hazards and events which we experience in our region; that constantly challenge our economies, impact our societies and pressure our environmental integrity.

The 2nd World Conference as we know was sandwiched between two other important conferences that considered sustainable development, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which gave effect to the Declaration made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the Mauritius Strategy for Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, which both outline key principles and strategies for disaster risk management (DRM).

At the regional and national levels in the Pacific we prepared and actively participated as support to our member States in all three conferences and we realised that any declarations, frameworks for action and the like would require implementation at national and regional levels.

Consequently in mid-2005 the regional policy framework ***"An Investment for Sustainable Development In the Pacific Island Countries - Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management A Framework for Action 2005 – 2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters"*** was adapted for the Pacific from the Hyogo Framework for Action. This was approved at the 12th Pacific Regional Disaster Management Meeting in Madang, Papua New Guinea and was commended to and subsequently endorsed by Pacific Leaders during their Forum Retreat also held in Madang in October 2005. At that Forum meeting our Leaders also endorsed the *Pacific Plan* which provides the overarching regional strategic priorities and directions for our region in respect of four key guiding principles being good governance, regional security, sustainable development and economic growth. The Pacific Plan identifies 24 key priority

initiatives requiring immediate attention for implementation and the implementation of the DRM Regional Framework is one of these.

Clearly it is significant that our Leaders in the Pacific have recognised the importance to mainstream DRM and have called for the immediate implementation of the Regional Framework for Action relating to it; it is significant as well to note the intimate links between DRM and sustainable development if we are to achieve our development objectives and therefore the need to advocate the merits of embracing a whole-of-government / whole-of-country approach to tackling this matter; it is significant that at national level there are countries such as Vanuatu (from which you recently heard) that are truly committed to mainstreaming DRM and implementing their recently completed National Action Plan.

So what is SOPAC's role in all of this – as mentioned our Pacific Leaders have entrusted SOPAC with lead responsibilities for coordinating regional DRM activities in the Pacific Islands Region. We have worked in this area now for almost a decade. We supported our member States leading up to, through and following the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We have facilitated the development of the Regional Framework for Action for DRM. We recognise our role and responsibilities to support our member states to meet the commitments that they have made at global and at regional levels to mainstream DRM. We believe that mainstreaming disaster risk management will enable countries to truly start to address some of the key development challenges that they are facing in a range of sectors such as water and sanitation; and, energy.

In saying all of this though we are not naïve in thinking that we could nor can we provide this support and assistance alone. Therefore we convened a meeting in February 2006 of development partners including donors and international financing institutions either involved and, or interested in DRM in the Pacific Islands region. The primary purpose of the meeting were to question ourselves on whether the status quo was good enough or whether there were merits in working together in close partnership with each other to support Pacific Island countries to mainstream DRM and to address their DRM priorities.

The Pacific Regional Disaster Risk Management Partnership Network was established at the February 2006 meeting. It has an open-ended membership and currently has a membership of thirty comprising international and national government and non-

government, and civil society organisations, donors and international financing institutions. At that inaugural meeting there were several key outcomes which may be of interest to you.

There was broad recognition and agreement between the Partners that:

1. Developing countries and particularly small island developing states such as those from the Pacific Islands region often have insufficient capacity to effectively receive, engage, absorb and implement initiatives agreed to with external partners whether these be bilateral or multilateral in nature. **Therefore it was deemed that a "united" front through a Partnership Network would seek to rationalise the number and extent of interactions required thus reducing the burden on the recipient State of too many potential partners consulting on the same thing. It would also enable Partners to be focussed and strategic in provision of their support once a strategic NAP framework had been developed and established.**

2. There would need to be a shift from supply driven interactions between donors and recipients to it becoming demand driven interventions. **Clearly the NAPs will provide the strategic framework to enable this to happen; however the principle of initiatives being demand driven equally apply to the process of developing the NAP and countries must request support of the Partnership Network to assist them.**

3. To make any significant progress the political profile would need to be raised and maintained; **at regional level DRM has already been acknowledged in various regional endorsed policies and plans; however, the recognised challenge is to get that same level of commitment to do something at national level. Therefore a Regional High Level Advocacy Team headed by a known and respected Pacific Island advocate is critical for the political dialogue and expression of political interest and commitment at national level, and this is an essential element of the Pacific process.**

4. More than just "traditional" disaster risk professionals need to be involved in mainstreaming DRM at national and local levels; **Key to this being to building agents of change beyond national disaster management professionals due to the important risk reduction dimension of the challenge. Therefore it is deemed absolutely essential for senior officials of the ministries of finance and economic planning to realise the criticality of DRM in respect of**

sustainable development and to realise their critical and essential role and responsibilities in respect of disaster risk management. In saying this the Network also embraced the need to advocate the merits of a "whole-of-government" / "whole-of country" approach to mainstreaming DRM due to its cross-cutting nature in numerous development areas and sectors. In addition to government the Network realises the critical role and responsibilities for other key stakeholders such as community based and faith based organisations to be involved.

5. Some members of the partnership recognised that they would be more involved in supporting national and regional implementation of priorities; rather than the development of the NAPs themselves.

6. Development of NAPs allows both countries and development partners a strategic entry point for discussions in respect of DRM whether this be bilateral or multilateral in nature.

7. The Network provides for a central place for sharing, data, knowledge and information and therefore enables partners (both technical implementers and donors) to add value, complement and in cases to collaborate and cooperate on initiatives of common interest or where technical competencies complement each other.

8. Confidence and trust building between the Partners and the benefits to accrue to members of the Partnership Network and of the recipient countries will not emerge overnight but rather requires commitment and perseverance. AND FINALLY

9. The Partnership needs to be effectively and diligently coordinated in order that the momentum for NAP development and implementation, for implementation of the Regional Framework and for effective information sharing in respect of these is retained. **In this regard SOPAC has been nominated as the Facilitator of the Partnership Network. It is realised and accepted that dedicated human and financial resources are required to ensure that such a mechanism stays robust.**

Outside of a concerted effort toward supporting member States to develop their NAPs; other regional and national initiatives which address key priorities described under the Regional Framework are being designed and implemented. Some of these initiatives have been the result of successful collaborative efforts between members of the Partnership Network. One such initiative between UNDP, UNOCHA, IFRC and SOPAC is well underway and seeks to design, develop and maintain an easily accessible information

system for DRM for the Pacific region. It is envisaged that other partners of the network will join the initiative either to provide information or to contribute to maintaining the system itself as the initiative develops further. We view this system as becoming a virtual centre of excellence for disaster risk management data, information and tools and we trust that it will one day be utilised by disaster risk management professionals, donors, implementing partners and potential partners as their preferred tool for planning, management and decision making in respect of DRM.

Therefore for the Pacific, we have considered the Hyogo Framework for Action and adapted it into a Regional Framework, and this provides the policy platform that guides our work in the Pacific Islands region in respect of mainstreaming DRM; the Regional Disaster Risk Management Partnership Network provides an effective mechanism for coordinating the implementation of the Regional Framework, and importantly seeks to provide targetted support to countries to developing and implementing their NAPs; The information system, the Pacific Disaster Net will eventually be the portal into relevant data, information and tools in respect of DRM for the Pacific Islands region.

In respect of monitoring and evaluating progress; at the global level clearly it will be the global platform for DRR to be held biennially; at the regional level against the Pacific Plan we are expected to report annually to our Leaders; at the organisational level we report annually to our Council; at the Partnership level, we meet annually to share experiences; suggest improvement options for more effective delivery and engagement and also to monitor progress.

I thank you all for your attention and for this opportunity to share our experiences two years down the road from Kobe.

Over the next months and years the Pacific Partnership Network will continue to work with Vanuatu in the implementation of their NAP and will work with other countries such as the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands and Samoa who have requested us to support them in the development of their NAP.

Challenges and How to Overcome Them

There are numerous challenges facing SOPAC and Pacific island nations as we implement the Regional Framework. The following key challenges, which have already been identified through various consultations, and included in past assessment reports on disaster risk management, still hold:

- Disaster risk management has been generally regarded as either an environmental or humanitarian issue.

- Disaster management has been largely considered in terms of response and recovery from disasters without considerations of risk reduction opportunities in a holistic manner and as an integral element of development planning.

- A lack of government policy, organizational structures and legislative framework to underpin DRM in a holistic, coordinated and programmatic manner.

- Inadequate allocation of national financial resources for DRM .

- Decision-making processes at the national, sectoral, provincial and community levels do not reflect explicit considerations of assessment of hazards and vulnerabilities to disasters.

- Engagement with communities at risk, private sector, women's groups and other stakeholders, in developing DRM actions and projects is minimal.

- A lack of or in some situations inadequate, quality information about hazards and vulnerability available to all levels of decision-makers.

- An absence of, or weak, information systems available for each key hazard that provides 24-7 monitoring and early warnings to communities at risk.

- Communities at risk lack adequate disaster risk reduction efforts to minimize their exposure to risks, or disaster management arrangements, which can be triggered in times of disaster.

The adoption or adherence by PICs to the following guiding principles could assist in overcoming the mentioned challenges.

- Promote a paradigm shift from treating disaster as an environmental and humanitarian issue to treating disaster risk management as a sustainable development issue, which requires a balanced approach addressing social, economic and environmental goals and objectives.

- Disaster risk management fundamentally involves supporting communities in understanding and managing their hazards and disasters **(refer Figure 1)**

- Effective disaster risk management requires a strong governance framework with clear policies and legislation, accountability issues of institutional and organizational arrangements and connections across, within and between levels of government, sectors and communities.

- Acknowledge the importance and relevance of continued assistance by regional organisations as well as regional and international development partners in supporting national activities.

- Mainstreaming disaster risk management and capacity development into national planning and budgetary processes, sectoral and provincial plans and community development plans **(refer Figure 2)**

- Developing time series hazard information and undertaking robust vulnerability assessments supported by traditional knowledge, as a basis for underpinning key decisions at all levels in a country (that is national government (whole-of-government and sectoral) and provincial government agencies, NGOs, communities and individuals).

- Encouraging the relevance and value of traditional knowledge and its integration with scientific information in the design of risk reduction and risk management strategies and activities at all levels.

- Adoption of regulatory and incentive based disaster risk management instruments

Figure 1: DRM Guiding Principles [1]

The link between national development processes and disaster risk management reflecting the above-mentioned guiding principles is summarized in Figure 2.
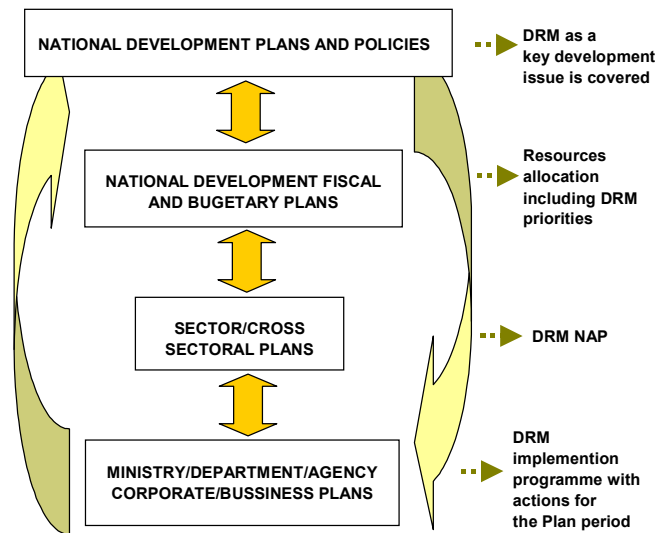

Figure 2: The link between national development and budgetary processes with DRM planning

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[1] Source: Adapted from Norton J. (2006), Norton Consulting Limited, and New Zealand with inputs from SOPAC, PIFS and the Vanuatu NTF.