



## PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

### **Virtual Submission to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji regarding the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum**

22 February 2021, 11 am

**Dame Meg Taylor  
Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*Honourable Chairman and Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji,*

Thank you for the invitation to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to share with you today in your consideration of the *2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum*. I am pleased to present to you this morning with my Deputy Secretary General, Dr Filimon Manoni.

2. At the 36<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, held in October 2005 in my home country of Papua New Guinea, Leaders adopted the new Establishment Agreement and opened it for signature in Port Moresby.

3. Fiji was one of thirteen Member countries who readily signed the Agreement at that meeting; clearly recording their intent, and their consent to be bound by the 2005 Agreement, pending its entry into force.

4. The subsequent measured pace of ratification is reflective of our journey over the last 50 years; a journey that has had its ups and downs, never faltering however in our commitment to regionalism and solidarity.

5. Today, I am very pleased to see the significant progress leading to this important stage of Fiji's ratification of the 2005 Agreement. At a personal level, I am privileged to witness this occasion during my tenure.

6. Fiji's ratification will represent a significant milestone in our Forum family, and fasten the bridges that we have rebuilt within the Forum and the regional relations we have strengthened over the years.

#### **THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM**

7. Honourable Chairman and Members, allow me to briefly focus on the Pacific Islands Forum institution and its Secretariat.

8. Established 50 years ago in 1971, the Pacific Islands Forum – *then known as the South Pacific Forum* – was founded by seven independent and self-governing states, including Fiji.

9. Our 50 year existence spans a significant period in our region's history; one where many Pacific Island countries attained nationhood and joined the Forum family in pursuit of deeper regionalism for our collective well-being.

10. Now comprising 18 countries and territories, the Forum has evolved in shape and size, has undergone the necessary reforms required with time, and continuously pursues ways to strengthen our Blue Pacific identity and sovereignty, under our own terms.

11. Through the Forum and indeed through regionalism, we have achieved a number of significant milestones, including the enactments of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, supporting self-determination, sustainable economic development and regional trade, regional security, the Biketawa and Boe Declarations, and our global leadership in addressing climate change and oceans.

12. Forum Leaders are committed to their Vision for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives.

13. Since 1973, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat – *then known as the South Pacific Bureau of Economic Cooperation* – has enjoyed legal status, privileges and immunities in our host country, Fiji, as well as in all member countries.

14. I take this opportunity to express my utmost gratitude to the Republic of Fiji, its Government and people, for the continued support, generosity and hospitality extended to the Secretariat and its staff.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 2005 AGREEMENT**

15. Honourable Members, I now refer to the 2005 Agreement and offer brief remarks regarding its significance for Fiji and the region.

16. By way of background, the Forum has been governed through four successive establishment agreements adopted by Leaders in 1973, 1991, 2000 and 2005, and has had name changes once for the Forum itself and three times for the Secretariat. Our present name – Pacific Islands Forum – captures our vast family tree across our Blue Pacific Continent.

17. As set out in the information before you, the 2005 Agreement contains the latest suite of reforms to the Forum's constituent agreement, in accordance with Leaders' directives in 2003 and 2004 relating to the review of the Forum and its Secretariat.

18. Significant changes in the 2005 Agreement include the establishment of the Pacific Islands Forum as an international organisation in its own right, and affirming the principle of the equality of all its members. The role of the Forum is also expanded beyond economic development and trade, to "economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security".

19. As a way of facilitating regional cooperation and integration, the 2005 Agreement also broadens the Forum's membership by establishing associate and observer membership categories.

20. Fiji's ratification will be significant for the region as it is the final act required to bring into force the 2005 Agreement, and thus set in motion the next chapter of the Forum.

21. In the context of our Blue Pacific narrative, and securing our Blue Pacific Continent, the entry into force of the 2005 Agreement represents a timely opportunity for renewed hope and restored faith in our beloved institution.

22. Now more than ever, our common Forum identity is critical to collectively and urgently address and overcome our region's vulnerabilities and dependencies for present and future generations to come.

## **CONCLUSION**

23. Mr Chairman, we close our submission by congratulating and commending the Republic of Fiji for its decision and active efforts to pursue this final treaty action that will have significant impacts on our region.

24. I look forward to a successful decision by your Committee and ultimately the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. I also look forward to Fiji's incoming chairmanship of the Forum and its leadership over the next year.

25. Mr Chairman, I hope that this submission is of assistance to your Committee as it deliberates the ratification of the *2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum*. The Secretariat stands ready to provide any further assistance required, including responding to queries the Committee may have.

26. I thank you Mr Chairman and Honourable Committee Members.