Bula! Willkommen! Welcome to the 23rd Convention of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) -- led for the first time by a small Island nation, Fiji, but held in Germany. The cold, rainy German winter days contrasted with the bright colors of traditionally dressed Fijian delegates and of the Fijian National Marching Band performing on the streets of Bonn. Inside the negotiation chambers on the implementation of the Paris Agreement, Fijian Kava drinks were served to delegates during the long meetings.

COP23 launched in the welcoming Fijian spirit of “Bula” and with the intent of moving the Paris
Agreement towards full implementation using inclusive participatory dialogues or “Talanoa.” Fijian Prime Minister and President of the COP23, Frank Bainimarama opened the convention with three questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? And how are we going to get there?”

*Where are we?* Two years ago, signatory counties to the Paris Agreement reaffirmed and strengthened their support for a global target to limit the global mean temperature increase to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius. At COP23, the last two remaining nations joined the agreement—Syria and Nicaragua. Every country has now submitted loosely defined nationally determined contributions (NDC) that outline country specific actions that are also within local capacity. Now, the negotiators are grappling with how to move the global financial mechanisms (such as the Adaption Fund and Green Climate Funds) of the UNFCCC towards the Paris Agreement while maintaining a global commitment to common but differentiated responsibility and transparency.

*Where do we want to go?* In 2017, the small island of Fiji took over the presidency of the COP in a unique joint effort with the country of Germany. The President of Fiji, eager to put a Fijian stamp on the Paris Agreement, declared that creating space for dialogue in the tradition of Talanoa—inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue—was a necessary step to define where we want to go. More than just dialogue, Talanoa also represents the tradition of sharing stories, building empathy towards making wise decisions. At the opening of the COP, the Fijian president commented, “we are all in the same canoe,” and expressed that dialogue among all stakeholders, parties, civil society and non-state actors is the only way to foster inclusiveness, mutual trust and respect. Talanoa not only reflects the first ever presidency of the COP by a small island state but also a change in the tone of the conversation. Talanoa also opens doors to all actors — state, civil society and non-state actors to strengthen the capacity of countries to achieve the ambitious goals of the Paris Agreement.

*#WeAreStillIn* As the last remaining countries, Nicaragua and Syria, joined other nations supporting the Paris Agreement, the US is now the sole country outside of this partnership. Through events that feature governors, mayors, business, university presidents and faith leaders, the “We Are Still In” network highlighted the determination of multiple actors in the U.S. to pursue climate action. More formally, America’s Pledge, is cataloguing all these efforts to assure the international community that the pledges in the US NDC will be achieved, regardless of the intentions of the current administration. These organizations even opened a pavilion right outside of the COP23 negotiation halls resulting in a line that snaked around the corner as delegates huddled under umbrellas waited to enter. “Where do we want to go” will be the question in 2018 and how to move a spirit of trust and open dialogue through Talanoa to include America’s Pledge, multinational corporations and local cities to achieve global goals.

*How are we going to get there?* In the opening ceremony featuring sea creatures and Fijian chanters, the Fijian President reminded the delegates that, “we are all in the same canoe.” The Talanoa dialogue provides a space for the subnational and non-federal actors like those businesses, mayors, cities and states assembled in America’s Pledge to gain a seat in the same canoe paddling along with everyone else. Talanoa helps embrace #WeAreStillIn, the rallying cry of America’s Pledge and provides hope that we can move past the challenges of implementing the Paris Agreement and surpass country-level politics as we move into 2018. Vinaka vakalevu! Thank you! While at the end of COP23, the canoe was still paddling forward, 2018 will be rough waters with extreme climate events increasing the pressure on small islands while wealthier countries are still debating. Moving that global canoe towards implementing the ambition of the Paris Agreement will take many more dialogues and the participation of all actors.