I carry Soil from my grandmother’s grave In a coconut shell
And stories, memories, names and songs of my village boundary
A carved wooden totem of Tangaroa, the shark god
And Pele, the goddess and keeper of fire
I carry Traditional remedies To heal the scars of proxy wars of modernization
And Christianity Simultaneously
I carry Islanders People
Living in the tundra

Carnage of droughts and king tides Between hope and fear
Death kisses replicates And sinking islands
Victims of a sea water rising crisis No one leaves home
No one abandons home No one does that Here
Unless
Home is sinking
Unless
Home is chasing you to the shore
Unless
Home is but a coral strip And water
Is measured from feet to knees
Knees to chest
And eventually
Chest to chin
No one leaves home

Returning home to nest
And our ancestral remains
Are no longer safe to rest
No one leaves home

Unless
Home won’t let you stay for another night
Because there is no more hope
And the ocean is, but safer

Disappear with the sinking shoreline
And frigate birds have stopped

Bula Vinaka! Noa’ia ‘e mauri!

Regional Councilor Ms. Ana Tiraa, IUCN delegates, Invited Guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

May I, greet you on behalf of the team of outstanding young eco volunteers and supporters who have worked side by side in the ebb tide to plant mangroves and clean up the Suva foreshore. All of them have a very special love and connection for the environment and they would love to be here today to empower everyone to protect mother-nature. We are a team and they are here with us in spirit.

My name is AnnMary Vikatoria Raduva. I am from the Mataqali Naiqoro, Yavusa Nayaumunu, Viwa, Bau, Tailevu and Malha’a, Rotuma. I am 15 years old and I am part of the generation who may be the best hope for the cause of slowing the impacts of climate change and preserving what is left for our own survival!

My opening poem is a labor of love – between a mother and child. My mother, an amateur poet attempts to capture our vulnerability in this well thought out poem – a gift passed down from three generations – and now I am
learning to embrace this gift of writing that I hope one day, I can pass on to my generation. We are lamenting. The land, our reefs, our fishing grounds, our forests are crying with us! We must heal and reconnect. We must do it now.

When I was growing up (and I am still growing up), I saw the world with rose-tinted glasses and my parents’ and grandparents’ childhood memories of “life back in the days” that I am sure most of you can relate to. Today, I stand before you with a **HEAVY ANGRY HEART** and **FEAR** – all I’m hearing are holes in the ozone layer, oil spills, plastic floating islands, extinction of animal and plant species, climate change, health risks, food security and high level meetings here and there – I wonder, is there anyone taking note of all the mileage flown or traveled, electricity used at these venues, hotels, restaurants, finances used for hosting these meetings and the amount of food used at all these high level meetings? Has any organisation or independent consultant worked out a chart showing all the resources used?

**ANGRY** – because my generation may be the last line of defense in this ecological and climate change crisis. And **FEAR** – that one day, my generation will not have the privileges YOU have today! Our basic rights to life, water, food - are at stake!

More than a year ago, with no hidden agenda and funds, I started campaigning for a total ban on balloon releasing here in Suva. In this space, I would like to acknowledge my parents, for their financial support. Although we did not have a big budget allocation for my campaign events – my parents made sure that there was enough money for transportation, reusable and degradable garbage bags, gloves, light refreshments and merchandise – so I could continue creating awareness and attention on balloon releasing, protecting our environment and climate change.

The objective of my campaign “**Say NO to Balloon Releasing**” was to raise awareness on the deadly effects of releasing balloons to remember or celebrate a lifetime achievement. I was ignored, ridiculed and was met with much less enthusiasm. I felt that my efforts fell on deaf ears. My parents wanted to shield and protect me, like most parents would do but I was determined to raise my voice and to give my generation something to talk about.

We took to social media and used the Facebook and Twitter platforms to raise awareness. I also use social media to communicate, mobilize and spread the word about actions. It is through social media that I am able to reach out to other young eco champs – we are not a happy-go-lucky group of kids making unnecessary noise and just holding up signs and used as props in high level meetings – we mean business and we are sounding the emergency alarm on our depleting ecological system and climate crisis.
Ladies and Gentlemen, balloons are bright and colorful; they are popular props for decorations, unfortunately they are as harmful as the single used plastics that our governments are hoping to ban. Our Fijian government is committed to ban all single-use plastics from January 1st, 2020 – 5 months from today!

In my effort to raise awareness on the effects of balloons, I am calling on the Fijian and regional governments to relook at your environment laws and acts. Our Fiji Law Act 2008 needs to be revised. It needs to be updated. It needs to be done NOW! These environment guidelines MUST classify balloon releasing as littering. We must ALWAYS look for eco-friendlier alternative ways to celebrate events and lifetime achievements and one of them is planting mangroves, trees and walking the conservation talk.

I also created the Young Eco Champions network for children Under 18 to reshape the awareness landscape around climate change and the ecological crisis and I am confident that this network of young, inspired and empowered environment activists will create change in protecting our environment. There is always a misconception that young children have no say on climate change and conservation issues and we are discriminated because of our age and gender.

The establishment of the “Say NO to Balloon Releasing” and the “Young Eco Champions Network” are to: (1) empower and support young activists because we feel that not a lot of attention is given to young activists below the age of 18, thus the urgency to establish a network or league for young eco-champions. Not everyone’s story will go viral but the more empowering stories we have, the better it is. And, (2) this is our future we are talking about. The recent environmental breaches here in Fiji namely, Savusavu and Malolo are a wake-up call for my generation. We are always said to be young and naïve and it is defeating for me.

I have been told and reminded in several occasions that I should be in school; that I should concentrate on my studies, get a good job and to leave campaign work to adults and professionals, experts and government leaders. I am 15 years old and I have seen the disrespect and ignorance from adults and so called professionals and leaders – they’re either on their phones, gadgets or walk away when they see younger children my age talk about climate change, environmental issues and sustainable development. I have also had adults blow balloons in my face or mockingly call me “Balloon Girl” – I am not offended – in fact, I raise my head higher knowing that the message is clear and people are talking about balloons.

In our small corner in the Pacific, we may not have the respect we deserve as young activists, but we are mobilizing my generation to protect our Earth because we have lost hope in our adults. I am convinced now that
my purpose on our planet is to save it from the mess created by your generation and the generations before you.

I am beginning to wonder if children my age feels overwhelmed by the immensity of the challenges we face.

I have found, in my campaigns that the main obstacle is trying to convince government and the private sector that climate change is a serious problem – they only think of making money instead of THINKING WHAT THE WORLD IS GOING TO LOOK LIKE FOR MY GENERATION AND THE GENERATIONS AFTER ME.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not old enough to partake in any election yet, but I know that if YOU, responsible adults, elect the right people into any leadership office, the world will change.

I am often asked ‘why do I help clean the seashore, plant mangrove saplings and call for a balloon less world?’

My inspiration comes from my daily conversations with God through prayer. When I asked my parents to support me with my campaign, they both agreed to pray with me. Pray about it AnnMary and God will guide you through – these were my parent’s advice. In our region, we are also spiritually engaged to our natural environment and we have exhibited this through song, dance, art and storytelling. This engagement governs the very way we interact with our environment. I am confident that we can also use this concept to preach and convert more people into acknowledging the importance of conserving our resources – in our everyday living.

My 12 year old sister Faith Lagilagi and one – year old baby sister Eunice have helped me in numerous occasions as I put my thoughts into action and they have always been there at all my brainstorming sessions. Thank you Faith and Eunice - I promise that I will never stop trying to protect our God-given home from being completely destroyed by the actions and decisions of our leaders today.

Honourable Member of the Fijian Parliament, Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, Lavetanalagi Seru and the Alliance for Future Generations – Fiji team, the WWF Volunteers, IUCN Oceania, Fiji National Softball Association and the Under 12 and 15 teams, the Fijian Ministry of Forestry, the many young eco champions and their parents in Fiji and the region – your support is always appreciated. This is our fight together! I am also inspired by the efforts and campaigning that are carried out all over the world by children my age. My younger sisters and my Adi Cakobau School family continue to remind me to keep pushing boundaries. They remind me that behind our messages, our activities and our commitment to soften the impact of climate change and to guard whatever resources left in our ecosystem – there is a greater group of young eco hero volunteers cheering us on.

I also learned a lot from my late paternal grandfather, a soldier, a farmer, and a conservationist who lived a minimalistic lifestyle. He was there at our very first mangrove planting and with good humour and wit, he said
“AnnMary, look after the environment and you’ll be well fed!” Words of wisdom indeed! Later, on a serious note, he narrated to me about growing up in a healthy evergreen and nature-wealthy Fiji and the need to protect what is left of its serenity.

When we, kids - make a mess, we are immediately told to clean up! I know this very well – because I am always messing up. But imagine if it’s the other way round? From Europe to Asia, Americas to Africa and the Pacific region – children my age are now initiating clean-up campaigns – cleaning up the mess that again – we did not create.

‘Moana: Our heritage, our future’, what a timely theme to focus on and act upon! If we do not re-nurture, lovingly sustain, smartly conserve and wholly maintain mother-nature, we lose our green-bountiful-self-sustaining planet to a world of: mountains of plastic, unbearable litter, endless pollution, 24/7 chaos and a multitude of climate refugees. We will all be guilty of not doing our part to pass on a better world to the next generation. The young eco-champ volunteers out there and I will not allow that to happen!

‘Global warming is a fact!’ The world and industrial leaders need to be serious in their commitment – in action and in financing the whole exercise. To put it simple: we need to link climate change to biodiversity and land degradation because these three key factors are intertwined. It is vital that society understands and are part of this huge responsibility to lower the carbon footprint, address climate change and put a stop to littering!

In our Pacific, the delegates from Tuvalu and Kiribati will tell us of the effects of climate change – the rising sea level. In Fiji, the tonnes of plastic in our rivers and seashore are a hindrance to marine life. And, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, climate change in the Pacific Islands will cause "continued increases in air and ocean surface temperature; these will further cause an increased frequency of extreme weather events – where rainfall increases during the summer months and decreases rainfall during the winter months." We need to seriously address this forecast and make the Pacific a better haven.

Imagine our pristine Pacific Islands, Ocean and sea becoming unkempt, imagine our evergreen forests chopped down to the stumps, imagine our rivers once brimming with fishlings, prawns and eels blocked with household waste or polluted by spillage from mining and deforestation! The relentless destruction of our ecosystems is depriving my generation from experiencing nature’s beauty, clean air, safe drinking and recreational water, nutritious food supplies and safe shelters.
The sad reality today is that we do not need to imagine these scenarios, it is happening all around us. The so-called industrialization and economic progress and corporations bent on profit making are wrecking our environment! They operate without a concern for the conservation of nature and their actions have launched an unstoppable ‘attack’ on the environment. These many negative factors and after-effects have:

1. Bleached our coral reefs,

2. Caused soil erosion,

3. Triggered landslides,

4. Destroyed our mangrove swamps and forests,

5. Over-harvested our fish and seafood stock,

6. Polluted our fresh water supply, and

7. Warmed our globe!

This list of negatives is endless! Our carbon footprint does not make good reading but it can be decreased!

You can start teaching my generation to be aware of this carbon footprint, how to define and calculate it and how to decrease it by returning to basics like: 1. If your school is in the neighborhood, walk or cycle, 2. Use a carpool, 3. Catch the public transport, or 5. Use wind power or solar instead of fossil fuels. Innovative learning and creating that curiosity to learn about one’s own carbon footprint will certainly be exciting during the science classes. Yes, your carbon footprint is calculated by the CO2 emitted into the atmosphere. Every student should be aware of one’s tonnage of CO2.

This morning, I also challenge the IUCN to put out an ‘easy to read and understand’ carbon footprint proforma for students to fill in. Yes, we definitely need to create that awareness of decreasing one’s own carbon footprint. If we start from Kindergarten level – the most basic of form – about how to protect our environment, we will never go wrong.

Earlier this month at a two-day stock taking meeting in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates titled, Abu Dhabi Climate Change Meeting, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres warned that “Climate Change is outpacing our efforts to address it!” He further announced that “we have only 12 years to limit the global
temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, beyond which we face irreversible climate disruption.” Ir-re-ver-si-ble! “Wow!” that is a stark warning! But to my generation it is a **LAST WARNING**!

In 12 years – yes in 2030, I will be 27 years old and I’m beginning to plan my future with “Ifs”. My future is not as promising as I hoped after learning about the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s 1.5 degrees findings and report. I hope to carry on talking about policies, implementation, resilience, adaptation and mitigation and to find a workable solution to A BIGGER problem that my generation and I DID NOT CREATE. I am still hopeful – even if countries like Saudi Arabia, the United States, Kuwait and Russia refuse to endorse the IPCC findings - that common sense will prevail. Yes common sense!

With the release of the IPCC report, focus is on the mentioned 12 year climate change ultimatum. IPCC warns that within 12 years, global warming should be kept to a maximum of 1.5 degrees. The IPCC also suggests that this is affordable and feasible, however, the onus lies at the most ambitious end of the agreement pledge that was signed at the COP 21 meet in Paris back in 2015.

At that Climate Change Meeting in Abu Dhabi, Mr Guterres offered some tangible solutions like, (and I quote):
1. Shift taxes from salaries to carbon; we should tax pollution not people. 2. Stop subsidizing fossil fuels – tax payers’ money should not be used to boost hurricanes, spread drought and heatwaves and melt glaciers, 3. Stop building new coal plants by 2020 – we need a BLUE-GREEN economy **NOT** a grey economy!

Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, there have been a lot of expensive forums and talk about ‘how to counter climate change’ but so far we young climate activists only see meetings and hear promises but nothing concrete is done worldwide! The world leaders are not trying hard enough! There is a lot of posturing but not much is done on the ground. We, young climate activists, just get right into the action. We provide the volunteer workforce, what we need is a team of workhorses in positions of leadership to facilitate action – yes, winning outcomes to decrease the carbon footprint! The solutions must be enforced and enforced now!

In that 2015 Paris Agreement, more than 190 countries did aim to keep the global increase in temperature to well below 2 degrees above pre-industry levels and to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees in order to reduce the risks and effects of climate change. The world needs to keep to that commitment and do more!

Like my Adi Cakobau School motto “**Leave the World Better than You Found it**”, conserving natural resources in our society is exactly that – managing resources for today’s needs and leaving more than enough for the next
generation. To save the world, we must work together – YOU the leaders of todays and US – tomorrow’s leaders and guardians of our planet Earth!

Protecting the environment, lowering the carbon footprint, saving our heritage which is our future is everyone’s concern. We, young activists and those hundreds of keen volunteers are ready to re-nurture the environment and maintain its serenity. We are ever ready to re-generate, maintain and sustain our forests and marine life – IUCN delegates, regional leaders, ladies and gentleman: what about you?

Thank you! Vinaka vaka levu!