

The United Kingdom's Written Statement for the Pacific Island Forum: Dialogue Partners Meeting

1. The UK is proud to be a Pacific Island Forum Dialogue Partner and our new Minister for Asia and the Pacific, the Honourable Heather Wheeler, is delighted to attend the 2019 leaders' week in Tuvalu. Our new government is more committed than ever to the Pacific and the broad agendas we share. The UK values the key role that the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) plays in the region and hopes to work closely with the Forum on areas of shared interest, including regional prosperity, resilient development and ocean sustainability.
2. As the UK prepares to exit the European Union, we want to reassure you that our shared values of liberal democracy, rule of law and human rights will not change. We look forward to a continued strong partnership on global challenges, including on climate where we are bidding, in partnership with Italy, to host COP26 in 2020 under a UK Presidency. But the UK will set its own course after 31 October as an open, free trading nation, looking outwards. We will build on historic partnerships and pursue new opportunities.
3. The UK particularly values our deep ties with the Pacific, including with our Commonwealth partners. In 2018, we announced that we will double our diplomatic footprint in the region, including by opening three diplomatic missions in Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa, to complement our existing footprint in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. We have also enhanced the British High Commission in Suva, including by appointing a Development Counsellor and a Trade Policy Advisor. These are the initial visible elements of the UK Pacific Uplift, which is coupled with a plan to work even more closely with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) on a shared agenda, within international fora, and on supporting peace and security across the Pacific. The UK is proud of its role as a leading donor in the region, channelling the majority of our funding via multilateral investments. We want to use the UK's increased presence in the region to ensure that multilateral funding is delivering on the Pacific and our own priorities in an agile and effective way. We will continue to support Pacific Island countries in specific areas of shared interest including climate, the ocean, scholarships, capacity building, governance and other bilateral support.

Climate change and the ocean

4. Climate is the backbone of the modern UK-Pacific relationship. Climate change affects us all, but few are threatened as tangibly and as gravely as the people of the Pacific. The UK was the first major economy to legislate for net-zero emissions by 2050 and we are calling for other countries to commit to similarly ambitious targets to progress the large-scale changes necessary to restrict global temperature rise to 1.5°C.
5. The UK remains in the forefront of international action on climate: co-leading the resilience strand of the UN Climate Action Summit and bidding, in partnership with Italy, to host COP26 in 2020 under a UK Presidency. If successful, this is an opportunity to raise ambition, and support the mitigation and adaptation challenges facing the PICs. As members of the High Ambition Coalition, we remain your climate ally and ready to work alongside you and other members of the Coalition.
6. We recognise the existential threat posed by climate change and extreme events to many Large Ocean States. UK aid to the Pacific, which was over £40 million in 2017, provides support across all 16 PICs including on climate resilience, disaster risk insurance, health, and education. We are proud of our commitment to spend 0.7% of our GNI on aid, and have committed to increasing climate finance by at least 50% between 2016 and 2021.
7. We recognise the importance of supporting initiatives in the Pacific region that Pacific Leaders prioritise, such as climate. Following the strong commitments made on climate at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, the UK announced £1.2m to the region for 2018-20 to co-fund the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). The NDC Hub provides technical support to the PICs, including 9 Commonwealth countries, to review, enhance and implement their NDCs. This work contributes to sustainable and resilient development, and the transition to a net-zero emissions development pathway in the Pacific. The Hub is

already providing technical assistance to Fiji and Nauru. The scope of work has been agreed for Tonga and Kiribati, and negotiations with the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tuvalu are underway.

8. As a result of global warming, extreme events - such as tropical cyclones, will increase in their intensity. Insuring against such events is one way of dealing with their impacts. We are pleased to see the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) entering its 7th season, continuing to provide insurance against cyclones and earthquakes to its members. This year the UK made a further capital contribution of £1.3 million to the PCRAFI, bringing our total contribution to £12.5 million. We were delighted to see Fiji join the scheme this year. We look forward to working with Fiji in the future to ensure the scheme meets Fiji's needs in dealing with future disasters.
9. The UK stands alongside the Pacific and the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, in our continued dedication to protect the ocean. As an island nation, we recognise the importance of including the ocean in climate related debates and the ocean's role in providing resilience to climate change impacts. We know that one of the central challenges faced by the global community is how to incorporate the ocean agenda into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The ocean is important for a wide range of UK and Pacific interests; marine protection and combatting plastic pollution will be crucial in the Pacific and worldwide.
10. The UK keen to deepen its partnership with Pacific countries and regional organisations to protect the ocean. Vanuatu and the UK co-lead the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance (CCOA), a Commonwealth Blue Charter action group. Member countries from the Pacific have committed to ambitious actions to reduce plastic pollution in support of SDG14 "Life Below Water". There is a CCOA support package available of up to £70m, and we are working closely with Pacific members on the Technical Assistance Facility for this programme to help reduce marine plastics.

11. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme (CMEP) is supporting nine Commonwealth Pacific Island Countries to develop their marine economies sustainably. This £26.5m programme promotes growth, innovation, jobs and investment – while safeguarding healthy seas and ecosystems. In addition, we have joined a call to increase Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to 30% by 2030 to protect bio-diversity and encourage sustainable use of marine resources.

International fora

12. We fully recognise that the Blue Pacific is your regionally owned narrative that underpins your shared intentions and visions for a prosperous and climate resilient future. The UK is ready to work with PICs in international fora to address many of our shared goals in this regard. For instance, we will use our resources and influence to work with you to improve accessibility to climate finance, to seek solutions to the challenges faced by SIDS in terms of ODA graduation and access to concessional finance, and to ensure continued progress towards achieving SDGs and gender equality.

Commitment to stability, peace and security

13. The UK is committed to upholding and strengthening the rules-based international system (RBIS). We will continue to work with PICs in this area, to improve stability, peace and security in the Pacific and beyond.

14. We have launched a scoping study on governance in the Pacific funded by the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The aim is for us to learn from the region about how the UK can best assist in reinforcing and strengthening governance in the Pacific.

15. The UK is expanding its global network of policy officers tackling serious and organised crime (SOC) and Illicit Finance and we have deployed a SOC illicit finance lead to the region, to deepen engagement with Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island Countries. We will actively seek to understand the extent of the illicit finance threat to the Pacific, with a view to establishing whether there are gaps in which UK expertise could add value.

16. We have provided £1.8m of funding for the Pacific Commonwealth Equalities Programme (PCEP) to support the region's work on

establishing and strengthening human rights institutions. The PCEP delivers technical assistance to state and civil society, to build capacity for promoting, protecting and upholding human rights commitments in Pacific Commonwealth countries. The momentum created at the regional dialogue on the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), which was core-funded by the PCEP, has contributed to both Samoa and Kiribati ratifying the Convention. The PCEP has also furthered PICs understanding on how to address shared challenges in effectively implementing and reporting on their obligations under international human rights treaties. This has helped drive progress towards agreed solutions, as demonstrated by the recent commitment of Solomon Islands to establish a new coordinating body across government, and Samoa's expanded rollout of innovative software to address these challenges.

Conclusion

17. The UK's relationship with the Pacific is built on our shared history and values, family ties and common purpose. As the UK further increases our engagement with the region, we will work closely with the Pacific, seeking to cooperate on some of the most pressing challenges facing our world, including climate change and safeguarding our ocean, making international fora - including the Commonwealth and UN - even more effective, and supporting the rules-based international system in the region and beyond.