



"The Blue Pacific – Our sea of islands – Our security through sustainable development, management and conservation"

**Civil Society Dialogue with Pacific Islands Forum Leaders**  
**6 September, 2017**  
**Apia, Samoa**  
**SUMMARY RECORD**

The Civil Society Dialogue of the Forty-Eighth Pacific Islands Forum was held in Apia, Samoa on 6 September, 2017 and was attended by Heads of State and Government of Cook Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, French Polynesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Palau was represented by its Vice-President. Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Niue were represented at Ministerial level. New Zealand was represented by a Senior Official. Civil society representatives from all Forum Member states were in attendance. The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP); the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (PIFFA); the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; 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), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) attended as Observers.

**Rapporteur's Summary**

1. The Dialogue identified the following key themes:

- a. The Blue Pacific as a narrative for reinforcing the value of civil society working in partnership with governments for the benefit of all Pacific people
  - Recognised the value of ongoing civil society dialogue with governments at the national level, potentially linked to national planning and budget processes, in addition to the annual dialogue with Forum Leaders.
- b. Healthy Oceans, Healthy People
  - Reconnecting Pacific people with their natural resources, environment, oceans and culture.
  - The need to shift government budget lines to save lives and combat NCDs.
  - There is a gap between rhetoric in regional spaces and action at home.
- c. Inclusion, with Dignity for all People
  - Respect for LGBT communities, and the engagement of youth and women.
  - Self-determination and rights in West Papua, and commitment that this moves to the UN.
- d. Regionalism – shared opportunities and shared Ocean
  - The Blue Pacific is a resilient Pacific, but threatened by climate change
  - Balancing voice and perspectives on important issues - e.g. Sea-bed mining and PACER Plus, and the caution suggested by all parties regarding concerns and the need for ongoing dialogue.

2. The Civil Society Dialogue theme was *Partnerships for the Blue Pacific – an exploration of the role and contribution of civil society*. The Dialogue:

- Reaffirmed the importance of meaningful partnership and the contributions that different actors make, allowing for inclusivity and innovation;



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- Reaffirmed that civil society are partners to the region's elected Leaders and are willing to work together for the benefit of all Pacific people;
- Recognised the value of ongoing civil society dialogue with governments at the national level, potentially linked to national planning and budget processes, in addition to the annual dialogue with Forum Leaders; and,

The value of the dialogue was recognized and the President of Nauru stated that a similar dialogue will be held at the 49<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum next year.

### **Resilient Pacific People for a Sustainable Future**

3. The dialogue acknowledged the need for commitment at the highest level, for a sustainable and resilient region, ensuring a peaceful Blue Pacific, as custodians of the Pacific Ocean. Representatives of civil society stressed that an unhealthy ocean and unhealthy people would hinder our future livelihoods and made recommendations for greater partnership between governments and civil society:

- Prioritise budgets and programs for combatting NCDs as a threat to health security of Pacific's people future;
- Support Youth Councils to address youth unemployment issues through the establishment of an economic empowerment fund to promote entrepreneurship; and,
- Secure the health of the Blue Pacific by including youth, persons with disability, women and our culturally diverse gender identities in policy dialogue and decision making.

### **People at the Heart of a Secure and Peaceful Blue Pacific.**

5. Civil society outlined current issues relating to regional peace and security:

- Upholding people's dignity is at the heart of peace, stability and sustainable development in the Pacific; social, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing is equally important as economic wellbeing. Every Pacific Islander has inherent worth and value, without diminishment by age, life experience or circumstance.
- Leaders urged to adopt a resolution that ensures regular constructive dialogue and reporting on the breadth of human rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identities.
- Requested the inclusion of Civil Society representation, should an election observer mission be conducted by the Pacific Islands Forum to West Papua during national elections.
- A call for democratic transition support for Bougainville and New Caledonia in areas such as scholarships, training, civic support, and to revive peace programs for the region.
- Respect for rights and culture as a Pacific priority, utilizing our heritage as a narrative for framing contemporary development.

### **Blue Pacific Economy**

7. The Dialogue discussed the importance of the preservation of the oceans, and the vulnerability of our countries and islands to climate change and acknowledged that the Oceans are at the centre of our Pacific community. Civil society representatives outlined a number of current issues relating to a Blue Pacific economy:

- Our large oceans are in jeopardy. Our Islands are at the frontline of the impacts of climate change and these are now part of everyday reality for Pacific Islanders.



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- The importance of collaboration with all partners and solidarity amongst all Pacific Islands to ensure a resilient future. We need to take a step back and rethink how we develop our oceans in a way that is people centric rather than profit driven so that we leave behind a healthy ocean for our future generations.
- Concerns raised around PACER Plus, in particular Civil Society Representatives stressed the need for independent and consultative social/environment impact assessments before ratification.
- Civil Society called for caution, lest we damage our lands, our oceans and our people beyond repair, and called for adequate regulations over the use of our oceans, and for Leaders to take a firm stand against deep sea mining.

8. Most of the issues raised by representatives of civil society were not new to Leaders, but the perspective and context is new, with the changing geo-political context and the changing environment for global discussion on climate change. Leaders concurred with civil society perspectives relating to survival in the face of existing challenges such as sea level rise, disappearance of small islands and the destruction of our way of life. The importance of urgent action and ambition with respect the resourcing and implementation of the Paris Agreement was stressed. Leaders and civil society alike should support Fiji in its presidency of COP 23 and present a united Pacific position on these issues.

9. Leaders welcomed civil society as equal partners in ensuring a peaceful and stable Blue Pacific. They provided commentary relating to peace and security:

- Issues related to the situation in West Papua, Bougainville and New Caledonia are clear to the Leaders. It is important to distinguish between self-determination and human rights issues, and these are priorities that must be addressed under the appropriate United Nations mechanisms.
- The New Caledonia referendum of 2018 represents thirty years of political process leading to the referendum with focus on the economy and the various competencies with France in the areas of the judiciary and related issues. Remaining with France or becoming independent is pertinent to embracing a democratic process.
- Reference to the Samoa independence status exemplified adherence to the United Nations charter of guidelines to ensure clarity and solidarity in ensuring effective process to achieving such an outcome.

10. In relation to deep sea mining, there was recognition of SPC's technical advice in this area, but also acknowledgement of the diversity in perspectives on this issue. The reality is that mineral resources offer opportunity for economic development that will secure the future of our people. Civil society needs access to better information about these issues and Leaders stressed their commitment to ensuring appropriate environmental safeguards are in place.

11. Representatives of civil society were encouraged to read the full legal texts the OCTA impact assessments to have a better understanding of the PACER Plus; the eight year process of consultations were highlighted. The intent of PACER Plus is for the benefit of the Pacific people, and provisions are in place to ensure human, animal, plant and resources are protected.

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