

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, MR W NOEL LEVI, CBE
AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF THE
PACIFIC REGIONAL INITIATIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF (BASIC) EDUCATION (PRIDE)**

Head of EU Delegation, HE Mr Frans Baan, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Acting Vice Chancellor, Prof Rajesh Chandra, Ladies and Gentlemen. I extend a warm welcome to you all to the Forum Secretariat.

2. We once again gather here this afternoon to witness another milestone in Pacific ACP/European Union cooperation. We are here not only to welcome the birth of a significant project for the region but also to welcome the birth of a “new era” of the EDF programme, namely that of the 9th EDF under the Cotonou Agreement, a unique development agreement between the EU and member States of the African Caribbean Pacific community. For me personally, the occasion marks one of the milestones during my term in office to have all fourteen of our Forum Island Countries become signatories to the Cotonou Agreement and members of the ACP/EU Partnership.

3. Talking about milestones, it was last year in October that I stood on this very spot and had the honor and privilege to sign the Regional Strategy Paper with EU Commissioner Nielson. This document as you are all aware, lays out the framework for development cooperation between the Pacific ACP member States and the European Union at the regional level until 2007. With this strategy, three important areas were chosen as priority areas for the region. These were Regional Economic Integration, Human Resource Development and Fisheries.

4. Human Resource Development is a key element in all sectors of the development strategies of our member countries and as such, huge investments in terms of their budgetary allocation have been directed towards education and training. It is perhaps unfortunate that too many of the children in our member countries leave school prematurely without the necessary skills to enter the informal as well as the formal sectors of the economy. At the same time an increasing number of students are unable to enter tertiary institutions because they lack the entrance requirements, and even if they do, many are not able to cope with the academic demands. This situation needs to be addressed urgently, and in this regard, I urge Forum Island Countries governments to do more in the area of developing education strategies to suit the basic needs of the people.

5. The Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of (Basic) Education (PRIDE) programme we signed today will obviously supplement the efforts by member governments to redress some of these problems. The programme will provide resources to help member countries develop and implement strategic education plans as well as helping them to coordinate financing through the wider donor community. The acronym of the programme, I believe, aptly captures the sentiments we all wish to promote in the Forum wide Basic Education Action Plan.

6. PRIDE as a concept was developed over a period of two years of wide consultation and analysis of pertinent education issues in all Pacific ACP member countries. Its design was a collaborative effort among CROP agencies, Civil Society,

other regional organisations, as well as the international organisations in the region. I would like at this juncture, to offer my sincere thank you and appreciation to all those many people who had assisted in the development of the PRIDE programme.

7. One person I want to make special mention and pay tribute to his guidance and wisdom in the development of the PRIDE programme is the late SAVENACA SIWATIBAU who was the Chair of the Human Resource Development Working Group which was responsible for the overall project design. There is little need for me to describe the qualities of this man but simply to say that his virtues of simplicity, honesty, and courage, had undoubtedly shaped PRIDE into what we are witnessing today.

8. Finally, but not least, I want to acknowledge the effort of HE Mr Frans Baan and his team of hard workers at the EU Delegation's Suva office for their tireless effort in piloting PRIDE through the numerous departments and committee in Brussels. The Government of the United Kingdom for the provision of technical support throughout the design phase, many thanks. We are naturally appreciative of the EURO 8 million grant the European Union has provided to the project. I want to also thank the Government of New Zealand for the NZ5 million dollars assistance which has ensured PRIDE got off to an early start. This is indeed good donor collaboration in an important regional development programme and I look forward to more of this type of cooperation happening in the region in the future.

Forum Secretariat, Suva
26 November 2003