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**VISIONING AHEAD TO 2030:
Promoting Stronger Partnership between Government and
Cooperative Stakeholders in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals**



Vanuatu Country Statement

**Approaches in areas of health, education, green economy, and care
for aged with emphasis on women and youth.**

Hon. Joe Y. Natuman MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Tourism, Industry,
& Cooperatives

DPM STATEMENT FOR SESSION 3

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women and youth.**

Mr Chairman, Director General, Ministers, Excellency's, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Republic of Vanuatu takes pride in making this statement, as this is the first Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference it is attending as a full member since its accession to the ICA in late 2014.

We thank H.E The President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Government and people of Vietnam, ICA and the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance for their warm hospitality and excellent organization and facilitation of this conference. In particular, we wish to acknowledge and express our gratitude to the Asia – Pacific Regional Office and Regional Director, Mr. Balu Iyer for his substantial support and assistance to enable Vanuatu to become a full member, and in facilitating our participation at this august Conference. Not only that, it should also be mentioned that in March 2015 when I was Prime Minister, Vanuatu was devastated by TC Pam, a category 5 Cyclone, we acknowledge Mr Balu for rallying

support through ICA for the assistance and messages Vanuatu received during this dark period. Your assistance, together with the support of the other Countries and donors, have enabled Vanuatu Government to serve its people, and consequently moved on to regroup and refocus its agenda politically and economically to rebuild a more diverse, inclusive and resilient nation in addressing the more important sectors and its 270,000 population. This new direction was recently launched by The Prime Minister under the name “Vanuatu Sustainable Development Plan 2016 to 2030” and it is also called ‘The People’s Plan’ and has three main pillars – Society Pillar; Environment Pillar; Economics Pillar where Cooperatives are expected to make a significant contribution.

Distinguished guests, before I go further, I should like to introduce Vanuatu to you, as it is clear many of you know very little about our Country. It should also be explained at this juncture that, while I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few remarks at this time, my presentation will give more of a over view of the whole Cooperative set up in Vanuatu, and not really specifically on the topic of this session.

Vanuatu is an island nation located about 2000km east of Brisbane, Australia, has 83 inhabited islands and having a total population of around 270,000. It is now a Republic but was formerly a colony of both England and France. Vanuatu has only 2 major cities with total urban population of 65,000 and the rest of the population resides in rural areas with their major activity being in Agriculture. Primary Exports are copra, cocoa, kava, beef, tuna and timber. Most of this production is from small holder farmers and family owned farms.

I should also like to make it clear at the outset that even though Cooperatives was introduced around the late 1960s, and it became a significant political tool to help us gain our political Independence in 1980 from Britain and France, it has failed to live up to the general expectation that it would be the basis for our economic self reliance. . The Government has a large dedicated Department of Cooperative whose role is to help set up Cooperatives in all sectors and to use these Cooperatives to drive the economy.

Vanuatu has 387 active cooperatives in areas of agriculture producers, transport, savings and loans, fisheries and retail and consumer placing strong emphases on promotion of women in business that result in 219 female managers. The growth rate of cooperatives over the last 8 years is 6.4% which constitutes to 13.8 % growth in employment and 11.8% growth in membership. Other growth indicators were recorded in the increase of cooperatives turnovers, profits, and in dividends and savings shared amongst members. Cooperatives have turned away from seeking donors support but getting into partnerships with Non – Government Organizations thus addressing gender issues, women and youth in business in areas of fisheries, agriculture, handicrafts, construction and transport.

Like most small economics, Vanuatu depends significantly on international trade in goods and services for its economic development to improve the standard of living of its people. The rules based multilateral trading system should be responsive to the aspirations of small and vulnerable economies and least-develop countries by continuing to provide a robust platform which would enable them to expand and diversify their economies and use trade as an engine of economic growth and sustainable development.

Today’s Cooperative Ministers’ Conference holds a special significance for us since this is our first participation after becoming a full member in late 2014. We are the first Pacific Island Nation to become a member of ICA and we face unique challenges because we are a small nation surrounded by a

big ocean, geographical isolation, sea level rise and natural disasters. Like many of our Pacific Island neighbors, the smallness of our economies and vast distances from major markets create further barriers for producers.

We acknowledge that the United Nations 2030 Goals for Sustainable Development sets a course to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. These goals have also been included in our National Sustainable Development Plan 2030. Cooperatives are recognized as important players to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because they foster democracy, practice social inclusion and operate with concern for the environment.

In Vanuatu, we recognize that the Cooperatives Development Model can be a significant vehicle to be used in achieving our Social inclusion, protect our Environment and achieve our Economic goals. Through the Office of the Registrar of Cooperatives and Business Development Services, which is an office under the Ministry I lead, we are in the process of drafting our New Cooperative Policy 2017 – 2022, with lessons learnt from the past. We acknowledge that for Vanuatu, Cooperatives need to move into a new era where the traditional approaches give way to new and innovative co-operative approaches including the formation of the first ever Vanuatu Cooperative Alliance body.

Despite scarce natural resources, Vanuatu recognizes the need to promote new cooperative concepts in the areas of food security, transition of the informal to the Formal Economy, the proper coordination of the rapidly emerging SMEs, productive employment creation, gender-equality and inclusion of women in leadership and business, youth involvement in business and working with the communities to promote and encourage the move into green economy.

Distinguished Guests.

Vanuatu is a male-dominated society but recent experiences within the Cooperative system and in the larger business environment have shown Women to be better managers, and these has resulted in improved status for women with some even being elected to Management or leadership role in business and regional governments.

Vanuatu has three main types of Cooperatives; Producers Cooperative, Consumers Cooperative and Savings & Loan. The majority of Cooperatives are Agri-Coops with a few small-scale secondary manufacturing and processing of coconut oil and other vegetables. There are also Consumer Cooperatives operating in retail, transport and fisheries sector. Some Consumer Cooperatives have been registered within the health and education sector where people who work in the same Sector have formed Cooperatives as a way of pooling resources to boost their purchasing power. In some instances, members do not see any direct income but their revenue is held in a Savings & Loan schemes and this is recycled to increase their capital.

Last week, our local news announced the result of two Sanitation Cooperatives making a breakthrough in the manufacture of Toilet paper; more emphases are being placed on youth which saw youth forming fishing cooperatives diversifying their business activity to savings and loans where their the cooperative paid their catches directly into their savings account. Last month,, a school cooperative was launched. The first of its kind and its purpose it to supply its members with school stationaries and food for the boarding schools.

As part of the long term actions to counter increasing youth unemployment, one strong direction the new Cooperative Policy is addressing is the inclusion of the cooperative curriculum in schools.

With respect to the advancement of other member Countries already moving in the directions of these new concepts, Vanuatu Cooperative Movement is in a transition era where a lot of promotion and awareness needs to pave way to accommodate these new ideas. These new opportunities will need to be owned and recognized by the Government and Ministry of Cooperatives, and to be driven by the Office of the Registrar of Cooperatives ensuring its implementation by the Cooperative members at large.

For Vanuatu, our development aspirations, as per The People's Plan 2030, are based on

- A vibrant Cultural identity underpinning a peaceful, just and inclusive society;
- Supported by responsive and capable state institutions delivering quality public services, including health and education, to all citizens
- Maintaining a pristine natural environment on land and at sea that serves our food, cultural, economic and ecological needs;
- With enhanced resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change and natural disasters; and
- A stable economy based on equitable and sustainable growth that creates jobs and income earning opportunities accessible for all people in rural and urban areas.

Our presence in this important conference shows Vanuatu's strong commitment to align itself globally, while ensuring the Government can empower the population through appropriate legislation and policies, and impacting change one community at a time. It is through participation in events such as this that we hope Vanuatu can learn from ICA and its members, particularly our ASEAN colleagues, and be better fortified to take our Cooperatives to the next level. Furthermore, as the only Pacific participant here today, we hope Vanuatu can count on your support to bring more of our Pacific neighbors into this Alliance.

I, as the Minister responsible cooperatives, together with my team present in this meeting, look forward to the outcomes and actions this conference will take and I strongly agree that in achieving the 3 objectives of this conference, the ICA members and their respective Governments including Vanuatu will benefit greatly.

We welcome the exchange programs and technical assistance from ICA and its member countries who wish to work with us to help us advance our cooperative enterprises.

Having said all these, Distinguished Guests, I again thank you for your attention.