



## **STATEMENT BY HON. BOB LOUGHMAN WEIBUR, MP During the Fifth France-Oceania Summit**

*Monday, 19 July 2021*

### **Session 3: COVID-19 Economic Recovery, Connectivity and Infrastructure.**

His Excellency Mr Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic,  
Fellow Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and Associate Members,  
EU

Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum,  
Director Generals of SPC and SPREP,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am pleased to offer brief remarks under this third session, with the focus on COVID-19, Connectivity and Infrastructure across our Blue Pacific Continent. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected our communities and economies and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities to external shocks as developing and small island developing states.
- The pandemic continues to be a health crisis and affect drivers of growth across all our countries including the private sector, trade, tourism, and fishing license fees.
- At this juncture, establishing connectivity and resilient infrastructure facility is critical to recovery for a smaller economy in our Blue Pacific Continent.
- Indeed, the Pacific region as a whole, was estimated to have contracted by an unprecedented 6.1 per cent last year.
- Concerningly, COVID-19 has wound back years of hard-won development gains for our Island countries. Social and economic recovery efforts will take

months and years, and require efforts at all levels – national, regional, and global.

- As Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, we reaffirm that the health and wellbeing of Pacific peoples remains our highest priority.
- Rather than a return to normal, the pandemic presents opportunities for us to ‘build back better’, to ensure societies and economies that protect the health and wellbeing of all; preserve our natural environment; aim for low emission and climate-smart; and build our resilience to future crisis.
- In this regard, Pacific Islands Forum Members have been working collectively on COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- Our efforts are focused on health and wellbeing; integrated pathways for economic recovery and resilience; debt relief; adaptive learning and employment pathways; inclusive social protection systems; and sustainable livelihoods and food systems.
- We emphasise the importance of safe and effective vaccines for the Pacific region and call on global leaders to support the equitable and affordable distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines to all peoples.
- We thank the Government of France, and all our international partners, for the support to date for our COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. We particularly acknowledge the direct support of development partners in strengthening the health systems of Forum Island Countries.
- We call for ongoing collaboration and investment to support these efforts over the longer-term, working through our national and regional systems. Partnerships and development assistance will be essential for our region to recover.
- In this regard, we call for the international community to support the re-opening of borders where possible; to maintain open and free trade and to enhance the level and flexibility of development financing.

- We also call for capitalisation of the Pacific Resilience Facility - a funding source that will be regionally available to Forum Island Countries to build economic resilience and strengthen disaster preparedness.
- Excellencies, as one Blue Pacific and alongside our important partners such as France, we must continue to work to build back countries and a region that is more unified, safe and resilient.
- With this said, I would like to profit from this opportunity to welcome France decision to recommence its assistance to Vanuatu under the auspice of Development Agency (AFD) going forward.
- Thank you