Statement by H.E. Mr. Moana Carcasses Katokai Kalosil
Prime Minister of The Republic of Vanuatu
at the 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Forum
20 May 2013, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

Your Excellency, Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister of The Kingdom of Thailand
Distinguished Heads of Delegations

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants to the Forum,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the earnest and efficient preparation by the Government of Thailand for hosting this Asia Pacific Water Forum here in Chiang Mai province, Thailand.

Mr Chairman,

It is indeed a great honor for me to make a statement at this Water Forum which I believe has proved its ability to make a meaningful contribution to addressing the most pressing water issues across the Asia and the Pacific. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the Prime Minister of Thailand, H.E. Yingluck Shinawatra, for the invitation to take part in such an important event.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prime Minister Shinawatra and the government of Thailand for their dedication in
realizing this 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Summit meeting today. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Asia Pacific Water Forum (APWF) and the Thai organizers of the 2nd Asia Pacific Water Forum for their tremendous work in organizing this Forum. I am truly honored to be provided with this opportunity to speak today as Head of the Vanuatu government at this very important meeting.

Water is the basis of all life and a resource fundamental not only for the maintenance of human life and health, but also for the preservation of the ecosystem as well as for economic and social activities. Water is also the basis for realizing human security. We cannot live a single day without it. Water is life, without it there is no life!

Currently, our precious water resources are now facing threats on many different fronts. Our understanding of the impacts of these threats needs a great deal more effort and response. In that sense, discussing and exchanging views and approaches to water security and water-related crisis management at the summit level during this meeting is of considerable significance.

The demand for freshwater is and will continue to increase whilst at the same time supply is becoming more uncertain. This is certainly the case in the Pacific region, where our significant efforts in improving our people’s access to safe water and sanitation are not keeping up with population growth, development and climate change. Currently, it is estimated that around 20% of our global population (people) do not have adequate access to safe water, and in the Pacific region this
number is even greater. Steps need to be taken now to address future water stress. Water scarcity could be imminent, as predicted by experts, if no drastic measures are taken and as many as three out of four people could be affected by water scarcity not in the too distant future.

Water-related risks and disasters are particularly common in the Asia-Pacific region and Vanuatu is no exception. All the disasters that routinely face our region – whether they be caused by storm, flood, drought, earthquake, tsunami or volcano – are critically linked to the management of water and sanitation. That is why in the Pacific we are working through a process that positions the water and sanitation sector within an Integrated Regional Strategy on Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change. This Summit therefore provides a good opportunity to further our own efforts in this regard.

As our population growth and urbanization increase, stress on our water resources intensifies. Climate change, as currently being experienced, is expected to worsen the situation significantly. As such, reduced access to freshwater could and may lead to certain consequences including the loss of livelihood security, reduced food production, health and human welfare, and un-sustainable socio-economic growth. Raising awareness of the importance of water as a means of security is therefore crucial; as such, we will continue to support the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (or IWRM for short) at the watershed and groundwater system level to meet economic, social and environmental demands equitably, inter alia to address the impact of development as well as climate change, taking into consideration
environmental needs, the interests of all stakeholders, using a participatory process in decision making and planning to achieve solutions locally that benefit all nationally.

Most of our water problems are not attributed to an actual shortage, but rather are the result of weak water governance and political will. Given the political will and commitment required, they are solvable through more effective governance, better integrated management practices and through sufficient amount of investment.

We, as governments, need to develop coherent and integrated national responses and policies to simultaneously address the problems, with the aim of reducing water security risks and disasters, maintaining environmental services and providing economic benefits, such as investments in infrastructure for water conservation and management. The Pacific, including Vanuatu, needs to be proactive in responding to these threats and it is therefore appropriate that the Pacific Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Water Management is being currently reviewed and updated. This regional approach in which governments and other key stakeholders, including nongovernmental organizations, civil society groups, and businesses, work together to clarify responsibilities and coordination mechanisms to address water security concerns is of particular importance to the Pacific. Related to this is the critical need for sharing and learning from each others successes so that resources can be more effectively directed at achieving beneficial outcomes for our people.
However, water problems can be so diverse that within one government there are typically two or three ministries in charge of water. They also involve highly diverse stakeholders and the differences in their stances can sometimes lead to complex conflicts of interests. In such circumstances, political will is therefore essential for overcoming such difficulties and for all stakeholders to join hands.

In Vanuatu, for example, a "National Water Resources Advisory Committee" was established through a legislative framework and initiated its activities with a view to bringing together water stakeholders in the country to address water challenges. The IWRM Sarakatata Watershed Management Plan pilot project, funded by GEF (2009-2013), is a classic example. The project profile can be viewed at Pacific SOPAC / SPC exhibition booth. It drew in not only the government but also businesses and industries and civil societies, to form a loose-knit cooperative framework.

Political will and financial support are therefore crucial to effectively combat the concerns that I have mentioned.

In that context, the fact that this meeting is being held to gather leaders at the highest level and various stakeholders under the theme of "Water Security and Water-related Disaster Challenges: Leadership and Commitment" in this historic province of Chiang Mai province where the cultures of Asia and Pacific join together is indeed meaningful in itself.
Vanuatu and the Pacific are determined to address these challenges related to water within the context of sustainable development and therefore reaffirm the prior commitments made by our leaders to achieve the internationally agreed upon goals on water and sanitation, including those in Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation including Pacific Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management and the Pacific Wastewater Framework for Action.

To conclude my statement, I offer my heartfelt wish that this meeting will bear fruitful results.

I thank you for your attention.