

Speaking notes at the UNIDO Industrial Development Board Meeting

Wednesday 22 June 2011

1. [Salutations]

I thank the Director General of UNIDO, Kandeh Yumkella for his continuous support in giving me every opportunity to promote my country with friends who are potential partners in my country's quest towards renewable energy.

2. I am very humbled to be invited to share with you our vision for renewable energy in the Cook Islands.

3. While the Cook Islands may be small, our commitment to RE is intense and immense. This intensity is driven by the increase in oil prices which impacts on our national budgets, uncertainty in national planning, and economic growth; and also the desire to reduce carbon emissions to allow our environment to rehabilitate and get healthy again. I cannot and will not allow the people of the Cook Islands to slip further into poverty, enslaved to the price of fossil fuel. The Cook Islands has immense Political Will and Community Support. There is an obvious urgency to get the Cook Islands converted into using renewable energy. We know this is going to take a lot of work and we also know we have our challenges and limitations, however, we are not going to let it stop us from pursuing our dream. In brief we want to be flag-bearers for renewable energy in the world and especially in the Pacific.

4. We have learned a lot from the inspirational address yesterday by the former Governor of California, Arnold Shwazeneger. We would like to take the enthusiasm and energy for this type of initiative and leadership injected into the State of California by their former Governor and replicate it in our country, and let my country be the champion of this initiative amongst countries in the Pacific and in the Southern Hemisphere.

5. The Experiences, Policies and Strategies of places like California in doing this will be developed locally to ensure local needs are appropriately met. The technology to do this is available and the expertise to install and operate them belongs in the various countries you represent around this table. My country is looking for partners to guide us on this exciting and very rewarding journey: We know that this journey has low risk, socially, economically and financially but it yields very high returns for our people. The Cook Islands is looking for a partner to provide us with the necessary tools to help us move this faster than the goals we set ourselves.

6. We know this venture will attract many to the Cook Islands like it did to the State of California. In return we will help market the technology of those countries that assisted us, generating further economic returns for those countries; a very worthwhile investment in my view. Right now we have 2 external country partners; Japan and New Zealand and a couple of international and regional organisations supporting us in our quest. We could do with a few more. We have country plans in place for this work and it is currently being refined.

7. This plan suggests that all islands except Rarotonga will be converted in one transformation starting from the northern group islands for reasons of poor access and high costs. The size of these islands suggests that a single transformation is manageable and the right approach to take with primarily photovoltaic technology. Our diesel generators will be kept as backup until technology has perfected reliable supply. Storage for us will be an issue and we are looking at various options. ICHET has options that we will be looking at in Turkey and Greece after the Forum. We thank UNIDO for making this possible.

8. Rarotonga's transformation will be staged. Private sector investment will be encouraged through policies that promote financial incentives. However, without waiting for these policies to be endorsed, some private sector partners have already made investments in solar panels in an attempt to reduce the cost of doing business and to enhance their future competitive advantage over others.

9. We anticipate critics along the way, but that provides for a balanced and healthy relationship, however, we will let the results convert them.

10. I thank you for allowing me time to share and dialogue with you on my country's vision and path towards energy security.

10. Thank you.