

Speech: Melanie Hopkins' Remarks at the launch of the Fiji Electrification Trust Fund

I am delighted to be here today to launch Phase 1 of the Fiji Rural Electrification Trust Fund. This is an important week for the country as you host the Annual General Meeting of the ADB, bringing countries from right across Asia to see the front-line climate challenges faced by Pacific countries. During such a high level week, it is all the more important to take time out to visit a smaller island to understand first-hand the challenges faced at community level.

The United Kingdom is serious about the need to tackle climate change and is one of the world's largest funders of international climate finance. The UK has committed over £5.8bn from 2016-2020 on international climate finance.

Fiji also takes a leading role on climate change. When HRH Prince Harry Duke of Sussex visited Fiji last year, he said "We look to Fiji to provide leadership on environmental issues which affect all of us, and that have been affecting you as an island nation for many, many years.

Fiji took on the role of COP23 Presidency in 2017. This was a major area of international leadership at a critical moment. Fiji took on this highly challenging role on behalf of the international community and I'd like to commend the Government for this leadership. The British Government was keen to support Fiji in this and provided over FJD 4.5 million. This not only met the very immediate support needed to assist the COP23 Presidency but enabled more schoolchildren and rural communities to become more involved in the climate debate. As an official COP23 legacy initiative, we were also very pleased to respond to the Government's request to support the FREF and look forward to seeing this very sustainable programme grow. The UK has offered to host COP26 in 2020, which will be a pivotal moment to take stock of global ambition and prepare the world for further action.

The real debate on how to grow sustainably and how we use the planet's resource must begin at home. In the UK, we are proud of our Climate Change Act, which has just celebrated its 10th birthday. Since 1990, we have reduced our emissions by 42% whilst growing our economy by 72%. I commend the increased focus that the Government has placed on climate and oceans, including leading the Ocean and Climate Change Action Group of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, and working towards a plastics free Fiji. It is inspiring to see that today's solution has been based on solar technology, enabling Fiji to move towards a clean, green future.

If we want to achieve real change in tackling climate, innovative partnerships and grass-roots collaboration will be key. We are proud to work with a variety of actors, including academics, businesses, students and civil society, on our Talanoa Dialogue. I was delighted to learn of the involvement

of Viti Renewables, community NGOs and support from the Leonardo di Caprio Foundation in this project. I hope very much that this model of grass-roots involvement can be further developed in the future.

In closing, I would like to express my very best wishes to the community of Vio Island and hope that this helps improve the standard of living for this generation and generations to come.

Vinaka Vakalevu