

**FORTY-EIGHTH PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM**

**APIA, SAMOA**

**5 – 8 September, 2017**

**FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ**



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The Forty-Eighth Pacific Islands Forum was held in Apia, Samoa from 5 – 8 September 2017 and was attended by Heads of States, Governments, and Territories from Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Republic of Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The Republic of Palau was represented by their Vice President, the Republic of Fiji was represented by the Minister for Defence and National Security, New Zealand by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Niue by the Minister for Social Services. The Forum Leaders' Retreat was held at Taumeasina Island Resort in Apia on 8 September 2017.

2. Tokelau attended the formal session as an Associate Member. American Samoa, Wallis and Futuna, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States Secretariat; the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations (UN), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the International Organisation for Migration and the World Bank attended as Observers. The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP): the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (PIFFA); the Pacific Power Association (PPA); the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC); the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO); the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); and the University of the South Pacific (USP) were represented by their respective Heads of Organisation and senior officials.

3. Forum Leaders **expressed** their warm appreciation to the Prime Minister of Samoa, the Government and the people of Samoa for the kind and generous hospitality extended to all delegations. Leaders **commended** the outstanding preparations and facilitation of the 2017 Leaders' and related meetings which enabled Leaders and all participants to hold inclusive and constructive discussions, and contributed to the overall success of the 48<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum.

**THE BLUE PACIFIC – OUR SEA OF ISLANDS – OUR SECURITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION**

4. Leaders **reaffirmed** the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* (FPR) as their platform for a renewed commitment to collective action to drive the region's policy agenda towards the realisation of the Leaders vision for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives.

5. Leaders further **reaffirmed** the value of ownership of the regional agenda through an inclusive and transparent policy development process. Leaders **recognised** the value of dialogue

processes with the Associate Member, Observers, Forum Dialogue Partners, CROP Heads, civil society and private sector to inform the Leaders meeting.

6. Leaders **endorsed** *The Blue Pacific* identity as the core driver of collective action for advancing the Leaders vision under the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*. Through this endorsement, Leaders **recognised** *The Blue Pacific* as a new narrative that calls for inspired leadership and a long-term Forum foreign policy commitment to act as one “Blue Continent”. In considering the shifts in the global and regional contexts, Leaders **recognised** the opportunity of *The Blue Pacific* identity to reinforce the potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and reaffirm the connections of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment, culture and livelihoods.

7. Leaders further **recognised** *The Blue Pacific* as being about all Pacific peoples comprising our ocean of islands, who recognise their needs and potential, who plan and own their development agenda, and who can act collectively for the good of all, rather than a few. *The Blue Pacific* is the catalyst for deeper Pacific regionalism.

8. Leaders **reiterated** their support for existing regional ocean policy and declarations, and strengthening of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner for coordination and advocacy of cross-sectoral ocean issues. Leaders **called** for the commencement of the negotiations in the UN for a new Implementing Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity on Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

9. Leaders **committed** to fast track the development of policies to ban the use of single-use plastic bags, plastic and styrofoam packaging and **called** on Pacific Rim partners to join and commit to action on addressing marine pollution and marine debris, to maintain the environmental integrity of the Pacific Ocean for people, planet and prosperity.

10. Leaders **called** for a united regional effort that establishes and secures international recognition of the permanent protection and integrity of the maritime zones and sovereignty from the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise. Leaders **noted** the leadership of Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Palau and Vanuatu toward integrated ocean management of their maritime and exclusive economic zones.

## **ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND FINANCING**

11. In considering the need for coherent implementation of the Forum Leaders’ decisions as well as the need to address the current fragmentation of actors in their support of the regional policy agenda, Leaders **confirmed** they are the apex of the regional architecture and the driver of regional priority setting and resource allocation. Leaders’ **committed** to ensuring a whole-of-government engagement with the regionalism agenda to strengthen the regional architecture and maximise effective use of resources, regional actions and initiatives; embed the Forum agenda across the CROP and its member agencies, including at ministerial and institutional governance levels; and commence a Member-driven process to converge regional meeting platforms and agenda setting processes.

12. In relation to implementing the Forum agenda, while recognising national needs and priorities, Leaders **encouraged** donors and partners to the region to align their resources, including through a regular regional donor roundtable linked to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting.

13. Leaders **instructed** CROP and its member agencies to ensure that meetings and their agendas are rationalised to take forward the Forum agenda in a synchronised way, and **directed** the CROP Chair to work closely with the Heads of CROP agencies and their respective Governing Boards to develop an implementation plan of the recommendations above and to report to Leaders on progress.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

14. In endorsing the *Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development (PRSD)*, Leaders **reinforced** the centrality of the FPR in contextualising global commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway. Leaders **acknowledged** with appreciation the work of the SDG Taskforce and all key stakeholders in preparing the PRSD. Leaders **committed** to focusing their national as well as regional collective efforts to ensure that “no one is left behind” and requisite resources are secured. Leaders **recognised** that the five elements of the Roadmap provided the requisite guidance for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda by the region. Specifically, the elements are: (i) leadership and coordination; (ii) advocacy and communications; (iii) regional monitoring and indicators; (iv) integrated reporting; and (v) supporting the means of implementation.

15. Leaders **agreed** to strengthen Pacific solidarity by ensuring collective efforts through improved ownership and returns from *The Blue Pacific* by way of specific initiatives including the following regional priorities:

### **(a) Fisheries**

16. Leaders **acknowledged** the progress made by the Fisheries Task Force in implementing its agreed work programme, and **noted** the need for national level policy coherence to support regional policy positions as highlighted in the Tuna Political Mapping Report and **noted** the need to consult further with the relevant fisheries experts on the proposed recommendations in the report. Leaders **recognised** from their dialogues with stakeholders that the increasing demands for fisheries resources across the region requires coherent and coordinated approaches to address multidimensional issues including illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing, and monitoring, control and surveillance.

17. Leaders **noted** with concern reports that the negotiation of a new management measure for tropical tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is being used by some WCPFC members, including some Forum Dialogue Partners to undermine zone based measures, that Forum Members have developed in exercise of their sovereign rights under international law. Leaders **called** on such partners to withdraw proposals for flag State based measures and to actively support Forum members’ efforts to gain benefits from sustainable management of fisheries in their EEZs.

**(b) Climate Change and Resilience**

18. Leaders **reaffirmed** their call for the Framework for the Resilient Development of the Pacific (FRDP) to be fully elaborated to reflect the outcomes of the Paris Agreement and **called** on the Forum Secretariat to undertake a process for this elaboration.
19. Leaders **supported**, on a trial basis for an initial period of two years, the proposed Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) governance arrangements agreed by the PRP Working Group to ensure effective implementation of the FRDP while encouraging flexibility to allow the participation of Members in the Task Force; and **committed** the Forum Secretariat to support the successful implementation of the FRDP.
20. With regard to the issue of fragility and vulnerability, Leaders **reiterated** their call to the World Bank for an expanded definition of “fragility” to take into account the vulnerabilities faced by Forum Island Countries.
21. Leaders **welcomed** the early entry into force of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in November 2016, at the twenty-second Conference of the Parties (COP 22), in Marrakech, and **reaffirmed** the Pacific Islands Forum’s commitment to continue to work with others who remain steadfast on their obligations under the Paris Agreement. Leaders **welcomed** the adoption of the Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (“Montreal Protocol”) and **urged** countries to accede to the amendment.
22. Leaders **recognised** the unique opportunity that the twenty-third Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides to the Pacific, building up on the outcome of the UN Ocean Conference, and **expressed** their support towards Fiji’s COP 23 Presidency.
23. Leaders **acknowledged** Fiji’s five key priorities for the COP 23 presidency, namely: (i) facilitative dialogue; (ii) implementation guidelines and the Paris Agreement Rule Book; (iii) Gender, local communities and indigenous peoples platform; (iv) Adaptation and loss and damage; and (v) Oceans pathway through 2020 that strengthens the ocean-climate change nexus.
24. Recognising the significant vulnerability of Forum Island Countries to the adverse impacts of climate change, Leaders **called** for urgent, ambitious action from the global community to address climate change, including the provision of finance to implement the Nationally Determined Contributions, finalising the Paris Agreement Guidelines by 2018, and launching an inclusive process to elaborate the Facilitative Dialogue.
25. Leaders **tasked** the Forum Secretariat to coordinate, in consultation with Members, the work of CROP agencies in preparations leading up to the COP 23 in Bonn, Germany. Leaders **agreed** to remain fully engaged in the upcoming regional and global preparatory meeting, including the pre-COP meeting to be held in Nadi from 17 – 18 October.
26. Leaders **supported** eligible Member’s application to the Green Climate Fund, including that of Nauru.

(c) **PACER Plus**

27. Leaders **acknowledged** the signing of PACER Plus on 14 June, 2017 in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, as a milestone achievement noting that eleven Forum member countries have already signed.

**SECURITY**

(a) **Radioactive contaminants in the Republic of the Marshall Islands**

28. Leaders **recalled** that the Republic of the Marshall Islands was placed by the international community under the trusteeship of the United Nations administered by the United States of America, both of which therefore have ongoing obligations to encourage a final and just resolution for the Marshallese people. Leaders **welcomed** the recommendations in the Special Rapporteur's report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2012, and that the statement of the UN Secretary-General on 14 August 2017 that "finding a solution to this issue is critical for the future of the Republic of the Marshall Islands" and his assurance that the relevant United Nations entities stand ready to respond to requests for assistance.

29. Leaders **supported** bilateral, regional and multilateral action to assist the Republic of the Marshall Islands in its efforts to engage the United States towards a justified fair and just resolution to the U.S. Nuclear Testing Programme. Leaders **agreed** to submit letters to the US Government urging the US to take further action to meaningfully address the ongoing impacts resulting from the US Nuclear Testing Programme, and to the United Nations Secretary General regarding any requests for assistance submitted to relevant United Nations agencies by the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and any other measures which may assist to address the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

30. Leaders **recalled** their decision from 2016 and **reaffirmed** that the Forum Secretariat coordinate assistance by CROP Agencies to the Republic of the Marshall Islands in addressing ongoing impacts of nuclear testing, including, *inter alia*, human rights, environmental contamination, and health impacts. Leaders further **tasked** the Forum Secretariat to report to the 49<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum on actions taken in this regard.

(b) **Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)**

31. In reflecting on the state of Pacific regionalism since the Forty-Seventh Pacific Islands Forum in 2016, Leaders **acknowledged** the conclusion of RAMSI and **recognised** it as a true testament to the benefits of regionalism and a shining example of regional cooperation and diplomacy, embodying more than a decade of partnership and cooperation amongst Forum members.

32. Leaders **congratulated** the Government and the people of Solomon Islands for the success of RAMSI and **acknowledged** with appreciation the support of all Forum countries to RAMSI through the deployment of personnel, and to Australia and New Zealand for the significant investment of resources to RAMSI.

33. In considering the recommendation by Forum Foreign Ministers to expand and strengthen collective action for regional security due to emerging security threats to the region, Leaders **agreed** to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum security related declarations as a foundation for strategic future regional responses, recognising the importance of an expanded

concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change. Leaders **tasked** the Forum Secretariat to initiate consultations on developing a comprehensive ‘Biketawa Plus’ declaration for Leaders consideration at their next meeting.

34. In their dialogues with various stakeholders, Leaders **acknowledged** the need to strengthen cooperation and information sharing in maritime domain awareness. Leaders also **recognised** the importance of addressing cyber-security issues.

#### **(c) Tensions in the North Pacific**

35. Leaders **condemned** repeated efforts by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to test nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and the threat posed to Guam, which constitutes a threat to the wider Pacific Islands region. Leaders also **agreed** on the importance of ensuring the full implementation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

36. Leaders **committed** to deregistering any DPRK trading or fishing vessels currently flagged on Pacific states’ shipping registers. New Zealand and Australia will assist other member states with intelligence gathering to identify illegally flagged DPRK vessels and offered to off-set the financial burden incurred.

#### **(d) West Papua (Papua)**

37. Leaders **recognised** the constructive engagement by Forum countries with Indonesia with respect to elections and human rights in West Papua and Papua and to continue dialogue in an open and constructive manner.

### **FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS**

38. Inspired by *The Blue Pacific* and building on the panel format initiated by the Government of Samoa this year, Leaders **reaffirmed** their commitment to reinvigorate their dialogue with all stakeholders in order to ensure more meaningful and robust engagement.

#### **(a) Ministerial Meeting Charters**

39. Consistent with this, Leaders also **considered** meeting charters aimed at ensuring greater alignment and coherence to a prioritised regional agenda, in support of the delivery of the vision and objectives of the FPR.

40. Leaders **endorsed** the meeting charters for the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting and the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting respectively.

41. Leaders **endorsed** fisheries and climate change to be standing agenda items for Forum Leaders given that they are both key regional priorities that require a whole-of-government approach, foremost Leaders’ close oversight.

#### **(b) Forum Membership**

42. Leaders **noted** that French Polynesia has deposited its instruments of ratification to formalise its membership status. New Caledonia is close to concluding its instruments of ratification. Leaders **agreed** that the authoritative text be in English only.

43. Leaders further **noted** that future applications should be subject to agreed criteria and due process.

## **PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGY**

44. Leaders **emphasised** the need to demonstrate members' equitable ownership of the Secretariat and ensure adequate and predictable funding of the Secretariat in order to safeguard its role as an independent body providing high quality policy advice to advance Pacific regionalism.

45. Leaders **agreed** to delay implementation of the Sustainable Funding Strategy of the Secretariat, which updates the membership shares in the *2000 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat* tasking further work to be carried out on the new sustainable funding arrangements to be implemented, to be tabled at the next meeting. Leaders **noted** the special position of Smaller Island States (SIS), especially their smallness and lack of capacity.

## **RENEWAL OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S TERM**

46. Leaders unanimously agreed to **reappointing** Meg Taylor, DBE, as Secretary General for a second, three-year term.

## **COUNTRY INITIATIVES**

### **(a) Insurance Facility**

47. Leaders **considered** the concept of a Pacific Island Climate Change Insurance Facility (PICCIF) to cover the impacts of Climate Change and **noted** a taskforce would be established to further elaborate it. Leaders further **supported** the idea that the taskforce would report to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting in 2018 and later to the Leaders meeting.

48. Leaders also received an update on the establishment of the PCRAFI initiative which is now operational.

### **(b) Pacific Connect**

49. Leaders **noted** the *Pacific Connect* initiative of Australia, which aims to forge stronger relationships between Pacific and Australian leaders across the public and private sectors.

### **(c) Visa fee free Entry (Papua New Guinea)**

50. Papua New Guinea advised that they are formalising visa fee free entry for all Pacific Island Forum members and **encouraged** members to consider offering similar arrangements to strengthen regional integration.

### **(d) Upper Air Space and Air Services**

51. Leaders **acknowledged** the importance of addressing equitable and accessible air services, including maximising benefits of greater ownership of upper airspace management by SIS. Leaders further **recognised** the urgency of addressing air services and upper airspace management and the importance of addressing these as separate issues.



**(e) United Nations Climate Change Displacement Resolution**

52. Leaders **considered** a proposal for a UN General Assembly Resolution to Give Protection to People Displaced by Climate Change.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**(a) Smaller Island States Leaders Outcomes**

53. Leaders **noted** the SIS Leaders' Summary of Decisions.

**(b) Candidacies**

54. Leaders:

- (i) **reaffirmed** their support for the Cook Islands' candidacy, as endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2016, for a position on the Executive Board of UNESCO for the term 2017 - 2020;
- (ii) **supported** Fiji's candidacy to the Human Rights Council for the term 2019 – 2021; and
- (iii) **reaffirmed** their support for Australia's candidacy, as endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2016, for the UN Human Rights Council for 2018 – 2020.

**(c) Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean**

55. Leaders **expressed** strong solidarity with the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, and the Caribbean region following the destruction and loss of lives in the wake of Hurricane Irma. Leaders **noted** that this was one of the strongest Category 5 storms to visit the Caribbean region and called on the international community to urgently consider the provision of necessary support and immediate relief supplies.

56. Leaders **recalled** the impact of recent cyclones in the Pacific and in particular the significant destruction to infrastructure and economies of small states. Leaders **reiterated** the importance for the international community to recognise the 'existential threat' climate change poses to the Pacific, the Caribbean and throughout the Commonwealth and the critical need to provide the necessary support as small states continue to adopt resilient and innovate approaches to pursue a development agenda and to meet the goals of the SDGs.

**VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING**

57. Leaders **confirmed** Nauru as the host for the 2018 Forum.