



For and endorse

**Statement
By
Hon Marc Ati,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation
and External Trade
Vanuatu Government
To the
First Meeting of Parties
To the
Treaty of Rarotonga,
15 December 2020.**

Chair,
Ministerial Colleagues,
Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with honour that I take the floor to express support, on behalf of the Vanuatu Government, for the Ministerial Statement before us which was prepared for our consideration by our officials. Let me begin by re-affirming the endorsement of the Vanuatu Government of key intents and principles in the Statement, for operationalizing the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, as directed by Forum Leaders during their annual Meeting in Tuvalu in 2019.

In welcoming Forum Members and non-Parties as Observers in our first Meeting today, let me also say that Vanuatu feels you are important stakeholders to stand shoulder to shoulder with Parties towards ensuring that our Blue Pacific region is always blessed with the bounty and beauty of our ocean space, and the land territory and airspace above them remain the heritage of our peoples and descendants in perpetuity to be enjoyed by all in peace.

This regional ambition is in alignment with the national aspirations and vision of our forefathers, who after championing our independence in 1980 had widely advocated a Nuclear Free Pacific, as a platform for promoting regional peace and security during the bipolar world era. Thus, I feel privileged to join you all today to renew Vanuatu's commitments to the Treaty of Rarotonga through our Blue Pacific

identity, the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, and our work to secure the Pacific Blue Continent against nuclear threats.

We agree that we must continue to act as a region towards securing our Blue Pacific Continent against nuclear threats. This is in spite of our assurance that since the coming into force of the Rarotonga Treaty on 11 December 1986 the number of nuclear arsenals in the world has been reduced from an excess of 70,000 to approximately 13,400. Our successful regional response against the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has taught us the important lesson that avoidance of a major catastrophe requires anticipation, careful planning and preventative actions.

In reviewing developments over the past 35 years, I have noted with satisfaction that nuclear testing in the Blue Pacific region had ceased permanently 24 years ago. I cannot, however, overlook that five decades of nuclear testing in our region, both atmospheric and underground, had left legacies that our peoples and environment continue to bear today.

I am also pleased to note that the Zone had been successful in promoting international peace and stability through its prohibition of Parties to manufacture, acquire, possess or control nuclear explosive devices, prevent the stationing and testing of nuclear explosive devices, and to prevent the dumping of radioactive wastes and other radioactive material.

I want to acknowledge the following achievements that may require further follow up actions: firstly, that all the world major nuclear powers have signed and ratified the three Protocols of the Treaty, except the United States of America remaining to ratify the three Protocols; secondly, the Treaty has served as an inspiration for setting up several other Nuclear Free Zones in the world, and there is scope for pursuing opportunities for cooperation and common objectives with these Zones; thirdly, several other key regional treaties on environmental conservation and protection in the Pacific have promoted and re-emphasized the objectives of the Rarotonga Treaty; and fourthly, our continued unity of purpose to pursue the region's firm commitment to a Nuclear Free Pacific and a Nuclear Weapons Freer World.

In terms of on-going challenges let me reiterate that Vanuatu continues to share grave concerns over the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation and its risk to the peace and security of our planet. We join others in the firm belief that their total elimination remains the disarmament priority of the United Nations. In this regard we call to an end of all actions inconsistent with Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Moreover, we continue to be concerned over the transportation of radioactive materials across the region; we will continue to condemn any efforts by the DPRK to test any nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles into the region; and we will continue to encourage the Government of Japan to take all appropriate measures to ensure that nuclear contamination does not spread within the Zone.

Finally, in re-affirming our commitments to the Treaty we call on the United States of America to ratify the three Protocols as soon as possible, pursuant to the announcement it made to this effect in 2010; we commit to promoting membership by all Pacific Island Forum Members in accordance with Article 12(3) of the Treaty; we call on other states to take all appropriate measures within their territory, jurisdiction or control to prevent significant transboundary harm to the territory of another state, as required under international law.

I thank you all.
For your attention