

**Statement by  
HE Frans Baan, Head of the European Delegation,**

**“PRIDE”  
“Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education”  
(9<sup>th</sup> EDF RIP)**

**Signature of the Financing Agreement and Contribution Agreement  
26 November 2003**

Mr Noel Levi, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Regional Authorising Officer,  
Prof Rajesh Chandra, Acting Vice-Chancellor of USP,  
Your Excellency Mr Charles Mochan, British High Commissioner  
Your Excellency Mr Jean-Pierre Vidon, Ambassador of France  
Your Excellency Mr Adrian Simcock, New Zealand High Commissioner  
Ms Hilda Lini, PCRC

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Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very *proud* to be here today for the signing of the Financing Agreement and Contribution Agreement for PRIDE, the “Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education”.

PRIDE is the first programme of the 9<sup>th</sup> EDF Regional Indicative Programme to be signed and we expect the others to follow soon. (PRIDE is also the first 9<sup>th</sup> EDF programme to be signed in any of the ACP regions, and that’s another reason why we should be proud today).

PRIDE is also “a first” in another field: although not initially designed as such, it developed into a co-funding initiative between the European Union and New Zealand. Something we are very happy about and which we would like to see repeated in the region, whenever the priorities of both agencies coincide. It happened because the CROP HRD Working Group invited other donors with an interest in Education to join them, so transparency has already started to pay its dividends in this case.

The programme, for which the European Union is contributing € 8 million, will assist the Pacific Island countries to:

- (1) develop and strengthen comprehensive strategies for the Education Sector, which include formal and non-formal education and
- (2) implement some priorities of those strategies.

It consolidates the strategic basis on which country-led development operates and this in a sector that is crucial for the future development of the region: Education.

The institution implementing the project is the University of the South Pacific, a partner with which the EDF has increasingly become involved over the last years. Another expected result of the programme is that it will contribute to strengthen USP's capacity to assist Pacific countries in strategic planning and the implementation of basic education.

New Zealand has already provided funding for the start-up activities and that allowed USP to select the technical assistance team, which seems to be of excellent quality. We expect recruitment and full implementation to follow in the coming days.

I would like to remind all here present today of the need to make this an inclusive and consultative process, from the outset. Education in the region is seen by some as divorced from local cultures, values and traditions, and in many cases communities and even parents view the school as an unfamiliar institution, with which they are not involved.

These attitudes are not exclusive to the region, nor to developing countries. Education is one of the "difficult" sectors in most European countries, one which siphons huge budgets and seems always ready to breed new challenges.

Such is the nature of working with children and the youth, the true motors of change in any society. Such are the difficulties of finding a balance between the values, traditions and culture we want to preserve and the fast, ever faster, changes in the world and in the aspirations of our youngsters.

It turns out that our children are not happy in the kind of school environment we grew up in, they are not interested by the same subjects, or by the methods how these subjects are presented. And it seems that they tend to be less docile than we were when school reality did not meet our aspirations.

No durable balance has ever been found for this challenge; the only certainty is that what seems right today will be out-of-date in ten years time, or sooner. It is a challenge not cut for the faint at heart and it is one that can have most destructive consequences if a reasonably appropriate solution is not found. Cases of "lost generations" abound in history...

Unfortunately there is no "one size fits all" in this line of business, but the challenges often have common issues and we can all benefit from joining our efforts and experiences.

The partnership being sealed here today involving two donors and two regional organizations of the Pacific should be the model for the future direction of the programme: partnership as a key-concept. The Cotonou Agreement officially introduces the non-state actors as full partners in development. Few other sectors would be as appropriate for this approach as Education. Although it may be difficult at times, and definitely more time consuming, it is imperative that communities are involved in

national decisions affecting the future of Education in their country. At the end of the day we are talking about the future of their children

It is our role, as members of this partnership, to ensure that we are successful in this endeavour. We simply owe that to the present generation of Pacific Islanders.

Before I finish, please allow me to join Mr Levi in paying homage to the memory of Mr Savenaca Siwatibau. It would not be possible to present PRIDE without remembering Siwa who, as head of the CROP Working Group, so decisively contributed to the final design of the programme. And I will remind you that he used to refer to the growing numbers of young people leaving school without minimum skills to secure a job as a “time bomb”. This expression gives a true perspective of the challenge the Pacific island countries have before them. We hope that PRIDE will assist them to address that challenge successfully. As I said, we owe that to the present generation of Pacific Islanders, and we also owe it to Siwa’s memory.

26 November 2003