

**Welcome Address by the Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor
Rajesh Chandra at the 2016 Pacific Update Conference
Japan-Pacific ICT Lecture Theatre
Monday, 18 July 2016**

1. Greetings and Welcome

- The Chief Guest, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy,
Public Enterprises, Civic Service and Communications, Fiji,
Honorable Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum;
- Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Margaret
Twomey;
- Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
- Pro Chancellor and Chair of USP Council, Mr. Winston
Thompson;
- Vice-President of Knowledge Management and Sustainable
Development, Asian Development Bank, Mr Bambang Susantono;
- Dean, Asian Development Bank Institute, Dr Naoyuki Yoshino;
- Director, Development Policy Centre, Australian National
University, Professor Stephen Howes;
- Members of the USP Council, Senate, and their committees;

- The Acting Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics,
Members of USP's Senior Management Team; and
- Distinguished Speakers, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen

2. A very warm welcome to you all to the 2016 Pacific Update Conference, which is being jointly hosted by The University of the South Pacific, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank Institute, and the Australian National University's Development Policy Centre. I extend a special welcome to our Chief Guest: Hon. Minister, we are grateful for your acceptance of our invitation to open this important development dialogue for the Pacific.

3. This annual forum gathers policymakers, academics, and development practitioners from the Pacific and across the world to present recent research outcomes that can contribute towards substantiating the efforts of the Pacific governments and people and their development partners to find sustainable solutions to development issues facing the region. In order to improve

development outcomes in our region, take full advantage of global opportunities, and deal effectively with current and future global threats to our region, we need a combination of national, regional, and international perspectives and benchmarks. We should have this at this Update.

4. The theme for 2016 Pacific Update Conference is “***Inclusive Growth for Enhanced Resilience***”, with sessions on economics, finance, governance, regionalism, ICT, environment, climate change and disaster risk management, private sector involvement, infrastructure, trade, education, labor mobility, renewable energy, health, and fisheries. The theme is especially relevant to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, and the environmental challenges faced by Pacific Island Countries.
5. I am particularly pleased to note that topics to be dealt with at this update conference are also closely aligned to the seventeen 2030 SDGs .

6. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the University's key partners who continue to enable us to host this annual conference. ADB and ANU have long been partners of the University and have supported us in our initiative geared towards development of the Pacific region through higher education, research, and regional integration measures.

7. The University enjoys a collegial relationship with the ADB and this is exemplified through the history of collaborations between the two institutions. A visit by Mr Takehio Nakoa, ADB President to USP Laucala campus in August 2015 to deliver a public lecture, which was streamed live to all regional campuses, serves to affirm the strong ties between the two institutions.

8. As for USP and ANU, I recently discussed our partnership with the newly appointed ANU Vice-Chancellor to explore more innovative ways of effectively meeting the growing research and development needs of the people and governments of the Pacific region. A

progressive partnership between USP and ANU that recognizes the centrality of USP and other Pacific Islands institutions is crucial.

9. USP has always supported conferences of this nature, which presents and discusses research related to Pacific Island Countries. This is very much aligned to the regional nature of the University and the expectations that it is the major Pacific Islands think-tank.

10. We are at crossroads in the Pacific. The new Framework for Pacific Regionalism calls for greater ownership and responsibility for its development; greater responsibility for thinking about their future and their solutions; and greater recognition and understanding from our development partners of the importance of giving space, time and opportunity to Pacific Governments, people and institutions to find solutions stemming from their vision and ambitions and rooted in their experiences and sure in their sustainability.

11. Recently our Pro Chancellor, Mr. Winston Thompson launched a new book on the new Pacific Diplomacy that indicates that some of our countries are successfully playing the full international stage and

charting a course that allows them to take more active and direct role in benefitting from the enormous opportunities that exist in the global system. If countries can do this and keep in mind that their individual and collective success depends on strong regional co-operation and integration, then the new path can lead to greater success than in the past.

12. To take fuller advantage of the opportunities and to deal more confidently and beneficially with the world at large, top class human resources are crucial. In many ways, the most important element of our future success—the quality of our people, the innovation of our society, the agility of our response, and our competitiveness in the world—is not being addressed in this Update or in others. The world is an unforgiving place and ultimately the only sure basis for a dignified existence in the global system is to have a smart society. This in turn calls for much greater discussion and attention on education, on tertiary education to deal with the abysmally low participation rates in tertiary education, on research, development,

and innovation—in summary, to the creation of a knowledge society in the Pacific Islands.

13. Just as high quality, internationally benchmarked educational system is the foundation for our development, so is societal and political cohesion and the creation of strong and widely shared sense of a unified nation. We need to look at resilience in terms beyond economic or environmental resilience—as is the common view—and focus equally strong on nation-building and unifying all citizens around a strong, shared vision for the countries.

14. Conferences of this nature take a lot of financial and human resources and the time spent here has opportunity costs. It is vital therefore, that what happens here has strong impact. We are streaming the presentations and discussions to reach out to more people. The media will be active in disseminating the findings and discussions. We will be putting all the presentations on our Web almost immediately after the presentations—and the other partners

will do the same. We hope that the conference will allow policy-makers and researchers to network for longer-term collaboration.

15. I understand that the Conference will have an evaluation at the closure. I wish to encourage all participants to provide honest and frank feedback on how future Conferences can be improved for greater inclusion, relevance, and impact.

16. With this, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all the very best in your deliberations for the next two days which I hope will improve development outcomes that are inclusive and promote our resilience in the widest sense of the word.

17. Vinaka Vakalevu, Shukriya, thank you.