



2021 PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING

27 July 2021
Virtual Meeting

OUTCOMES

The 2021 Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting was convened virtually on 27 July 2021.

2. The meeting was chaired by the Honourable Simon Kofe, Minister for Justice, Communications and Foreign Affairs of Tuvalu, and attended by the Honourable Dalton Tagelagi, Premier of Niue, and Ministers from Australia, the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Solomon Islands. Fiji was represented by its Special Envoy to the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu were represented by Senior Officials.

3. The Pacific Aviation Safety Authority (PASO), the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP), the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP), and the University of the South Pacific (USP) attended as members of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP). The full List of Participants is at [Annex A](#).

OFFICIAL OPENING

4. The Chair welcomed Ministers to the Meeting, and highlighted the unprecedented circumstances in which the meeting was held. The Chair reaffirmed the region's unity and shared ownership – *kaitasi* – in regional and mutual efforts to combat the effects of COVID-19 throughout our Blue Pacific, and commended the steps taken in response to COVID-19 and a range of other key issues, including climate change, sea-level rise, and ocean safety.

5. Secretary General Henry Puna, in his inaugural statement to Foreign Ministers, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve the region and people. The Secretary General also referred to the complex and heightened geostrategic context, and encouraged Ministers' support to continue to shape the engagement of the Forum on issues of key importance, including in working together to ensure regional solidarity moving forward.

6. The full statements by the Chair and the Secretary General are at [Annex B](#) and [Annex C](#), respectively.

7. Ministers **expressed** congratulations and well wishes to the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, the new Prime Minister of Samoa, and **acknowledged** with gratitude the leadership and contribution of former Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, to Samoa and to the region.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT, AND COVID-19

8. Ministers considered the regional and international context, including progress made through various regional mechanisms established by Forum Members to manage the region's response to the COVID-19, including the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C), the Covid Economic Recovery Taskforce, and the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Taskforce. Ministers provided further guidance to improve the region's collective response and recovery efforts over the next 6 to 12 months.

9. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **noted** the current status of the COVID-19 situation in the region, and **expressed** their grave concern with the fast transmission of the delta variant in the region;
- (ii) **expressed** condolences to Pacific families and friends that have lost loved ones during the global pandemic;
- (iii) **acknowledged** Members' updates on efforts to manage the COVID-19 pandemic at the national level, including progress on vaccination plans across the region;
- (iv) **reaffirmed** the importance of access to COVID-19 vaccinations to economic recovery from the pandemic across the region;
- (v) **acknowledged** the ongoing support of Australia, New Zealand, SPC and the Pacific Joint Incident Management Team, including the COVAX facility, in supporting Members with their national response measures as well as ensuring ongoing access to COVID-19 vaccines, and **reaffirmed** the importance of continued collaboration and coordination through existing mechanisms;
- (vi) **noted** and **reaffirmed** the decisions of the Forum Economic and Forum Trade Ministers Meeting in relation to COVID-19 recovery strategies, including their support for a WTO TRIPS waiver for COVID-19 vaccines;
- (vii) **reaffirmed** the importance of close collaboration across the region to address the socio-economic challenges posed by the pandemic, and **emphasised** the importance of access to timely data to inform inclusive and wellbeing-focused recovery measures, as highlighted through the report on the *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Pacific*;
- (viii) **reaffirmed** the ongoing importance of the PHC-P, and **supported** the proposal to further explore a harmonised approach to vaccination certification across the region to also support ease of regional travel moving forward; and
- (ix) **requested** that the PHP-C issue regular updates on COVID-19 vaccination implementation across the region to monitor progress towards achieving comprehensive coverage and support discussions on possible travel bubbles, whilst emphasising the importance of caution.

DECLARATION ON PRESERVING MARITIME ZONES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED SEA-LEVEL RISE

10. Ministers recalled Forum Leaders' 2019 commitments to collective efforts on climate change-related sea-level rise and maritime zones, recognising that climate change is the single greatest threat to our region, and that securing our maritime zones is the defining issue that will underpin the full realisation of our Blue Pacific Continent as envisaged by our Leaders.

11. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **noted** the progress made to implement the Leaders' commitments to secure the maritime zones of the Blue Pacific Continent against the threat of sea-level rise and to preserve Members' existing rights and entitlements stemming from maritime zones, and **further noted** Members' progress to conclude outstanding negotiations on maritime boundaries claims and zones;
- (ii) **commended** the FOC Specialist Sub-Committee on Sea-level rise in relation to International Law for its work to develop the draft *Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-level rise*, and Aide-Memoire, which provide a strong basis for Forum engagement and advocacy on the Leaders' commitment to secure the region's maritime zones against climate-change related sea-level rise;
- (iii) **recommended** for formal endorsement by Forum Leaders the draft Declaration and its Aide-Memoire, at the Opening Leaders Retreat of the 51st Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings on 6 August 2021;
- (iv) **recognised** the critical value and flagship potential of the Declaration in shaping global consideration of the issue of climate change-related sea-level rise impacts on maritime zones, and in reaffirming and elevating the Blue Pacific region's global leadership on Oceans; and
- (v) **welcomed** advice on immediate next steps, following Leaders' consideration and formal endorsement, to ensure strengthened advocacy, visibility and recognition of the Declaration at the global level, including at the upcoming UN General Assembly on 14 – 30 September 2021 and the COP 26 negotiations on 1 – 12 November 2021.

CLIMATE CHANGE – PREPARATIONS FOR COP 26

12. Ministers discussed the critical importance of COP 26 in relation to actioning and securing global commitments under the Paris Agreement. Ministers stressed the importance of effective participation by all Forum Members to ensure that global leaders truly heard the appeal of the Blue Pacific, despite the obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

13. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **reaffirmed** the urgency of the climate change crisis facing Pacific Island Nations, and **called** on all country Parties to the Paris Agreement to conclude negotiations on the Paris Rulebook at COP 26 to enable the full implementation of the Paris Agreement;

- (ii) **noted** the progress achieved in preparing Pacific countries to strategically engage at COP 26, and **directed** the Secretariat and the One CROP+ team to identify technical and financial resources to implement the two complementary approaches;
- (iii) **requested** the One CROP+ team to develop detailed negotiation briefing papers on priority issues for COP 26, including monthly preparatory briefings and delegation of support on the key thematic priorities for the Pacific to COP 26;
- (iv) **reaffirmed** the importance of climate diplomacy and **supported** regional initiatives to strengthen the capacity of Forum Island Countries to strategically participate at COP 26, at the senior political level, including through the COP 26 Political Climate Champions, in accordance with the region's position in the *Kainaki II Declaration on Urgent Climate Action Now* and **noted** the interest by Fiji to champion Oceans or Climate Finance;
- (v) **recognised** the importance of engaging Pacific youth from Forum Members in climate change projects and advocacy in the lead up to COP 26, and **requested** the Secretariat to invite all Forum Members to nominate youth representatives that can contribute to this work;
- (vi) **acknowledged** the relevant outcomes of the 2021 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, and **tasked** the Secretariat to work with the relevant CROP or international organisations to ensure consistent agreed positions, where relevant, and to support Members' agreed advocacy priorities on climate change to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and in other appropriate fora such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO);
- (vii) **noted** the progress made at the 47th Session of the Human Rights Commission in relation to a Special Procedure mandate holder on human rights and climate change;
- (viii) **noted** that the Pacific Regional Dialogue of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) will be held in September 2021; and
- (ix) **supported**, for Leaders consideration, the following to be reflected as key messages in their Communique ahead of COP 26:
 - **Reaffirm** that climate change is the single greatest threat facing the Blue Pacific and recommit to the goals of the Paris Agreement;
 - **Reiterate** that COVID-19 must not delay global climate action but should promote recovery investments that are climate-smart and in line with a low emissions development pathway;
 - **Welcome** the 47th G7 Summit in June and **note** its outcomes, **welcome** the Leaders' Summit on Climate in April, and **welcome** accelerating efforts to cut green-house gas emissions and keep the 1.5 degree Celsius goal of the Paris Agreement within reach;

- **Call** on all global major emitters to urgently commit to stronger climate action, and to formulate and communicate mid-century long-term low emissions development strategies, which may include commitments and strategies to achieve net zero carbon by 2050, taking into account the urgency highlighted by the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 degree Celsius, and establish the necessary policy, financing and governance mechanisms required to achieve this;
- **Urge** all Parties to the Paris Agreement to ensure that COP 26 concludes negotiation on the Paris Rulebook, delivers an outcome that promotes stronger transparency and pursues efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and mobilises scaled-up climate finance for adaptation from all sources, and **reiterate** our call in the *Kainaki II Declaration* for the international community to continue efforts towards meeting their climate finance commitment of US \$100 billion per year from a variety of sources and accelerate support for the work of the *Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts*;
- **Urge** all Parties to the UNFCCC to ensure that COP 26 advances the work on Oceans in the UNFCCC, recognising its centrality to the Blue Pacific Continent; and
- **Support** regional approaches to strengthen Forum Island Countries' strategic participation at COP 26, including through the COP 26 Political Climate Champions.

JAPAN FUKUSHIMA ALPS TREATED WATER

14. Ministers considered key developments since Japan's announcement to discharge Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) Treated Water into the Pacific Ocean and were deeply concerned over the implications such a decision would have on the health and wellbeing of the Blue Pacific Continent. Ministers emphasised the critical role of the Forum as custodians of the Blue Pacific Ocean.

15. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **noted** Japan's announcement on 13 April 2021 of its plans to discharge over a million tonnes of ALPS Treated Water into the Pacific Ocean, and **reiterated** Forum Leaders' concerns on the potential significant threat of nuclear contamination to the Blue Pacific;
- (ii) **noted** the concerns surrounding the seriousness of this issue in relation to the potential threat of further nuclear contamination of our Blue Pacific and the potential adverse and transboundary impacts to the health and security of the Blue Pacific Continent, and its peoples over both the short and long term;
- (iii) **acknowledged** the collective effort by Members to date, through the PALM9 process, to raise their concerns with the Government of Japan;

- (iv) **recalled** the Forum Leaders' undertaking at the PALM9 Leaders Meeting, as reflected in the Declaration, highlighting the priority of ensuring international consultation, international law, and independent and verifiable scientific assessments and guidance, and **noted** Japan's undertaking it would provide Forum Members with explanations based on scientific evidence, in a highly transparent and timely manner and in close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);
- (v) **supported** Policy Option 2 as the approach for continued Forum engagement on this issue, and noting that Forum Members have committed to pursue independent guidance to interpret the scientific evidence as it becomes available;
- (vi) **tasked** the Secretariat and CROP agencies to coordinate continued analysis of this issue to support Members to put in place the necessary measures and safeguards to secure the Blue Pacific Continent, noting the urgent timelines involved, and **further noted** Australia's offer to provide technical expertise to interpret information as they become available;
- (vii) **supported** the utilisation of all existing Forum and CROP mechanisms, and mechanisms under relevant regional treaties and conventions, including the convening of experts as required to progress consideration of policy options and related activities as agreed to in (vi) above; and
- (viii) **noted** the important role of the IAEA, and **agreed** to propose the nomination of a Pacific region nuclear expert, Mrs Rhea Moss-Christian, Chairperson of the Republic of the Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission, to participate and provide regional perspectives in the IAEA Taskforce on Safety Related Aspects of Handling ALPS Treated Water at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, while noting.

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE 2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT

16. Ministers considered an update on the progress of the comprehensive work undertaken to develop a progressive, carefully considered and inclusive strategy for the Blue Pacific. Ministers looked forward to considering the Strategy over the course of the 51st Pacific Islands Forum.

17. Forum Foreign Ministers **noted** progress made to develop the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and **endorsed** the next steps and updated work plan for the 2050 Strategy.

OTHER MATTERS

New Zealand Country Initiative: Strategic Discussion on Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meeting

18. As the Chair of APEC, New Zealand provided an update on its work so far and highlighted its intent to leverage its role to also progress mutual Forum priorities, in particular COVID-19 recovery, labour mobility, climate change and Oceans.

19. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **congratulated** and **welcomed** New Zealand's chairing of the APEC and its efforts to ensure that the Pacific voice and priorities are heard and considered in the APEC forum, in particular, initiatives relating to COVID-19 economic recovery efforts across the Pacific region;
- (ii) **welcomed** the opportunity for the Forum Chair to present a Forum Statement at the APEC, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, and **tasked** the Secretariat to consult with Members and coordinate accordingly;
- (iii) mindful of the emerging priority of digitalisation during this pandemic, **called** on APEC to consider expediting its discussions and efforts on the digital agenda, as championed by Papua New Guinea in 2018; and
- (iv) **welcomed** APEC's consideration on the strengthened advocacy against the trade of illicit drugs and transnational crime.

Country Paper by Tonga: Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment

20. Tonga provided a paper on strengthening disaster readiness to severe weather, water and ocean events across the Pacific.

21. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **endorsed** the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment, which seeks to reduce the human and economic cost of severe weather, water and ocean events across Pacific Island communities, by strengthening national meteorological and hydrological organisations and their partnerships with national disaster management organisations;
- (ii) **recognised** that the Decadal Programme of Investment is a comprehensive approach and responds to the needs of the Pacific region;
- (iii) **directed** the Secretariat to bring the Decadal Programme of Investment to the attention of Leaders for their endorsement, and for sharing with Forum Dialogue Partners; and
- (iv) **requested** SPREP as the secretariat of PMC to continue to seek funding for the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment, and report back to FOC on progress.

Country Paper by Tuvalu: A Proposed Call to Revitalise the CROP ICT Working Group

22. Tuvalu tabled a paper stressing the significance of ICT in the face of COVID-19, and the importance of a well-coordinated CROP effort to respond to Members' needs.

23. Ministers **recommended** that Members call on the CROP ICT Working Group to provide development updates and an update on the progress of the PRISAP through this paper,

which will be tabled at the FOC Meeting, the Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting (FFMM), and/or the Forum Leaders Meeting for comment and endorsement and to be shared with all members of CROP.

Country Paper by Tuvalu: Proposed Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting Joint Statement on Blue Pacific Leadership in pre-Pandemic and pre-Disaster Planning

24. Tuvalu proposed the development of a statement on importance of early pandemic and disaster planning.

25. Forum Foreign Ministers **noted** the content of the paper, and **welcomed** the development of a Forum Foreign Ministers Statement to be further considered by the Committee before being tabled with the Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting for final endorsement, and **further noted** that the paper would be tabled at the next FFMM for noting.

Arrangements for the 2021 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting and Related Meetings

26. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **strongly commended** Tuvalu for its exemplary leadership and Chairmanship of the Forum from 2019 – 2021, and its stoic and resilient tenure in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the region;
- (ii) **congratulated** Fiji as incoming Chair, and **welcomed** Fiji’s preparations and plans for the 51st Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings, in particular the convening of the virtual Forum Leaders Meeting on 6 August 2021, and a face-to-face Forum Leaders Meeting in January 2022 subject to developments relating to COVID-19; and
- (iii) **supported** the proposal by Fiji for the conduct and modalities of the 51st Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings.

MATTERS ENDORSED THROUGH OUT-OF-SESSION CONSIDERATION

Report of the Forum Officials Sub-Committee on International Engagement and Advocacy

27. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **welcomed** the work of the FOC Sub-Committee for Forum International Engagement and Advocacy in driving strategic and proactive international advocacy on the Forum’s policy priorities; and
- (ii) **agreed** to refocus the Forum’s international advocacy priorities towards: a) 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent; b) COVID-19 response and recovery; c) climate change and resilience; d) sustainable ocean management, use and conservation; and e) regional security, with a key focus on maritime boundaries and sea level rise, and nuclear legacy issues as cross-cutting issues.

Review of Criteria and Guidelines for Forum Dialogue Partners and Observers & Forum Dialogue Partner applications

28. Forum Foreign Ministers:

- (i) **considered** and **endorsed** the revised Criteria and Guidelines for Forum Observers;
- (ii) **considered** and **endorsed** the revised Criteria and Guidelines for Forum Dialogue Partners;
- (iii) **recommended** further consideration and potential reform of the Forum's partnership mechanisms within the context of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and as part of the Review of the Regional Architecture, to ensure the right mix of partners and partnership mechanisms to strengthen Pacific regionalism and support delivery of the 2050 Strategy;
- (iv) **considered** and **supported** applications for Forum Dialogue Partner status from Chile, Norway, and Singapore as against the draft revised Criteria and Guidelines for Forum Dialogue Partners;
- (v) **recommend** the PIF Secretary General write to Chile, Norway and Singapore and all Forum Dialogue Partners to affirm their ongoing interest and intent in being a Forum Dialogue Partner based on the revised Criteria and Guidelines, ahead of Forum Leaders' consideration of this matter; and
- (vi) **supported** a moratorium on new applications for Forum Dialogue Partner and Forum Observer status until finalisation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and scheduled Review of the Regional Architecture.

Review of the Pacific Islands Development Program CROP Membership

29. Forum Foreign Ministers **recommended** to Leaders that the Pacific Islands Development Program remain a CROP member, subject to the adoption of the CROP Charter at the December 2021 meeting of the Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders Standing Committee.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva
27 July 2021

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Ms Nikola Komailevuka
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Mr Teanuanua Nicole
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Ms Pritika Bijay
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OPENING REMARKS BY

**THE HONOURABLE SIMON KOFE
MINISTER OF JUSTICE, COMMUNICATION
AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TUVALU**

Secretary General, Honourable Ministers and Senior Officials, and representatives from CROP agencies and Forum Observers – thank you all for joining the 2021 Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting.

At the outset, I would like to highlight the unprecedented circumstances in which today’s meeting is being held—unprecedented circumstances that have followed us for much of the past year. As a region, we stand together in our mutual efforts to combat the effects of COVID-19 throughout our Blue Pacific. I would like to express my deepest concern and condolences to all of our Members who are currently, or who have in the past, suffered trauma and loss of life due to the virus.

However, I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the steps we, as a region, have been taking in response not only to COVID-19 but to a range of issues, including climate change, sea-level rise, and ocean safety. I am of the firm view that the only way forward for our Blue Pacific Continent is through region-oriented and future-looking initiatives that seek to overcome the problems we face in innovative ways. It is clear from today’s agenda, that the Pacific Islands Forum is progressing this region-oriented and future-looking approach for the benefit of all Members. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent is a true mark of this.

During this meeting, we will discuss various regional efforts to combat COVID-19, as well as moves to ensure that our region clearly expresses its commitment to pre-pandemic and pre-disaster planning both now and beyond the COVID-19 era. We will look at paths forward for strengthening our collective responses to the COVID-19 crisis, including through vaccinations and harmonized approaches to vaccination certification. We will only be successful with regard to COVID-19 if we work together, put in place firms plans of action, and think long-term and toward the future.

Our consideration today of the normative declaration on sea level rise and maritime zones is another outstanding example of the future-looking strides currently guiding our region. Our Leaders’ have committed to securing our maritime zones against the threat of sea-level rise because they recognize the long-term existential threats of climate change. In progressing this work, we, as a region, are taking concrete action to safeguard our nations and our future generations against all possible climate-change scenarios. In response to climate change, we must act now to protect ourselves in the present and into the future. This includes working collectively to ensure ambitious climate action and full implementation of the Paris Agreement is secured at the 26th COP this November.

Our response to the ALPS treated water issue is a further, clear example of the region-oriented and future-looking approach shaping today’s meeting. As a region, as an interconnected Pacific continent, we are committed to protecting our oceans. As stewards of the Pacific, we recognize how bleak our future will be if we do not exercise the utmost care in safeguarding our sea—our cultural and economic sustenance. In Tuvalu, we speak of *kaitasi* or shared ownership. We—and our partners—must take shared responsibility for our lands, our peoples, and our oceans. Our caution and diplomacy on this issue underscores both our appreciation for our partners and our solidarity in protecting our region.

I am gratified to be chairing today’s meeting, especially in light of the important matters we will discuss and how they promise to shape our region into the future. I look forward to our discussions today and thank you all once again.

**INAUGURAL STATEMENT FOR THE
FORUM FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING**

**MR HENRY PUNA
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM**

The Honourable Simon Kofe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tuvalu and Chair of the Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting

The Honourable Reverend Dr Pohiva Tu'i'onetoa, Prime Minister of Tonga

His Excellency, Dalton Tagelagi, Premier of Niue

Excellencies and Senior Officials

Heads of CROP Agencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Intro and personal vision

It is my distinct privilege to address you today in my capacity as Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum.

I realise that I assume this role at one of the most challenging times in our organisation's history. Despite this, I remain grateful for the opportunity to serve our region and our people.

I make no pretence of my belief that my previous role has prepared me to lead our Forum Family through the challenges before us, instead, allow me to assure you of my utmost commitment to undertake, to the best of my ability, the responsibility entrusted to me by our Leaders to work with all our Members to navigate a way forward through our challenges.

Strategic Context

Honourable Ministers, we find ourselves today, at the cusp of our 50th anniversary and in a world that has been unravelled by a raging health pandemic amidst our own ongoing battle with a climate crisis.

The meetings of forum economic and trade ministers a fortnight ago reaffirmed the grim economic reality that we are faced within our region and taking this into account, they emphasised the importance of ceasing every opportunity available to support our region's recovery from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, most pertinent at this time is the challenge that we face to our own solidarity as a Forum Family.

As I had reflected on with our senior officials this past week, I have always believed that dialogue can resolve any difference. Differences in views and opinions are not new – rather, it is a mark of our humanity and diversity that brings us together.

The position taken and questions posed by our Micronesian Leaders open up a necessary political conversation that our leadership needs to have, and perhaps the time is ripe for us to engage and discuss these issues more fully as colleagues and in full respect of each other's views.

I believe that regionalism, just like life, is an evolving journey and we must not shy away from frank discussions that may need to be had – but at the same time, I am hopeful that we will all continue to endeavour to uphold the very vision of our founding fathers when they created the Pacific Islands Forum, 50 years ago.

The Forum is not about a singular entity nor individual countries; it is about all of us, as a collective, and how we work together to create opportunities for the greater good of our people.

It is with this in mind, Honourable Ministers, that I will rely on your diplomacy and your understanding of our current geopolitical context, to nuance, advise and support our Forum Leaders and myself in charting a way forward that will ensure the ongoing solidarity of our Pacific Islands Forum.

2050 Strategy

Yes, the future is uncertain. It remains a complex world with heightened geopolitical competition and limited resourcing.

As such, now more than ever, it is imperative that we are clear about our aspirations as a collective and how we will work together to achieve this.

The 2050 Strategy will be the articulation of our collective aspirations as the Pacific Islands Forum. Once concluded, the onus will be on you Honourable Ministers and our Forum Leaders, to continue to ensure that the strategy carries the political support and leadership it requires to realise its aspirations.

Climate Change

We have demonstrated the value and strength of our collective advocacy time and time again, most especially on climate action. Indeed, this remains the single greatest existential threat before us.

We may not always agree on how we approach the issue of climate change as a region, but we are all in acknowledgment of its ongoing impacts on our countries and our people. It is imperative that we step-up our efforts and advocacy for stronger and more urgent climate action now.

Indeed, the very future of our children depends on this.

The discussions today will consider three specific issues that will strengthen our targeted advocacy on climate action; elevate our global leadership on oceans governance to secure our home and our prospects in the face of sea level rise and emerging threats to our ocean environment; and strengthen a multi-stakeholder platform on resilience in the face of climate change and disasters.

Conclusion

Honourable Ministers, your considerations today will shape the engagement of the Forum on issues of key importance to us all. It will also inform the political advice that Leaders will consider in preparation for the 51st Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings, beginning with the Retreat in the coming week.

With these few words, Honourable Ministers, I wish you well in your deliberations.

Meitaki maata. Vinaka vakalevu, and I thank you.