

## **SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM**

**WELLINGTON 5 - 7 AUGUST 1971**

### JOINT FINAL COMMUNIQUE

The President of Nauru, the Prime Ministers of Western Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, the Premier of the Cook Islands, the Australian Minister for External Territories, and the Prime Minister of New Zealand met in Wellington from 5 to 7 August for private and informal discussion of a wide range of issues of common concern. They concentrated on matters directly affecting the daily lives of the People of the Islands of the South Pacific, devoting particular attention to trade, shipping, tourism, and education.

The talks were essentially exploratory. Those present discussed, as neighbours and partners, a number of problems which concern them and possible ways of solving them.

Useful ideas and information were exchanged: helpful and practical comments were made: and new lines of enquiry were suggested. Quite apart from being of immediate value to individual participants the talks significantly advanced the spirit of regional co-operation and mutual confidence.

The Wellington meeting could be described as an ad hoc gathering of Island Leaders and Representatives of Australia and New Zealand. The initiative came from the Leaders of the Independent and Self-Governing Island States, all of which are associated with the Commonwealth.

During the course of the discussion attention was drawn to the forthcoming series of nuclear tests to be conducted by France in the South Pacific. Participants expressed deep regret that atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons continued to be held in the Islands of French Polynesia despite the partial Test Ban Treaty and the protests repeatedly made by a number of the countries attending as well as other Pacific countries. They expressed their concern at the potential hazards that atmospheric tests pose to health and safety and to marine life which is a vital element in the Islands' subsistence and economy and addressed an urgent appeal to the Government of France that the current test series should be the last in the Pacific area. The Forum requested the New Zealand Government to transmit this appeal to the French Government.

The following main items on the Agenda were discussed:

#### **Trade**

The Forum made a close examination of South Pacific trade, and particularly that between the Island States themselves and with Australia and New Zealand. A programme was instituted to identify trading problems requiring further study by the Forum members. It was recognised that changes in the world trading situation, as well as developments in the Island economies, created a need for regular consultations between the participants on trade matters. The Forum resolved accordingly that a meeting of senior officials of the five Island Governments be held within 3 months to survey production potential and marketing

prospects for Island commodities in the region, and to study and report on statistical, economic and agricultural implications with a view to making recommendations about the possibility of establishing an economic union for the area. It was hoped that New Zealand and Australian officials would join in this task in order to promote trade and economic co-operation in the region, It was agreed that New Zealand should, in liaison with other members, coordinate the necessary preparations for the meeting.

The Forum decided in addition that the officials' meeting should investigate the situation with regard to existing regulations that may be regarded as unnecessary barriers to inter-island trade and the feasibility of establishing a regional bulk ordering scheme. The question of treatment for Islands products entering Australia and New Zealand would also be studied.

Quarantine, shipping, customs tariffs and the difficulties of marketing products were also discussed. The Forum recognised that there were a number of problems affecting inter-island trade and trade between the Islands and Australia and New Zealand and welcomed proposals made for increasing the frequency of trade missions between the Island groups and with Australia and New Zealand.

### **Shipping**

The Forum agreed that a considerable amount of further study in this field was required. It was noted that a joint working party had already been formed of representatives from each PIPA member country to investigate fully the organisation and operation of a regional shipping line. An UNDP regional transport survey is also under way. The Forum decided that further discussions on shipping would be held in the light of the information provided by these two investigations and the results of the Senior Officials' Trade Meeting.

### **Civil Aviation**

The Forum heard a survey of current developments in civil aviation in the region. After a general discussion it was agreed that the present system of liaison and close co-operation among all the countries represented at the Forum was most valuable and should be continued and strengthened.

### **Foreign Investment including Tourism in the Pacific**

There was general agreement on the great importance for all members of welcoming and offering incentives for investment, and the desirability of ensuring a substantial local equity in all enterprises. Tourism, in particular, was regarded as most important to the economies of the member countries. The Forum recognised the advantages of joint tourist promotion, and noted that further consultation would be desirable, especially in the light of the results of the current UNDP survey now taking place.

## **Law of the Sea**

The meeting discussed the question of territorial sea claims in the South Pacific. It was considered that the unique dependence of countries of the South Pacific on marine resources merited special consideration in the recognition of territorial claims. The meeting welcomed the offer of Australia and New Zealand, as members of the United Nations Seabed Committee to keep Island Governments informed of progress of the Committee's deliberations and to draw the attention of the Seabed Committee to the special needs of the South Pacific Islands.

## **Developments of Oceanic Resources**

The meeting took note of the work being done by the Hawaii Oceanic Institute for Research and Economic Development of Fisheries in the Region, and learned with interest of initial trials in the Cook Islands. The Premier of the Cook Islands would report in six months how the scheme was progressing.

## **Education**

The meeting considered the relevance of a Western academic-oriented education to meet the needs of the Island Territories in their development, and discussed ways in which the University of the South Pacific could be influenced to take account of traditional values and adapt curricula to the requirements of life in the Islands. The importance of technical training to develop the needs of the region was emphasised, and the advantages of doing this within the region were recognised. While it was necessary to find solutions to these problems, the meeting affirmed their strong and continuing support for the University of the South Pacific.

## **Telecommunications**

The Forum discussed the possibility of improving telecommunications facilities in the South Pacific with a view to catering; in particular, for the needs of the smaller Islands. It was agreed that Australia and New Zealand would undertake a preliminary study of this matter for future consideration and that Australia should present the views put forward in the Forum at the forthcoming Telecommunications Meeting in Sydney.

## **National Parks**

The Island leaders heard about conservation of national parks, for historical, recreational and tourist purposes and welcomed the offer of the New Zealand Government to assist with technical advice and training.

## **Regional Disaster Fund**

It was agreed that the establishment of a Regional Disaster Fund would mean that some relief should be available immediately: it would show that the region was prepared to help itself and show an awareness of the close ties binding the Pacific countries. The establishment of such a fund was agreed in principle and detailed proposals would be brought forward at the next meeting by the President of Nauru.

### **Joint Diplomatic Representation**

Considering the expense of foreign representation the Island leaders agreed that there would be advantages in joint representation where appropriate, and that those interested could pursue the matter with each other.

### **Regional Cooperation**

The Forum noted with satisfaction the growing strength of regional cooperation in the area through the work of such bodies as PIPA. While reaffirming their support for the South Pacific Commission, representatives expressed the hope that its procedures and activities would be modified and improved to suit present day conditions. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a catalogue and analysis of the activities of all the organisations serving the region and Australia undertook to prepare a paper and circularise members on this subject. Meanwhile it was agreed that the Forum had significantly advanced regional awareness and cooperation, and had produced positive proposals for further joint action.

### **Future Meetings**

Recognising the value of the frank and informal inter-change of views and the opportunity for planning for future regional development afforded by the South Pacific Forum, the meeting said they would like to see its continuation on an annual basis. It was considered premature to institute a formalised arrangement, although this could emerge in due course as and when the need for it became apparent. The matter would be reconsidered at the next meeting. It was agreed that Australia should be invited to host the next meeting of the Pacific Forum.

The Island leaders agreed that as countries of the Pacific attain nationhood it would be open to them to join the Forum.

### **Appreciation**

The Island leaders expressed their warm appreciation of New Zealand's kind offer to host the meeting, and for all the excellent arrangements and hospitality provided for delegations by the Government of New Zealand.

7 August 1971