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PRESS RELEASE

FNU part of high-level talks at the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers

Nadi, Fiji Islands.

Fiji National University led by the Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey featured prominently at the week-long 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) underway at Sheraton Fiji Resort on Denarau Island, Nadi.

Professor Healey together with senior academics delivered presentations and featured in discussions at the major international conference which was for the first time hosted by a nation in the South Pacific.

With the theme “Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?”, the conference discussions were dominated by two major natural disasters; Tropical Cycle Gita ravaging Tonga a few days prior to the commencement of the meeting; and the second year anniversary of category 5 Cyclone Winston which claimed the lives of 44 people in Fiji.

“The Fiji National University is extremely proud to be a Gold sponsor of this event and we are grateful to be given the opportunity to feature in several of the important discussions,” commented Professor Healey.

FNU’s VC Professor Healey was part of the debate panel that argued against the notion that “Education has failed students and business on employability” and won their argument with Healey deliberating that perhaps it is the businesses who have failed their employers by not investing in lifelong learning. Both sides of the arguments were very well presented and noted.

Dr Eci Nabalarua, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and Dr William May, Dean College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences presented on the topic “Recovering from natural disasters to build resilient universities” and used FNU as a case study during Cyclone Winston and shared best practices with the attendees.

Pro Vice Chancellor Research Professor Nii-K Plange spoke on International mobility for capacity building while Professor Nabobo-Baba, Professor of Education and Acting Dean, College of Engineering, Science and Technology Salabogi Mavoava spoke on the topic “Universities, climate change and resilience in Small Island Developing States (SIDS)” during the Education Minister’s meeting.

Prof Healey also chaired a panel that discussed the topic “What opportunities does the Commonwealth present for addressing the key domestic and international issues facing higher education institutions in the Commonwealth?” and shared his experience from teaching in the UK as well as Fiji.

The final presentation from FNU, during the 5 day workshop, was delivered by Professor Nii-K Plange who spoke on the topic “Accountability in education: who should answer to whom?” Professor Plange highlighted the importance of organisations to provide a conducive environment for its employees to ensure they are able to continue to upgrade their qualifications which in-turn would assist with high levels of productivity. Citing FNU as an example, Professor Plange spoke on the incentive based system which provided for academic to conduct research and receive rewards for their work. The senior academic

however stated that the policies guiding this needs to be thorough to ensure there is no abuse of the process.

Prof Healey said: "Given the high-profile delegates that were in attendance, I believe having our senior academics from the University present and fully participate in the various high-level discussions provided us great exposure and created awareness about the work we do at FNU. It also assisted with sharing best practices and creating new networks with other universities and important stakeholders that were all part of this international event."

"Having our points of views heard not only from our representatives but others that represented the Pacific I believe it was a wonderful achievement for Education in the region," Professor Healey added.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, as well as education ministers, higher education leaders, teachers, students, youth groups and civil society to discuss key challenges facing society.

Fijian Prime Minister Rear Admiral (Retired) Voreqe Bainimarama and Attorney General and Minister for Education Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum were also present at the meeting.

Hon Sayed-Khaiyum was also appointed as the Chair of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers.

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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).