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Joint CSO Statement to FFC106, Rarotonga

FORUM FISHERIES COMMITTEE MEETING (FFC106)

07-11 May 2018

EDGEWATER RESORT AND SPA

RAROTONGA

COOK ISLANDS

Delivered by Sioneheke Leolahi (PIANGO/NIUANGO)

Madam Chair, member delegates of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Committee, the FFA secretariat, and fellow observers,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this esteemed body on behalf of the Pacific Island Civil Society Organisations. We feel privileged to have been here to observe and participate in this week's meetings.

We present this statement with the support of WWF and on behalf of the Pacific Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO), the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG), the Pacific Islands Tuna Industry Association (PITIA), and National Liaison CSO Umbrellas, the Cook Islands Civil Society Organisations Inc (CICSO), and Niue Association of Non-Government Organisation (NIUANGO)

As civil society organisations we play an important role in our communities by ensuring a platform for organisation, a conduit for communication, and various social, cultural, and humanitarian services. As citizens of our respective countries, we also have an obligation to ensure that the interests of our people are always considered primary in the processes that ultimately affect our communities. That is why we have determined that it is important for us to play a larger role in the decision-making processes around important natural resources such as the fisheries that our countries depend on for our economies as well as food security and livelihoods. Thus, it is why we are addressing you here today.

This week we have recognised the importance of the collective strength of the FFA member states to advocate for sustainability of our fisheries resources and, in doing so, we have also recognised our own responsibility to help foster and strengthen that collective regional capacity.

We have listened closely to issues such as Observer Safety, Person of Interest, and Crewing Requirements, all of which have a direct impact on members of the communities we also represent. Like you, we want to maximise the economic benefits of our fisheries resources for the Pacific peoples, but we must also ensure that in doing so we do



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not lose sight of the social, cultural, and environmental impacts as well. After all, to quote Mark Chapter 8, Verse 36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

2018 is a crucial year for Pacific ACP (PACP) countries with the negotiations on post-Cotonou agreement to commence no later than September this year. We are mindful that there are countries that have recently signed an interim EPA with the EU. Chair, we are concerned about the impacts of these international agreements on resource ownership, development space and aspirations of our national governments.

On the note of fisheries subsidies and IUU, we note the WTO Ministerial in Argentina of December 2017 and the ongoing goal to conclude negotiations in 2019. We note that Ministers held their commitment to SDG14.6 on fish subsidies by ensuring that all parts of that outcome are maintained, particularly the need for effective special and differential treatment which essentially means that they have protected their space to develop. We urge FFA members to maintain this momentum as countries return to the negotiating table this month in Geneva.

We are large ocean states with a history firmly anchored in the sea. As such, our fisheries make up the fabric of our communities, and have so for time immemorial. Fish species caught in the tuna fisheries have been part of our oral tradition, and present in our arts and crafts, and diets for centuries. They are, in effect, a core part of our *soul* that we have an express obligation to look after.

We look forward to stronger strategic collaboration between CSOs and the FFA in future. We are encouraged by the inclusive approach taken by the FFC in enabling the participation of CSO observers at the FFC meetings. CSOs have the potential to support officials in national and regional agencies to identify and critically examine key issues and problems in the fisheries sector that are facing Pacific Islanders on the ground. CSOs are also in a good position to explore opportunities for collaborative actions with regional and national government officials provided we are part of key strategic planning exercises, and we look forward to becoming accredited observers of the FFC in due time.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the FFC.