Opening remarks

by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

“The 2030 Agenda at a crossroads - How do we ensure an integrated approach in tackling climate-related security risks, conflict and inequality?”

16 July 2019
6:30-8pm
Conference Room 1
UN Headquarters
New York
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to you all.

First, my sincere appreciation and a big thank go to the Permanent Mission of Sweden, the Permanent Mission of Fiji, and SIPRI, for your partnership in this event.

We all know first hand from our work how complex the interlinkages between development, inequality, peace and security, and climate change are. And, I add, how much more complex this has become given the ever increasing speed of change that we all have experienced.

One may wonder how given new technologies and computing powers that we could not have dreamt of a couple decades ago, still have not made us more proficient in addressing and managing complexity.

More than ever before, it is critical for us to understand the interlinkages making up complexity. More than ever before we are challenged not to manage them post-facto but by anticipating.

The high vulnerability and poverty levels in the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS put these countries, their peoples, women, men, girls and boys at high risk of ever more rapidly cascading crises. When you add to that the capacity and financial resources constraints they all experience, I leave it to you to picture the manifold challenges!

For a long time, interlinkages were looked at from the perspective of human agency or the economy alone. We no longer can ignore that the ever accelerating climate change impacts have moved from a “threat multiplier” to an existential threat in itself.

Some of you may have seen the picture of the Secretary-General on TIME magazine - this is the reality of too many by now and especially in the SIDS - ever since the first Barbados Conference, warnings about rising sea levels and climate change impacts have been expressed. How do you manage interlinkages, address complexity when you are close to loosing the land, the space to which your nationality, your identity is tied?

Climate change impact is known to undermine hardwon or taken for granted peace, prosperity and it causes social and political tensions, and it surely creates new fault-lines in national, regional and global relations.

Ocean acidification, melting mountain glaciers, rising sea levels, desertification and water shortages, go way beyond just threatening the most basic need of food security.

They threaten physical survival, they deprive young girls and boys of hope, they lead to ever more intense competition for scarce resources and eventually are the trigger for conflict and the involuntary displacement of people. They take away basic human rights.

Planned relocation - be it international or national - is now a reality. It brings with its own set of political, economic, social and legal challenges.
Yes, overall we have made progress in poverty alleviation. And yes, GDP growth has picked up in the LDC, LLDC and SIDS countries in recent years.

Yet, poverty persists and potentially is on the rise with climate change impacts and contributes to social tensions, crime, instability, fragility.

Ultimately, this increases the risks of conflict for all of us.

Capacities are constrained and the devastation from extreme weather events which now seem to occur almost weekly, presents major challenges to national institutions. How to provide adequate emergency and relief response, let alone reconstruction? How to balance between short-term emergency response and the need for medium to long-term action for sustainable development paths? How to muster capacity to locate and access much needed external financing?

Our internationally-agreed frameworks are often designed to look at one set of problems somewhat in isolation, each having their own reporting requirements and they often are driven by sectoral imperatives.

We have the Programmes of Action of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, the Paris Agreement, the peace and security institutional arrangements, and of course the overarching Agenda 2030.

We must of course continue, we must accelerate work to achieve these individually set targets and goals and that surely includes remaining within the 1.5 degree threshold.

But we also must look much more into how they interact with each other.

The human and natural ecosystems are a whole and managing in parallel or worse in separate ways the myriads of requirements just simply puts major capacity challenges on countries already struggling to beef up policy and management capacities to meet basic needs of their peoples.

Closer to home, and very much in line with the Secretary-General's call for efficiency and impact, we must review and adapt intergovernmental processes and the UN architecture as already called for.

We must be able not just to keep up with understanding complex interactions, see emerging new threats and challenges - we must be able to manage and deliver!

So, it is my hope that today’s discussion will help us get further insight and experience to better understand and reach consensus on what sort of institutional mechanisms and actions we need internationally, regionally and nationally.

We must act now to mitigate the risk of ever more rapidly cascading crises - we must invest now in what it takes to promote inclusive and peaceful development paths for all.

Thank you.