**Human Rights Council – 39th Session**

**Item 10 General Debate** **on 27 September 2018.**
**Joint Statement on advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, in the Pacific.**

I have the pleasure of delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Fiji, and other nations in the Pacific, including Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Our ocean of islands in the Blue Pacific is home to many persons with disabilities – about 15 per cent of the population. Like many around the world, they face stigma, discrimination and exclusion and are among the poorest and most marginalised of their communities.

Over the last decade, Pacific Islands Forum leaders have strengthened their commitments to tackle the barriers faced by persons with disabilities. All countries have either signed or become a party to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

The *Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,* adopted by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2016, sets out the Forum’s vision for an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for all persons with disabilities, embracing the diversity of all Pacific people.

Pacific nations have many strong examples of disability inclusive development to share. Persons with disabilities have played a central role through their representative organisations, ensuring “nothing about us without us”.

All Pacific countries are on a journey to fully implement the Convention and the Pacific Framework. A key challenge is changing attitudes to ensure persons with disabilities are embraced as individuals with equal rights, inherent dignity and individual autonomy. Capacity and resources to incorporate commitments into national policy, legislation, service delivery and monitoring are often limited.

Technical cooperation and capacity building, including from OHCHR, support from development partners, financial and human resources, and strong partnerships between government and non-state actors are key to achieving an inclusive Blue Pacific ocean continent where no one is left behind.

**295 Words**