



Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

Minister for Agriculture and Waterways & Environment

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**Launch of the Week-long celebrations to commemorate the
International Biodiversity Day 2020**

Theme: “Our Solutions are in Nature”

Venue: Level 4, Bali Tower

Date: May 18, 2020

Salutation

- PS Waterways and Environment
- Respective Directors for Environment and Waterways
- Media Personnel
- Ladies and Gentlemen



A very good afternoon to you all.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaims May 22nd as the International Biodiversity Day to commemorate the adoption of the text of the United Nation Convention of Biological Diversity (UNCBD) on May 22nd of year 1992.

The Biodiversity day aim to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues and is celebrated in more than 196 countries who are signatories to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

On the Theme:

The theme for this year's IBD is "Our Solutions are in Nature". The theme comes timely as global community begin to recognize and re-examine our relationship with our natural world. Now we fully understand that despite all our technological advances, we are still completely dependent on a healthy and vibrant ecosystems for our source of clean water, food, medicines, clothes, fuel, shelter and energy.

Ladies and gentlemen, no amount of technological advances can undo the fact that we are one part of the natural ecosystem and our survival is only guaranteed if the natural environment is guarded, protected and enhanced.

Ladies and gentlemen, while technological advances can enhance resource extraction, resource planning and resources processing, it cannot replace our stock of natural resource. We need to expand the base of our natural resources as well as protect it.

In light of the above, the theme for this year's IBD celebration reiterates the importance of sustaining our biodiversity for our prosperity in future. It emphasizes hope, solidarity, and the importance of working together at all levels to build a future that is in harmony with nature.

Research Findings concurring with the theme "Our Solutions are in Nature".

Ladies and gentlemen, there are two key issues that are threatening our diverse stock of natural resources. Natural calamities such as flood, earthquakes, hurricane,

land slides, wildfire and human induced activities such as industrial activities resulting in negative externalities.

Climate change and ensuing natural calamities are being discussed at the internalization level now and it requires global action. At the local level, we must mount nature based solutions to address these localized problems. For example, our Ministry's of Waterways and Agriculture are vigorously pursuing establishment of Vetiver grass along river banks to prevent bank erosion. Waterways Ministry is planting mangroves to protect sea shore erosion.

Nature-based solutions are defined simply as “actions which are inspired by, supported by or copied from nature. It is multidimensional and applies across all sectors to help restore biological diversity and ecosystem based services whilst advancing technologically. It emerges from a concept that integrate the ecological dimension alongside traditional planning measures. (Scott, Lennon, Haase, & Kazmierczak).

Ladies and gentlemen, the European Commission defines Nature-Based Solutions as a way to address societal challenges with solutions that are inspired and supported by nature. Research has shown that Nature-Based Solutions can spark social innovation in cities and accelerate the transition to sustainability. It does this by fostering innovative planning and governance, as well as new models for business, finance, institutions and the wider society (Faivre et al.)

Ladies and gentlemen, we must form a common united front to use nature based solution to protection our natural heritage of biological resources.

Ladies and gentlemen, what bothers me more is human conduct, be it at or around their home, on farm, or on commercial and industrial zones, detriment to our biological and natural resources. If we do not change our conduct drastically, we will completely alter the diversity of biological resources.

In agriculture and aquaculture, higher inputs of capital and agrochemicals can have negative impacts on biodiversity through water pollution, such as a 20-30% increase in eutrophication. At present, over 80% of the global nutrient load to freshwater that causes eutrophication is from diffuse sources, mainly agriculture. It is through the application of nature-based solutions that we are able to achieve dual purpose of improving water management and biodiversity conservation as well (Boelee et al., 2017).

Some of our household heads are treating our wetlands and waterways as rubbish dumps thus threatening the very existence of these biological resources.

Some in the commercial and industrial sector are engaged in indiscriminate resource extraction beyond sustainable limites. There is no considerate for their own balanced growth in their own local ebvironment let alone the well being of future generations.

One week-long program to celebrate IBD in Fiji.

Its time now we gather the supporters of nature and jointly address issues of biodiversity protection and enhancement. In this celebration of the International Biodiversity Day with the theme, we have put together a 1 week-long activity to be covered from May 18 to May 22, 2020. The activities are inter-linked, and is a build up towards the International Biodiversity Day on May 22nd.

Today we are launching the colouring competitions for 2 age categories - ages 6-7 years and 8-10 years. Our children are often regarded as vehicles of change and their participation in any environmental campaigns is always prioritized by my Ministry. The colouring poster that we see here represents life – it represents a future we want for our children and children’s children, where the environment is

so serene and rich in biodiversity, where there is harmonious relationship between nature and humans. We need to instill this image into our children's minds by taking them to parks, camps, and events that promote environment protection and resource conservation. Winners will be given an opportunity for a biodiversity tour to see some of the important biodiversity in Fiji, in particular those that are only found in Fiji. There will be 3 winners from each categories.

A Symposium organized for NGO partners tomorrow, Tuesday will highlight their work and commitments around the theme "Nature Based Solutions and Innovations". Our Ministry recognizes that our NGO partners are one of our key implementing partners who, with their technical expertise and research skills, have over the years contributed and supported the implementation of Fiji's biodiversity and wildlife policies. However, there is still a lot to be done and we need to capitalize on our collaborations with partners to make an impact on the ground and influence change for a better environment. I urge our NGO partners to implement more on the ground activities for expansion, enhancement, recognition, branding and protection of our natural biologically diverse resources.

On Tuesday afternoon, an introductory meeting has been organized inviting all faith-based organisations to discuss issues contributing to biodiversity loss in Fiji and how well can we adopt nature based solution as an everyday practice. In organizing this event, my Ministry acknowledges that faith-based organizations have exceptional reach and organizational power because of their devout followers. They are particularly well placed to communicate meaningful environment messages as the principle of environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

Later in the week on Thursday, the celebrations will take us to the North to launch the Ministry's Policy on the conservation and protection of Fiji's endangered Iguana species, on one of the biggest sanctuaries of the Fiji Crested Iguana in Fiji, Yadua Taba island in Bua. The Yadua Taba Island is managed by the National Trust of Fiji – a good example of collaborative conservation efforts with the communities of Yadua and Bua district as a whole.

On Friday, there will be a launch of the Coral Reef Management and Conservation Policy – an important wetland system that offers nature based solutions to many of our environmental threats, in particular climate change. The policy will be launched at the Qoliqoli Cokovata followed by a round trip to witness one of the important reef systems in Fiji. Coral Reefs are part of the wetlands that are extremely important in supporting people’s livelihood, social security, economic growth, biodiversity conservation and ecological services. The Ministry of Environment is mandated to ensure Fiji’s coral reefs are protected and managed well.

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge my team at the Department of Environment for putting this weeklong program together, and acknowledge the support of our NGOs partners, the Interfaith based organisations, Tui Macuata and Tui Bua, Commissioner Northern and his team, for their full support towards the 1 week long activity celebrating the International Biodiversity Week.

Concluding Remarks

We hope that through the celebration of the International Biodiversity Day 2020 that we are able to fully appreciate our biodiversity in Fiji, raise awareness of our relationship with nature and the need to brand it, protect it, expand and enhance it and bring in the much needed change in conduct by everyone conducting themselves in nature.

God Bless Fiji!

Reference:

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Scott, M., Lennon, M., Haase, D., & Kazmierczak, A. Nature-based solutions for the contemporary city/Re-naturing the city/Reflections on urban landscapes, ecosystems services and nature-based solutions in cities/Multifunctional green infrastructure and climate change adaptation: brownfield greening as an adaptation strategy for vulnerable communities?/Delivering green infrastructure through planning: insights from practice in Fingal, Ireland/Planning for biophilic cities: from theory to practice. *Planning theory & practice*, 17(2), 267-300. doi:10.1080/14649357.2016.1158907

