

**Vanuatu's Statement on the Consideration and Adoption of the Outcome of the 2nd
Universal Periodical Review**

Geneva, 20th June 2014

Mr President, Representatives from Member states, NGO delegates and OHCHR staff on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Vanuatu which we humbly represent this morning, we are deeply honoured to extend our sincere and warm greetings to you all.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the hard working staff of the OHCHR, PIFs and SPC RRRT who have assisted us greatly during our 2nd UPR Review before the Working group in January this year.

In the context of the International Year of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) we wish to highlight the importance of the participation in international fora including the in the work of the Geneva based human rights mechanisms. We are therefore thankful for the support received from the UPR Trust Fund to accommodate our participation in both the review and this adoption process.

Allow me also to thank all the states that participated in Vanuatu's review and last but not the least acknowledge the troika members, namely representatives from Maldives, Algeria and Brazil for their assistance in compiling the recommendations.

Although the UPR process is quite new and only in its 2nd cycle of reporting, our Government along with the assistance of NGO's has taken the opportunity for this new mechanism to strengthen its commitment to continue to do its utmost best to support, protect and promote the human rights of its citizens even for a very small country like Vanuatu.

When the Vanuatu government delegation received the recommendations after its 2nd UPR Report during its 18th session of the Working Group, in January 2014, we indicated that Vanuatu would require further consultations in country before we can give our positions on the recommendations during this session.

Consultations were made with appropriate stakeholders and careful evaluation of the 109 recommendations were made on each recommendation. To properly address these recommendations for the next cycle of reporting, we have completed a four (4) year implementation plan to address the accepted recommendations. We have also classed our recommendations into 'thematic areas' so that it is easier to be addressed.

Vanuatu is pleased to report that it accepts 95 out of the 109 recommendations but has not been able to support 14.

The recommendations that have been accepted, include the following thematic areas : Ratification, Implementation of International Human Rights Treaties, National Human Rights Mechanisms, Human Rights prevention programs, gender equality, strengthening the judicial system and law reform, children, the right to information, water and sanitation, health, education, persons with disabilities and the death penalty.

With respect to the Recommendations that were not supported, these include 99.1, 2, 5, 12, 13 and 14 that relates to the *Thematic Area 1 – Ratification of International Human rights Treaties*.

For Recommendation 99.1 on *acceding to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Vanuatu is not able to sign this at this time as we feel that the crime of genocide and aggression is not a serious threat in the context of Vanuatu.

For recommendations 99.2, 99.5, 99.12, 99.13 and 99.14 concerning, *the Optional Protocols to ICCPR, CRC on communications procedure and to the Convention against Torture*, Vanuatu supports the spirit of these recommendations but it is still not ready to commit itself fully to these human rights optional protocols as lack of resources and capacity continues to be a problem to fully comply with our reporting obligations of existing human rights conventions that we have already ratified.

For recommendations 86, 89, 90 – 95 on the thematic area of Education which include reference to compulsory education policy and legal measures. Vanuatu fully support the spirit of these recommendations, however the term 'compulsory' is not in the current education act, we will however try our best to ensure proper awareness and consultation are carried out at all levels on the importance of children having education.

However it is to be noted that the newly elected *Prime Minister, Honourable MP Joe Natuman* was quoted on the daily post of 11 June, 2014 "*I wish to emphasize that this new government places high priority on education for all the children of Vanuatu today and tomorrow*" this might just be a promising era or positive years ahead to realise these recommendations and for Vanuatu to be able to address compulsory education in its legislation.

Mr President, as part of its commitment to the promotion of Human Rights, the newly elected Prime Minister signed an order for the establishment of the *National Human Rights Committee* on the 6th of June which was reported on the media release of 9th June, 2014. Before signing the order, the Prime Minister expressed his gratitude and appreciation with the efforts of the interim technical committee on the collating and submission of 2nd UPR report in a timely manner last year and the strong commitment by the Government to Human Rights principles that was commended by the international community during this 2nd UPR Review in January this year.

The functions of this committee will include (a) advising the government on International Human rights treaties (b) advising the Government on whether Vanuatu should become a state party to an international human rights treaty and (c) to implement and ensure that the government complies with international human rights treaties that Vanuatu has ratified in

order to ensure that the government's human rights laws and policies meet its international human rights obligations such as reporting obligations. The Prime Ministers' Office through the Ministry of Justice is seeking assistance in the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and is in the process of appointing a Coordinator for Human rights position to be placed within the Ministry of Justice who will assist the NHRC to oversee the implementation of the UPR recommendations and other human rights convention committees.

Vanuatu would also like to report that in May 2014, the Council of Ministers (COM) approved the 2nd and 3rd report for CRC, the Initial report for CRPD and new disabilities bill, the 4th and 5th report for CEDAW and the 2nd cycle of the UPR recommendations.

With regards to the outstanding reports of both CAT and ICCPR we would be considering to complete these next year and will have our stakeholder consultations this year.

Finally but not the least Vanuatu would like to report on the implementation plan of our UPR recommendations that has been approved by the Council of Ministers (COM). We have divided these into priority areas according thematic areas, identified responsible stakeholders and given each recommendation a time frame. We also have allocated responsibilities to monitor the progress.

A number of recommendations that will require national consultations. For example Vanuatu has accepted the recommendation to sign to ICESCR, and it is a requirement that at least two (2) national consultations are conducted with the stakeholders and the wider community on why it is important for Vanuatu to ratify, and about the obligations under the convention, the benefits and constraints. This is where we might be seeking support for technical and financial assistance in conducting these consultations.

Vanuatu is hoping that with a UPR implementation plan in place and approved we will be able to report and take proper stock of data and what has been accomplished and effectively report after four years at the 3rd UPR Review at the Human Rights Council, at the same time may consider those we have not been able to support during this session.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the member states and other stakeholders who have given their comments in response to our 2nd review.

Human rights continue to be a pressing issue in our changing society with constant emerging issues. The protection of an environment for upholding human rights for its citizens will continue to be a challenge as we try to protect, promote and strengthen democratic institutions to end impunities, discrimination against women, children and violence.

The UPR process although during its second cycle is still both an educative and learning process for the government and its citizens. With the commitment of the Government to

continue to uphold and promote Human Rights in our Country, we will positively take on board the presented comments and will use and capture them in our implementation plan.

Mr President we note that the Council is giving due consideration to the issue of the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its UPR. Members of Parliament are key decision makers in any country therefore it is of importance that they are informed and engaged in the UPR process. Vanuatu is glad to report that in response to the UPR recommendation we have received to that effect, we have started to promote this process in Vanuatu.

Mr President, thank you once again for giving Vanuatu this opportunity to present its responses to the 2nd UPR Recommendations.