

## **REGIONAL INITIATIVE TEMPLATE**

Please complete each section below.

### **1. Contact Details**

Please provide the following contact details:

<b>Name of individual or group submitting initiative</b>	<i>Daryl Morini</i>
<b>Name and position of primary contact</b>	<i>Founder, Centre for a Common Destiny</i>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:darylmorini@gmail.com"><i>darylmorini@gmail.com</i></a>
<b>Alternate email address</b>	<a href="mailto:dmorini@asiasociety.org"><i>dmorini@asiasociety.org</i></a>
<b>Phone number</b>	<i>+1 646-467-3746</i>
<b>Fax number</b>	<i>-</i>
<b>Mailing address</b>	<i>725 Park Avenue, New York City, 10021, NY, USA</i>

### **2. Name of Initiative**

*Mediation Support Unit: Mobilising the Region for Peace and Security*

### **3. Background and Rationale**

*You may consider: What is the issue being addressed by this initiative? What are the causes of this issue? Are there relevant studies that have been carried out to support the issue? Are there links to national, regional or international goals/policies?*

***Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.***

This initiative addresses the need for a professionalised, regional mediation support unit (MSU) at PIFS. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat currently lacks such a capability, as do other regional organisations, including the Melanesian Spearhead Group. This deprives PIFS and its member-states of a crucial diplomatic tool to foresee, manage and defuse regional humanitarian, political and military crises before they escalate to the use of force. The lack of an MSU undermines PIFS' ability to act substantively and effectively to prevent violent conflict in the region. Establishing an MSU would therefore bolster the Pacific Island Forum's role and influence in regional peace and security.

The potential causes of this issue are numerous, and may include: a lack of funding and a lack of political will.

The first issue is unconvincing, as academic research on the cost of conflict attests.

Preventing armed conflict is, on average, 60 times cheaper than intervening once violence has broken out. But the world spends USD \$1 on conflict prevention for every \$1,885 it spends on military budgets. The Lowy Institute's Jenny Hayward-Jones calculated that Australia spent \$2.6 billion on the RAMSI mission in the Solomon Islands. Similarly, the

economic cost of the 2007 Kenyan electoral crisis was \$3.6 billion USD. A potential military intervention in Sudan, according to one estimate, could have cost up to \$100 billion.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the cost to the UN of overseeing a peaceful referendum in Kenya was only \$20 million. A one-year civilian mission around the 2011 referendum in Sudan cost about \$10 million. Prevention is much, much cheaper than cure, and that is only in terms of dollars, without mentioning the cost in human lives, scars and traumas.

According to this research, investing several **million** dollars upfront in a Mediation Support Unit may save **billions** of dollars in costly and lengthy military interventions or lost development potential down the track.

Secondly, a lack of political will may be another potential obstacle to the implementation of an MSU. Such a capability would make the PIFS a serious regional actor and possible mediator in regional crises, strengthening its regional credibility. Whether such a scenario is in member-states' interests is ultimately up to them.

However, a potential MSU capability in the PIF Secretariat is perfectly in accordance with its own declaratory statements and regional vision. The **Biketawa Declaration**, for example, recognises "the importance of averting the causes of conflict and of reducing, containing and resolving all conflicts by peaceful means including by customary practices."

The same declaration also singles out "third party mediation" amid a range of diplomatic tools to prevent violent conflict.

The vision is there. What is currently missing is an institutionalised, professionalised and impartial mediation support capability, without which any mediation attempts will necessarily be *ad hoc*, unsupported and sub-optimal.

There are existing examples of functioning Mediation Support Units in other international organisations, most prominently the United Nations, the African Union and the OSCE.

The practice is long-standing in international affairs. MSUs *cannot* replace informal networks of powerful mediators, such as Eminent Persons' Groups. Rather, their purpose is to backstop such mediators, by providing high-level technical, political and logistical support. In the case of Kofi Annan's 2008 mediation in Kenya, for example, he was supported by a highly-trained team of UN officials and technical experts, which also facilitated civil society organisations' input into the Annan mediation. This level of support made Annan's mediation a historic success. This can also work in the Pacific.

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*See below for a more detailed discussion of what an MSU would look like in practice, and how the PIF can develop one.*

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<sup>1</sup> See Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict's The Cost of Conflict: Prevention and Cure in the Global Arena (Ed. Michael E. Brown and Richard N. Rosecrance, 1999); Friends Committee on National Legislation, *Preventing war is 60 times cheaper than fighting it*, available at: [http://fcnl.org/issues/ppdc/prevention\\_60\\_1\\_cost\\_effective.pdf](http://fcnl.org/issues/ppdc/prevention_60_1_cost_effective.pdf); Jenny Hayward-Jones, 'The high price of RAMSI: Australia's lessons from the Solomon Islands', *Lowy Interpreter*, available at <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2014/05/08/RAMSI-Australias-lessons-from-Solomon-Islands.aspx?COLLCC=932422203&>.

#### 4. Description

Please provide a brief overview of this initiative. Try to address the following: Does this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region? What makes this initiative of importance to the Pacific region as a whole? Who would implement this initiative? Who are the main beneficiaries? Are regulatory or legislative changes required at the national level to implement this initiative? How would the initiative be funded? Has this initiative been carried out previously? What are the key risks in implementing this initiative? Are there any complementary projects and programmes currently active? What is the proposed timeframe for this initiative? How would the initiative be sustained over the proposed timeframe?

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.

##### ***Does this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region?***

Undoubtedly, an MSU would contribute to positive change in the region. At the very least, it would prevent negative changes in countries and sub-regions most vulnerable to relapsing into violent conflict, especially West Papua, New Caledonia and Bougainville. An MSU would give the PIF a permanent capacity to contribute *directly* to regional peace and security. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of individuals would owe their lives to the mediation work of PIFS.

##### ***What makes this initiative of importance to the Pacific region as a whole?***

By strengthening regional peace and security, PIFS would stand to gain in regional credibility and influence. If, today, only a handful of regional hotspots present the real risk of exploding into violent conflict, no soothsayer can predict which other countries in the Pacific may fall victim to political instability. Better a fence round the cliff, than an ambulance down in the gully, as a poet once wrote. It makes regional sense to develop an MSU today, rather than on the day it is most needed, by which stage it would be too late to make a meaningful difference. 72 hours is the maximum amount of time an MSU should take to deploy, according to the UN's own practices. An MSU is the diplomatic equivalent of a fire brigade, which requires time and resources to train; it cannot be created once a fire breaks out.

##### ***Who would implement this initiative? Who are the main beneficiaries?***

The PIF Secretariat would be responsible for operationalising this initiative, with the guidance of Leaders. In time, a team of 2-3 Mediation Support Officers would need to be hired, trained and tasked with further developing the MSU. They would become the core of the MSU, in charge of its situational awareness, early warning, standard operating procedures, simulating mediation techniques and tactics, and developing mediation strategies. The region's inhabitants are the main beneficiaries, as are regional governments, which could one day be saved from the devastating scourge of violence and billions of dollars in lost economic development, not to mention individual lives lost and social upheaval.

##### ***Are regulatory or legislative changes required at the national level to implement this initiative?***

No local or national regulatory changes are required to implement an MSU, as the peaceful settlement of disputes is an established concept in international customary law (see the UN Charter), which all member-states have ratified.

##### ***How would the initiative be funded?***

See **Part 6** below for specific funding details.

##### ***Has this initiative been carried out previously?***

No such regional MSU capability has previously been proposed or carried out, to the best of my knowledge.

##### ***What are the key risks in implementing this initiative?***

The most obvious risks – from member-states' perspectives – is that PIFS would gain enough influence, through this

mechanism, to interfere in domestic politics and undermine the effective sovereignty of national governments. This concern is unwarranted. Any and all mediation missions conducted by the MSU would require the *a priori* consent of host and participating member-states, in line with regional norms and agreements. Preventive diplomacy, which this MSU would represent concretely, *cannot* be carried out without the consent of relevant states. Kofi Annan's 2008 mediation in Kenya is one among many historical examples of successful mediations carried out with host nation consent. This regional MSU would be no different.

***Are there any complementary projects and programmes currently active?***

There is currently no dedicated, permanent, endogenous and impartial mediation unit across the Pacific region. Some NGOs, such as Conciliation Resources, seek to fill this gap, but their work is severely limited by material constraints.

At the local level, government officials, church leaders, NGOs and prominent individuals practice mediation in local disputes. They are irreplaceable actors in mediation across the Pacific; an MSU should not seek to take their place.

At the highest level, the only inter-governmental organisation with a mandate over international (and, therefore, regional) peace and security is the United Nations. However, the UN's mandates and political missions are subject to political pressures external to the Pacific region: namely the whims of the great powers.

As such, there is no functioning, professional, standing regional institution with a mediation mandate.

***What is the proposed timeframe for this initiative?***

A regional MSU could be ready in less than three years:

**2016:** Recruitment, training, studying international examples

**2017:** First MSU simulations, exercises and strategic documents

**2018:** Full operational readiness of MSU

***How would the initiative be sustained over the proposed timeframe?***

PIFS would manage the minutiae, with specialised submissions from regional and international academics and NGOs to provide more concrete ideas. The support of regional NGOs would be crucial to keep this idea high on the agenda.

## **5. Alignment to Regional Vision, Values and Objectives**

*Briefly describe how your initiative supports the vision, values and objectives set out in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. These can be found in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism document or in the submissions guideline document.*

***Please limit your response to no more than 500 words***

This MSU concept is in line with the values and objectives of the **Framework for Pacific Regionalism**, including:

- "a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives."
- "a peaceful, safe, and stable communities and countries, ensuring full security and wellbeing for the peoples of the Pacific." and
- "Security that ensures stable and safe human, environmental and political conditions for all."

## 6. Additional Information

Please provide or attach additional information in support of this initiative.

**Please limit your response to no more than 5 pages.**

### ***How would the initiative be funded? (Cont.)***

The MSU should be funded from a special budgetary allocation from PIFS' overall budget. As noted above, the precise cost of an MSU would consist of the full-time salaries of 1-3 additional employees, as decided by member-states. Logically, the costs of deployment in mediation field missions would be almost double the cost of these salaries (logistics, travel arrangements, accommodation, private security, etc.). All in all, however, it is unlikely that a three-person MSU would cost more than \$500,000 AUD per financial year after initial outlays. This is a drop in the ocean of the billions of dollars which are required to deal with the consequences of violent conflicts, as in the Solomon Islands.

Additionally, an MSU is a concept which I am confident that - if correctly explained to the region's inhabitants – could be at least partly funded by regional and international crowd-funding. This funding mechanism relies on small donations from individual citizens, using a variety of existing web platforms (such as Kickstarter).

The middle and upper classes around the region could almost certainly contribute up to a third or more of the necessary budget for a regional MSU. I personally believe strongly enough in the importance of this idea to pledge the first \$500 to a regional MSU. Moreover, I can also commit the support of the New Caledonian NGO which I founded, the *Centre for a Common Destiny*, to campaign to raise funds for an MSU. Local and international NGOs could follow our example.