

VNR- VANUATU

Statement by Hon. Ralph Regenvanu Minister of Foreign Affairs of International Cooperation and External Trade

Honourable Colleagues,

It is my pleasure as Vanuatu's Foreign Minister to present Vanuatu's first *Voluntary National Report*. This report provides the overview of Vanuatu's progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and aligning our planning with the 17 SDGs and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The vehicle we are using to ensure we meet our development goals is *Vanuatu 2030: The People's Plan*. This is the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) for the period 2016 to 2030, and serves as our country's highest-level policy framework. It is founded on culture, traditional knowledge and Christian principles, and builds on Vanuatu's development journey since independence. *The Plan* is guided by our **National Vision: A stable, sustainable and prosperous Vanuatu**.

The Plan outlines Vanuatu's national development goals and policy objectives to translate the **National Vision** into priorities to be actioned. This provides a sound framework to monitor progress, including alignment of *The Plan* with the 17 SDGs and other international agreements.

The design of *The Plan* recognised that Vanuatu's 83 islands are home to over 100 languages and dialects. The development of *The Plan* also considered that Vanuatu has an HDI of 138 of 188, a population that is 83% rural based, and an economy dependent on a narrow range of productive sectors that are vulnerable to external shocks. All of these unique elements of Vanuatu were discussed and reviewed over the two-year design and consultation process.

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable countries for environmental disasters in the world. In March 2015, Tropical Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu, affecting 195,000 people and causing loss and damage equivalent to 64 per cent of our annual GDP. This disaster was followed by the evacuation of 12,000 people from Ambae due to volcanic eruptions in 2016 and 2017.

I am proud to say that over the past four years we have met these disasters head on and implemented the *National Recovery and Economic Strengthening Program*. This recovery program coordinated projects to restore infrastructure and Government services that were damaged or destroyed by the category five cyclone. The program also supported Ni-Vanuatu livelihoods and protected vulnerable groups.

It is our values and the spirit of Ni-Vanuatu people which guides our disaster recovery efforts and the implementation of our development plans, as well as the continued alignment of the SDGs throughout Government policies, programs and projects.

For Vanuatu, development is about more than acquiring material wealth. It must be firmly anchored to the Melanesian values of respect, harmony, unity and forgiveness that our country is founded upon. These values shape our cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and are expressed through our oral traditions, languages, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events. They form our deep connections with our ancestors, land and place, and our skills to be productive with our natural resources.

Our people and place are at the very heart of our development aspirations. The connections between culture and the social, environmental and economic pillars of our national development plan are reflected in our aspirations, as outlined in *The Peoples Plan*:

***(for Culture) A vibrant cultural identity underpinning a peaceful, just and inclusive society
(for Social) Responsive and capable state institutions delivering quality public services, including health and education, to all citizens;***

(for Environment) Maintaining a pristine natural environment on land and at sea that serves our food, cultural, economic and ecological needs;

(for Climate Change) Enhanced resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change and natural disasters; and

(for Economy) A stable economy based on equitable, sustainable growth that creates jobs and income earning opportunities accessible to all people in rural and urban areas.

Progress has been made despite challenges confronting our sustainable development. Community, family and kinship serve as the primary social safety net, especially for the young, the elderly, people with disabilities and all Ni-Vanuatu people. The indivisible connections between culture and the three pillars of *The Plan* are reflected in how we implement priorities and actions.

Vanuatu embraces the Theme for 2019 of "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" through the integration of SDGs throughout *The Plan*. Vanuatu is proud to be the first Pacific State to develop a National Implementation Plan for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations. This plan informed our commitment to implementing key recommendations accepted at the second UPR cycle. Furthermore, Vanuatu is one of the few countries to establish a National Human Rights Committee by law, and continues to align specific plans and initiatives with the SDGs highlighted in 2019:

SDG 4. Education and Lifelong Learning

Vanuatu's National Education Sector Development Plan decrees that every child must have access to education. The Council of Ministers approved a policy on Early Childhood Education in 2018. The first phase of the Universal Access Policy for Education began last year for Early Childhood to year 10. In 2020 this policy will begin for years 11-13. This Access Policy is aligned with the Free Education Policy for years 1-6. Our Government has a school grant program to strengthen knowledge, develop more equitable and efficient education, and build staff capacity.

Additionally, Vanuatu has launched its first National Human Resources Development Plan (NHRDP). This Plan ensures that government scholarships respond to the needs of the labour market.

SDG 8. Sustainable Economic Growth & SDG 10. Reduce inequality among countries

In line with our national development priorities we have worked towards equitable development across the country to ensure better access for everyone. The Decentralisation Act and the implementation of a *Decentralisation Policy 2017-2027* brings the government closer to the people by providing citizens with greater control over decision-making processes and allowing their direct participation in public service delivery. The Policy's core objectives include devolving decision-making authority, functions and resources

to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services, and to ensure a “bottom up” flow of integrated development planning and budgeting.

The Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), under the custodian of the Tripartite Labour Advisory Council (TLAC), continues to guide Vanuatu in achieving SDG 8. Furthermore, in 2017 our Government increased the minimum wage from Vt170 to Vt200 per hour.

The livelihoods of Ni-Vanuatu involved in the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme have improved due to continued participation in New Zealand and Australia’s Seasonal Workers Program (SWP). Approximately 7,000 workers have participated since Vanuatu began the RSE program in 2007. The monies earned are an added benefit for families, communities, and largely rural based small businesses.

SDG Goal 13. Climate Change

Vanuatu's recovery after Tropical Cyclone Pam has been steady, despite personal income loss of Vt1.6 billion and lost work days. In an effort to protect jobs and businesses, the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce has taken steps to prioritise a transition towards “Climate Sustainability”, meaning a focus on jobs, business preparedness, recovery, resilience, and sustainability.

The National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction 2016 – 2030 provides the framework for ensuring that our communities, environment and economy are resilient to the impacts of climate change and disaster risks. The policy ensures that risks are identified, assessed, reduced and managed. It was formulated following a risk governance assessment analysing Vanuatu’s climate change and disaster risk governance capacity and needs with all relevant stakeholders.

SDG 16 Peaceful Societies and Justice for All

The Vanuatu Government recognises the value of human rights for all people in Vanuatu and has designed frameworks, policies and laws that enshrine the protection and promotion of these fundamental human rights. The enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2017 is the most recent development in the area of realising fundamental rights.

Our Government’s *National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy* aims to strengthen the foundation of Vanuatu’s society, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and build trust of the public sector and institutions.

SDG 17 The Global Partnership

Vanuatu will graduate from the LDC category on 4 December 2020. Since graduation officially began in 2012, Vanuatu has updated its overarching policy framework and sectoral strategies in a bid to boost productive capacity, reduce reliance on imports, improve export potential, raise much needed revenue, and create gainful employment and income generating opportunities. These measures have been articulated through *The Plan* and new policies across the productive sectors.

Finally, under the heading of “Society 4, Social Inclusion”, *The Plan* provides for an inclusive society which upholds human dignity and the rights of all Ni-Vanuatu, including women, youth, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. They are also supported, protected and promoted in our legislation and institutions. For example, Vanuatu recognises that Persons with disability have the same fundamental right to life, to respect and dignity, as any other citizen, and have passed The National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018-2025 to ensure these fundamental rights.

At this time, I would like to reiterate that the Vanuatu Government maintains its commitment not only to implementing government policies as stated in *The Plan*, but also to the continued monitoring of progress and alignment with the SDGs.

Thank you for your time