



**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT**

**2021 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting  
13 July 2021  
Virtual**

**Opening Remarks by Mr Henry Puna,  
Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum**

1. Hon Prime Minister of Cook Islands, Hon Vice President of Kiribati, Hon Ministers of Finance & Economies, Deputy Managing Director of the IMF, Excellencies, Representatives of Development Partners, Representatives of International Organisations, Heads of Regional Organisations, Senior Officials of Forum Members, Representatives of the Private Sector, Representatives of Civil Society Organisations, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.
2. Bula vinaka and greetings to you all. I am indeed privileged and honoured to provide a few remarks noting that this will also be my first opportunity to do so as Secretary General of the Forum Secretariat.
3. At the outset, let me thank the Government of Tuvalu and the Minister for Finance, Honourable Seve Paeniu, for your able leadership as Chair of the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting during these unprecedented times. I only wish that we could meet physically for a ‘talanoa’ in the true Pacific Way.
4. I do not need to tell you all about the negative impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has severely affected our economies and exacerbated our vulnerabilities to external shocks as developing and small island developing states.
5. The IMF has forecasted a negative economic outlook for the region. Economic output measured GDP is forecasted to decline, while public debt as percent of GDP is increasing across our Membership. Pacific businesses, big and small, have all felt the impacts of COVID-19. Tourism has come to a standstill for a number of our Members. Our fisheries industry, particularly the tuna

longline fishery is on life support and manufacturing has contracted across all Members.

6. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are amplifying the challenges the region faces with climate change and disasters. As a region, we are highly susceptible and significantly affected by the increased frequency, intensity, severity of climate induced and other disasters.

7. Immediate and urgent adaptation and mitigation actions and strategies must be taken to address our special and unique circumstances in the Pacific. Access to and mobilisation of financial resources from international development partners continues to be a challenge for the region. But this must not stop us from being proactive, to innovate and develop home grown solutions for the good of our Blue Pacific Continent and its people.

8. This meeting is timely to take stock of these issues, discuss appropriate policy options and consider ways forward to address these challenges. The agendas and papers before you provide details on these critical issues. I encourage you all to proactively participate and engage in these discussions.

9. On this note, I wish us all a successful FEMM over the next two days and I look forward to the outcomes of the meeting.

I thank you all.