Mr. Taholo Kami, Chair of the Pacific Island Round Table for Nature Conservation, and Regional Director for the IUCN Oceania Regional Office

Mr. Stuart Chappe, Secretariat of the Pacific Island Round Table for Nature Conservation, and Director of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management Division of SPREP

Fiji Government as Chair of the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas

Heads of Organisations, representatives, partners, donors and delegates
Ni sa bula vinaka.

Having worked with biodiversity conservation for nearly 20 years in Fiji, I pondered on the theme of for this Annual meeting - "Biodiversity for sustainable development". The new UN Framework to replace the Millenium Development Goals from 2015 will be based on Sustainable Development Goals. For our region, this was reflected at the SIDs meeting in Samoa in September 2014 as part of our preparation for the World Summit of 2015.

Many of us who work with biodiversity conservation will know that the highest priority biodiversity sites in the Pacific are mostly within indigenous lands. These lands have extraordinary value – for their beauty, the ecosystem services they sustain, and for their biodiversity. Our indigenous cultures are strongly dependent on natural ecosystems for their livelihoods and keeping our natural landscapes intact is necessary to keeping our indigenous cultures intact.

As we deliberate over two days and devise strategies and discuss issues and solutions around critical and emerging conservation issues, we need to remind ourselves that the vast wealth of traditional knowledge held by indigenous communities can make a major contribution towards providing economic justification for biodiversity conservation, and that such knowledge continues to be of great importance for communities themselves. The rights, well-being and aspirations of our peoples and biodiversity conservation are therefore inextricably linked, neither one nor the other can be looked in isolation and they are a vital component of national and regional conservation strategies.

We have experienced the impacts of rapid social and economic change from poorly planned development. The grim reality is that the social and environmental cost of extractive industries to our pacific island nations far outweighs the benefits. Every resource owner and user has a responsibility. Traditional resource owners, forestry developers, industries, corporations, tourism, and so forth have a responsibility to the sustainable use of the resource.

Climate change in our region puts entire nations at risk, and our growing population and needs have placed pressure on governments to satisfy the needs of their peoples. In his opening address to the National Summit on Green Growth in June 2014, the Prime Minister of Fiji stated, and I quote "the old ways of growing our economy, of developing our nation, are no longer adequate or acceptable. Too much of what has been done or achieved has

been unsustainable. In far too many instances, our resources have been exploited without the proper care that is needed to nurture them so that they continue to provide the prosperity on which we all depend" unquote.

In putting this statement into action, the Fiji government this year launched Fiji's very first Green Growth Framework, an innovative tool designed to accelerate integrated and inclusive sustainable development that inspires action at all levels in the country to build environmental resilience, social improvement, reduce poverty, economic growth, and build resilience to the anticipated adverse effects of climate change.

Human well-being should be at the heart of our work, and conservationists in Fiji will be challenged to use this tool in ensuring the communities they work with are empowered and consulted, in contributing to risk management approaches and having their input towards a sustainable development approach of government.

Establishing managed protected areas using traditional governance approaches which engage with modern methods of protected area governance can be explored to improve food and water security. Such economic empowerment of communities is interlinked with the livelihood provision of the ecosystems and communities are provided with viable opportunities for sustainable use of their resources.

This is an opportunity for us to bring to Fiji's Greengrowth Framework, national and global conservation targets of the NBSAPs and Aichi Targets, in a meaningful way, positively supporting communities for their future well-being.

I would like to acknowledge the Fiji Government as Chair until the next Nature Conservation Conference in 2017. The guiding principles for Fiji's Greengrowth Framework provides us with elements which we can all aspire to achieve across our island nations. These are:

- Equality and dignity for all citizens
- Respect for the diverse cultural, religious and philosophical beliefs
- Unity among people driven for a common purpose and citizenship
- Good and just governance
- Sustainable economic growth
- Social and economic justice
- Equitable access to the benefits of development
- Meeting the basic needs and provision of services
- Merit based equality of opportunities for all
- Responsible stewardship of Fiji's ecosystem.

As you come together to look at strategies for the successful implementation of the Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in the Pacific Island Region, I encourage you to look at the challenges of development within the perspectives of environment, culture, values, human well-being and a future vision of the Pacific.