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Press Release

Universities need to develop disaster management strategies - Usamate

The Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Hon Jone Usamate has called on the Fiji National University (FNU) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) to develop disaster management strategies that would assist communities in Fiji.

The Minister made these comments while speaking at the Commonwealth Climate Resilience Network (CCRN) Conference hosted by the Fiji National University (FNU) in conjunction with CCRN, convened by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) at the Tanoa Plaza in Suva earlier this morning.

Hon Usamate said both the universities need to engage with all the sectors, especially the communities to develop strategies that would assist the country to its full abilities in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

"I acknowledge the existence of climate change and environment programmes at both the universities. I urge you to maintain this and strengthen this," said the Minister.

He said for small islands in the Pacific, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report projects immediate risks of loss of livelihood, also settlements and infrastructure, ecosystems services and economic stability in the near-term.

"All of us here recognise the challenges posed by climate change which includes impact on for example health, infrastructure, settlements and also the food sector. For many Pacific Island countries this would mean moving, and relocating communities."

"The Paris agreement and what it aims to do in the Pacific is very important to us. It's actually a matter of life and death for us."

Hon Usamate said Fiji has remained strident in call for global action especially in its call for global action as the Pacific Islands stand to bear the brunt of climate related disasters.

FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey, who is also an ACU Council Member, said the key objective of the conference is to establish a global network in Climate Change Resilience and Mitigation funded by ACU scholarships and fellowships, aimed at preparing future business and political leaders for a world in which climate change increasingly dominates decision-making and planning.

Professor Healey said the conference has brought together member universities to develop and share strategies to mitigate the impact of the climate change already in the pipeline.

"At present levels of fossil fuel consumption, temperatures could reach 2.0C above pre-industrial levels by 2100, eradicating coral reefs, rising sea levels by 1.0m and leading to lethal heat waves, bush fires and devastating cyclones."

“Critically, there is a decades-long time lag between changing the emission of greenhouse gases and a subsequent change in global temperatures.”

“What this means for us in the South Pacific is that the huge increase in greenhouse gases that were pumped into the atmosphere over the last 50 years will continue to drive up temperatures, raise sea levels and intensify cyclones for decades to come, whatever steps the world’s leaders decide to make in terms of the Paris Agreement,” Professor Healey added.

FNU has developed three new programmes; Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Climate Change Resilience and Mitigation.

“These new programmes represent a major leap forward in terms of the capacity of the University to engage with external partners – in this case, the ACU, the IMO/MSAF and CPA –Australia – and to make a real difference to students here in Fiji,” Professor Healey added.

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About the Fiji National University: The Fiji National University (FNU) was established through the merger of 7 government-owned tertiary institutions in Fiji, and commenced operations from 1 January 2010. The constituent institutions are found at over 40 different locations across Fiji, and collectively offer Certificates, Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas, Degrees, Postgraduate qualifications and Skills Upgrading for those who are already in employment. Approximately 30,000 students pass through the University each year. Over the last six years of its operations, the University has registered major achievements with regard to new programme delivery, quality improvements and contribution to research and publications via its 5 Colleges: The College of Humanities & Education (CHE), the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences (CMNHS), the College of Engineering, Science & Technology (CEST), the College of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (CAFF), the College of Business, Hospitality & Tourism Studies (CBHTS) and the National Training & Productivity Centre (NTPC).