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GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

STATEMENT BY

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**AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU TO THE
EUROPEAN UNION**

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 18th SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY
OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ROME STATUTE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT**

2nd - 7th December 2019

Hague, The Netherlands

President Kwon,

Honorable Ministers,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a State which accords high priority to the International Criminal Court and its mandate to help put an end to impunity for perpetrators of international crimes, the Republic of Vanuatu is honored to once again address this Assembly. Our small but strong nation ratified the Rome Statute in 2012. This is our fourth attendance at the Assembly of State Parties, which speaks volumes to our commitment for unity in the pursuit of justice and accountability for the most serious crimes. We recognize that credible international institutions are essential to finding peaceful solutions to the world's most intractable problems.

Mr. President,

Strengthening international peace and security is everyone's business, and particularly important to us Small Island Developing States. While our region is characterized by relative peace and stability, the fight against impunity is global. Moreover, the criminal justice system, domestic and international, can potentially address the greatest threat to human rights in the Pacific and, ultimately, globally: environmental destruction and climate change.

In May this year, Vanuatu hosted the Pacific Island Roundtable on the ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute in partnership with the Government of Korea, the European Union, the ICC and the Parliamentarians for Global Action. We thank President of the Assembly of States Parties, H.E. O-Gon Kwon and former ICC President Song Sang-hyun in particular for traveling all the way to Port Vila to attend this landmark event, which aimed to raise awareness of the ICC and encourage other States in our region to join the Rome Statute. At this juncture, we wish to convey our warmest congratulations to the government and people of Kiribati for its ratification of the Rome Statute last month. We look forward to welcoming more Pacific neighbors and other States to this august body, with a view to achieving universal ratification of the Statute.

Mr. President,

We need all hands on deck because our legacy and future are at stake. We have an opportunity to take bold action to protect all peoples of our planet which are united by common bond. The mosaic of our different cultures forms a shared common heritage. Our lives are entwined by the environment we live in. Resolving to strengthen the international rule of law to protect our common heritage and environment could be our joint legacy.

Mr. President,

The threat to our environment, and ultimately our existence as sovereign nations, is becoming ever more severe. Climate change phenomena and related impacts have continuously battered our islands over the last three to four decades, but over the past four years Vanuatu has experienced disasters and related calamities of unprecedented scale. Sea level rise and other impacts of climate change are increasingly compromising our ability to achieve sustainable development in line with the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda. We are not alone in this; societies around the world face similar challenges. Those who contributed the least to the problem are most severely affected. Science indicates that things will get worse, and catastrophic if we do not achieve the rapid and far-reaching transformations necessary to keep temperature rise below 1.5°C.

Mr. President,

The unprecedented challenges posed by climate emergency require unprecedented international cooperation. International law has a key role to play in this regard; however, this role has remained marginal in practice. At an event convened by my Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Ralph Regenvanu, in the margins of the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit earlier this year, we deliberated how the international rule of law may be strengthened to avert climate catastrophe and secure reparations for victims. We believe that the city of The Hague, as the world's capital of international law, has a special role to play in this regard. This august body - the Assembly of States Party - is supremely well-positioned to help realize this potential. Most notably, an amendment of the Rome Statute could criminalize acts that amount to Ecocide. We believe this radical idea merits serious discussion

in the face of recent scientific evidence showing that climate change poses an existential threat to civilizations. At the same time, we call on the Office of the Prosecutor to ensure that climate-damaging conduct that amounts to international crimes is effectively investigated and prosecuted.

In closing, the Republic of Vanuatu remains steadfast in its commitment to the ICC to ensure that it is able to discharge its mandate. We stand ready to play our part in ensuring that the ICC is well-equipped to promote and ensure international justice in these challenging times.

Thank you very much.