

Fiji



UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
70th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
REPUBLIC OF FIJI – H.E. AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN
[Fiji Mission to the United Nations in Geneva]

Mr/Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and good afternoon/morning.

In the High Commissioner's opening statement, he touched on issues concerning the growing scale and complexity of forced displacement; issues on how to ensure access to asylum in the context of large displacement emergencies; pursuing sustainable, people-driven solutions; and securing protection in the context of complex mixed flows. The High Commissioner also spoke about internal displacement and statelessness.

Mr/Madam Chair,

These are issues that confront us with so much urgency. The need for common purpose in addressing these issues is more acute than ever.

Fiji and the Pacific region as a whole is dealing with an emerging issue in relation to the projected increase of climate-displaced people in the Pacific. National boundaries have become less significant and displacement is a reality for many Pacific Island States.

While Fiji is fortunate to have highlands to which we may retreat as sea levels rise, many of our fellow Pacific Island States do not have this recourse. There may come a time when Fiji, as well as other Pacific Island States, may be confronted with the issue of statelessness within the Pacific region arising as a result of climate-change induced displacement, particularly for our neighbouring low-lying Pacific Island States. If such a time does come, we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our neighbours and provide permanent refuge.

Mr/Madam Chair,

When we addressed the Executive Committee last year, we highlighted our journey with internal displacement and the relocation of coastal communities in Fiji due to climate change.

We spoke about our efforts in developing our own Relocation Guidelines to guide the movement of our people. It is my pleasure to advise that we have since launched our National Planned Relocation Guideline which provides a blueprint that includes a human rights based approach in relation to relocation processes, ensuring proper coordination between various agencies, sensitising the process to issues of marginalisation particularly in relation to persons in vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The purpose of the Guidelines is to ensure an inclusive and gender responsive consultative and participatory process to strengthen communities' response to climate change impacts, and ensure community engagement and ownership in the relocation process.

Mr./Madam Chair,

During the High-Level segment on Statelessness at the beginning of the week, we listened to the devastating consequences suffered by persons who are stateless. This is a problem of our doing. It is a man-made problem. Whether it be due to political or legal or administrative reasons, a denial of legal identity is a denial of human dignity and respect for human rights.

Fiji recognises the need to address statelessness and has taken appropriate action and has made significant progress within its domestic laws in doing so.

While Fiji strives to prevent statelessness, we recognize the growing phenomenon of its increased prevalence. We note its interrelation to conflict situations causing displacement and discriminatory national laws which disentitle persons to citizenship rendering them stateless, even in the country of their birth.

It is evident that over a third of the world's stateless are children, and the stigma of statelessness could follow them for the rest of their lives, event past their deaths.¹ The Citizenship of Fiji

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/statelessness/546217229/special-report-ending-statelessness-10-years.html>

Act 2009 contains a number of provisions which contribute to the prevention of statelessness and these include provision for children born in Fiji to be entitled to Fiji citizenship if he or she would otherwise be considered stateless.² Other provisions further facilitate avenues in which a child born outside of Fiji may be registered as a Fijian citizen.³ Fiji will continue to do its part to address the problem of statelessness.

Mr/Madam Chair,

We commend all States that have opened their borders to refugees and displaced persons providing them with a safe haven amidst the turmoil and in some instances, an identity of belonging.

We must continue to hold steadfast in our efforts to address the root causes of why people move, including strengthening our support for countries of asylum and transit, and renew our efforts to sustain peace.

I thank you, Mr/Madam Chair.

² Section 19(c) of the Citizenship of Fiji Act 2009.

³ Section 8 to 10 of the Citizenship of Fiji Act 2009.