

**FIFTY-FIRST PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM**

**SUVA, FIJI**

**11 – 14 JULY 2022**

**FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ**



## PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

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The Fifty-First (51st) Pacific Islands Forum was held in Suva, Fiji from 11 – 14 July 2022, and was attended by the Heads of State, Government, and Territories of Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, the Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. French Polynesia was represented at Vice-President Level, and Tuvalu was represented at Ministerial Level. The Cook Islands was represented by Special Envoy, and Nauru by Presidential Envoy. The Forum Leaders' Retreat was held at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Suva, Fiji.

2. The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) in attendance were: the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO); the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP), the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA); the Pacific Power Association (PPA); the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the University of the South Pacific (USP). The Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations (UN), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and the World Bank attended as Observers. Forum Leaders also welcomed the opportunity to engage with the broader Forum family, including civil society and the private sector, and looked forward to its engagement with Forum Dialogue Partners.

3. Leaders **expressed** their deep appreciation to the Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, and the Government and people of Fiji, for the warm hospitality extended to their delegations. Leaders **commended** the preparations and facilitation of the 51st Pacific Islands Forum, which enabled Leaders and participants to hold constructive discussions and contributed to the overall success of the 51st Pacific Islands Forum.

4. Leaders **congratulated** the Government and the People of Kiribati on the occasion of their 43<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of Independence. In relation to the position taken by the Government of Kiribati on the Pacific Islands Forum, Leaders **echoed** the sentiments conveyed by the Forum Chair that the people and Government of Kiribati will always be a part of the Blue Pacific Family, and **committed** to continue to dialogue towards a resolution to restore the unity of the Forum Family.

### INAUGURAL PIF WOMEN LEADERS' MEETING

5. Leaders **congratulated** the Government of Fiji on its successful chairing and convening of the inaugural standing Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting on 9 June 2022, which was a milestone for the region and is demonstrative of its collective commitment to ensure that regional priorities are considerate of gender-balanced views and perspectives. Leaders **welcomed** and **endorsed** the recommendations of the Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders meeting for the revitalisation of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

## **CELEBRATING PACIFIC REGIONALISM: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM**

6. As a continuation from the virtual meeting of Forum Leaders held on 6 August 2021, Leaders **commemorated** the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pacific Islands Forum, celebrating 50 years of Pacific regionalism and collective action. Leaders acknowledged that although the journey over the past 50 years has not been easy, relations as a Forum family remained strong because of its shared values, culture and tradition.

7. Leaders **recalled** that since its establishment in 1971, the Pacific Islands Forum has been the catalyst for strengthened regional action especially as a unified regional bloc. Furthermore, Leaders **recognised** the opportunity of The Blue Pacific Narrative to reinforce the potential of its shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and to reaffirm the connections of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment, culture and livelihoods.

### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND REGIONAL UNITY AND SOLIDARITY**

8. Reflecting on 50 years on regionalism, Leaders also **highlighted** that the Pacific Islands Forum stands at a critical juncture in its history. Leaders **acknowledged** that many economies and communities across the region continue to contend with a range of social, economic and development challenges, whilst having to continually adapt to the evolving challenges posed by COVID-19, as well as the current climate emergency. These challenges exacerbate the region's existing vulnerabilities and dependencies.

9. Leaders **noted** that the region continues to be a highly contested sphere of interest, in a wider geopolitical setting with external powers seeking to assert their own interests. In the current strategic context, Leaders **recognised** the importance of remaining unified as a Forum family to address common challenges and to capitalise on key opportunities. Furthermore, Leaders also **recognised** the importance of regional unity and solidarity in dealing with intensifying geostrategic interest, particularly to ensure the achievement of shared and common objectives.

### **FORUM CHAIR'S REPORT ON THE POLITICAL DIALOGUE MECHANISM**

10. Leaders **acknowledged** with sadness the Republic of Kiribati's decision to withdraw from the Pacific Islands Forum, and **welcomed** Kiribati's willingness to remain open to dialogue to promote Forum unity and emphasise the importance of genuine consultation and engagement, including through the issuance of a collective statement. Leaders further **agreed** to continue dialogue with the Republic of Kiribati between now and the Special Leaders Meeting, through the good offices of the Forum Chair and Secretary General, and explore options for closer diplomatic engagement, including through the appointment of a dedicated Special Envoy.

11. Leaders **recognised** the *Suva Agreement* as a political commitment to reform the Pacific Islands Forum based on the specific reform elements and timelines outlined in the Forum Chair's Report, and **directed** Forum Officials to commence the work on the operationalisation of the Suva Agreement through the Transitional Plan as recommended by the Meetings of the Forum Officials Committee and the Forum Foreign Ministers, noting that decisions on the hosting arrangements of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner and the Sub-Regional Office as well as the appointment of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner are to be finalised by Leaders at their next

meeting. Leaders have **endorsed** the Suva Agreement, and further **agreed** to leave the Agreement open for signature by the Republic of Kiribati.

12. Consistent with the indicative transition timeline to operationalise the political commitments under the *Suva Agreement*, Leaders **endorsed** the following:

- (i) 2022 Procedures Governing the Selection and Appointment of the Secretary General;
- (ii) 2022 Procedures Governing the Selection and Appointment of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner;
- (iii) The Chairing Arrangements and Forum Troika Charter.

13. Leaders **agreed** that, for the purposes of regional rotation, Australia will be under the Melanesian sub-grouping and New Zealand will be under the Polynesian sub-grouping.

14. Leaders **agreed** to convene another Special Leaders Meeting towards the end of the year under Fiji's Chairmanship to consider and endorse the remaining phases of the Transition Plan. Leaders **recognised** the importance of ongoing continuity in the transition of the Secretariat leadership in 2024.

15. Leaders **acknowledged** Secretary General Henry Puna and the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, and the Government of the Cook Islands, for their efforts to resolve the impasse and their commitment to protect the solidarity of the region, and **agreed** to ensure that the leadership transition was done in a manner that is dignified and seamless.

16. Leaders also **acknowledged** His Excellency David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, and His Excellency Surangel Whipps Jr., President of the Republic of Palau, who, together with the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, and the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, took the time to travel to Fiji to attend the Political Dialogue Mechanism on 6 to 7 June 2022 and settle the Suva Agreement.

17. Leaders **emphasised** the importance of funding certainty and sustainability to take forward the political commitments in the long term. Leaders **acknowledged with appreciation** that Australia and New Zealand would make an initial contribution to operationalising the Suva Agreement, and all Members will make a contribution to ongoing implementation.

## **2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT**

18. Building on from the Suva Agreement, Leaders **recognised** that their solidarity and shared commitment to work together offered the foundation to take a strategic and long-term approach to Pacific regionalism.

19. Leaders also **recognised** that inspired political leadership is critical to the success of Pacific regionalism. Leaders also **highlighted** that it was crucial for all Pacific people to be engaged in the processes of Pacific regionalism as advanced through the 2050 Strategy, to ensure that it was done in a truly inclusive way.

20. Leaders **emphasised** the importance of economic prosperity and wellbeing to the security of Pacific countries and the need to maximise business to business engagements to realise the potential of Pacific people and their resources.

21. Reflecting on the range of rich and robust dialogues as part of the 51<sup>st</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, and framed around the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, Leaders **discussed**: the need for urgent and immediate assistance with vulnerability to debt; a clear pathway for energy security and urgent requirement for decarbonisation of the energy sector towards renewable energy; and the need to address supply chains issues and rising costs of food.

22. Leaders **recognised** the need for increased investment in their people, with a specific emphasis on education. Leaders also **considered** the value of strengthening public-private partnerships to leverage greater opportunities – most notably in connectivity, high value agriculture and fisheries, and energy security.

23. Leaders **welcomed** and **endorsed** the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as the overarching blueprint to advance Pacific regionalism for the next three decades, articulating the region’s long-term vision, values, and key thematic areas and strategic pathways. In taking forward the Strategy, Leaders emphasised that an implementation plan will need to be developed that articulates key priorities and actions, delivery arrangements and resourcing requirements.

24. Leaders **reaffirmed** the importance of utilising existing regional mechanisms, including the Pacific Islands Forum, for engagement with partners, especially where multiple Pacific Island Countries are concerned, whilst still being respectful of the sovereign right of countries to engage with partners as they consider appropriate.

25. On the issue of regional security, Leaders **noted** that the 2050 Strategy calls for a flexible and responsive regional security mechanism in place to address traditional and non-traditional security issues in our region. Leaders **reaffirmed** the concept of regionalism and a family first approach to peace and security. Leaders further **noted** that the Forum Officials’ Committee has tasked the development of a Security Policy Roadmap and the Pacific Security Outlook Report to support the alignment to the *Boe Declaration* and the thematic area for Peace and Security in the 2050 Strategy.

26. Leaders **tasked** Senior Officials to progress this work and report back to Leaders at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum as part of the implementation of the 2050 Strategy.

27. Leaders **agreed** for the Forum Chair to write to all Leaders confirming the venue for the Forum Dialogue Partners Meeting later in the year.

## **REVIEW OF REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE**

28. Leaders **discussed** the Review of the Regional Architecture, and **recalled** their 2019 Communique on the need to ensure that “requisite governance and resourcing arrangements that promote, govern and deepen collective responsibility and accountability to deliver the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent” are in place.

29. Leaders **welcomed** the commitment of the CROP agencies to strengthen coherence and effective coordination in advocacy and the delivery of regional goods and services. Leaders **further welcomed** the commitment by CROP agencies to support the development of a comprehensive implementation and monitoring plan for the 2050 Strategy. To that end, Leaders **noted** with concern the fact that resource mobilisation is fragmented and competing demands on financing remain key challenges to the achievement of 2050 vision.

30. In this context, and also noting wider geopolitical competition playing out in the region, Leaders **highlighted** that the effective delivery of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent would require a fit for purpose “regional architecture”. These include: political leadership and collective commitment; the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders; CROP agency governance and resourcing arrangements that enable alignment; effective coordination between regional and international agencies operating in the Pacific to avoid duplication; and development partners to fully align their policy positions and resources to the 2050 Strategy.

31. Accordingly, Leaders **agreed** to broaden the mandate of the Review to consider:

- (i) *Political Setting*: to review political groupings, leadership, collective interests and decision-making and sustained political will;
- (ii) *Institutional processes, systems and mechanisms*: to review processes, systems and mechanisms supporting collective decisions, actions and advocacy;
- (iii) *Governance mechanisms*: to review mechanisms in place to effect cooperation and coordination between the various regional entities, and their engagement with the Pacific Islands Forum; and
- (iv) *Engagements and Partnerships*: to consider how the Forum interacts with international partners and stakeholders to progress regionalism.

32. Leaders **tasked** officials to proceed according to the expanded mandate and report back to Forum Leaders at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Meeting.

## **CLIMATE ACTION: REGIONAL PRIORITIES FOR COP27**

33. Leaders **reconfirmed** that climate change remains the single greatest existential threat facing the Blue Pacific, underscoring the urgency to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees through rapid, deep and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. In this respect, Leaders **declared** that the Pacific is facing a Climate Emergency that threatens the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of its people and ecosystems, backed by the latest science and the daily lived realities in Pacific communities.

34. Leaders **welcomed** the completion of the Paris Rulebook at COP 26, and **called on** all Parties to the Paris Agreement to ensure that COP 27 delivers clear progress on turning pledges and commitments into action, consistent with the 1.5 degrees pathway, and **urged** world leaders, especially the big emitters, to recognise climate change as the single greatest threat to the planet, to commit to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and to revisit and submit enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions before COP 27.

35. Leaders **reaffirmed** Members' commitment to fully implement the Paris Agreement, including a collective aim to achieve carbon neutrality in the Pacific by 2050, and invite development partners to support Forum Island Countries reach this goal.

36. Leaders **committed** to working together with the COP 27 President Designate leading up to COP 27 to ensure that COP 27 delivers an ambitious outcome that reflects the need to urgently scale-up ambition and implementation to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial level, enhance efforts by developed country Parties to at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing country Parties from 2019 levels by 2025, advances work on the ocean-climate nexus, and shows meaningful progress with the deliberations on the new collective quantified climate finance goal, the Glasgow Dialogue on funding arrangements for averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage and the operationalisation of the Santiago Network for loss and damage associated with climate change.

37. Leaders **reaffirmed** their support to the Pacific Islands Forum Missions overseas in their proactive engagements with the international community to support the region's effort to advocate for stronger climate ambition. Leaders **supported** the work of the Political Climate Champions to strengthen Forum Island Countries' strategic engagement at COP 27, including the nomination of a new Champion on Gender and Social Inclusion.

38. Leaders **welcomed** and **fully supported** Australia's renewed commitment to the Forum's climate change priorities, and **welcomed** the interest from Australia to host a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in partnership with Pacific Island countries.

## **ADDRESSING THE THREATS OF CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED SEA-LEVEL RISE ON MARITIME ZONES, STATEHOOD AND OUR PEOPLE**

39. Leaders **noted** that due to the complexity of the issues of statehood and persons affected by sea-level rise, due consideration of these issues should be guided and informed by applicable principles and norms of international law and relevant international frameworks and standards, and the need for the region to unpack these issues further.

40. Leaders **recalled** their 2021 landmark *Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-level rise*, and **re-emphasised** the threats of climate change and sea-level rise as the defining issue that imperils the livelihoods and wellbeing of our peoples and undermines the full realisation of a peaceful, secure and sustainable future for our region. Leaders **welcomed** and **expressed deep appreciation** for the international reactions to the *Declaration*, in particular the formal support by Heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States, the Climate Vulnerable Forum, the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, and the acknowledgement by Commonwealth Heads of Government, and **further called** on other states and regions to formally support the *Declaration*, including through adoption of similar practices to create a global norm for preserving maritime zones.

41. Leaders **reaffirmed** the priority of securing maritime zones against the threats of sea-level rise, which is the defining issue underpinning the full realisation of the Blue Pacific Continent and having regard to the status of maritime boundaries and zones in the region, **strongly encouraged**

the urgent finalisation and conclusion of outstanding zones and boundaries as per Leaders' commitments and decisions, including in 2019. In this context, Leaders **congratulated** the governments of Fiji and Solomon Islands in concluding and signing their Maritime Boundary Treaty at the Forum Leaders' Meeting.

42. Leaders **recognised** the many impacts of climate change and disaster and their threat to the future of the region's people and the statehood of many Pacific nations.

43. Leaders **noted** that, under its Future Now Project, the Government of Tuvalu has included the preservation of its maritime zones and Statehood as part of its joint communiques on forming diplomatic relations, and **noted** the invitation by the Government of Tuvalu to sign these communiques with all PIF Members.

## **UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION FOR AN ADVISORY OPINION ON CLIMATE CHANGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE**

44. Leaders **commended** Vanuatu on its initiative on a pathway to secure a request from the UN General Assembly (UNGA) for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to clarify legal consequences of climate change, noting the urgency of the climate change threat and the need for accelerated global climate action and implementation of the Paris Agreement.

45. Leaders **welcomed** progress since the initiative was reported to, and noted by, Forum Leaders at their 50th Meeting in Tuvalu in 2019, including progress on ongoing international and regional consultations on the initiative and related legal question(s) to be developed through the UNGA process, and **noted** that the initiative is consistent with, and complementary to, regional efforts and ambitious actions on climate change to safeguard our people against the adverse effects of climate change, and noting that an ICJ advisory opinion is non-binding but may change the course of current negotiations and boost commitments.

46. Leaders **called on** the UN General Assembly for a resolution requesting the International Court of Justice to provide an advisory opinion on the obligations of states under international law to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change, and **looked forward** to close collaboration in the development of the specific question to ensure maximum impact in terms of limiting emissions to 1.5 degrees, including obligations of all major emitters past, present and future.

## **NUCLEAR ISSUES**

### *South-Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*

47. Leaders **noted** the *Report of the Secretary General on the Treaty of Rarotonga* and other Nuclear Issues, **invited** non-Party Forum Members to accede to the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*, and **urged** the United States to ratify the Treaty Protocols.

*Forum engagement in the decommissioning of the Japan Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant*

48. Leaders **reiterated** their strong concerns for the significance of the potential threat of nuclear contamination to the health and security of the Blue Pacific, its people and prospects, and **reaffirmed** the importance of ensuring international consultation, international law, and independent and verifiable scientific assessments as per the PALM9 Declaration.

*Ongoing nuclear legacy issues*

49. Leaders **noted** the progress to address the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing through the CROP Taskforce on Nuclear Legacy issues in the Pacific, and the arrangements for a Preliminary Independent Review relating to Nuclear Contamination in the Pacific, including in the Nuclear Test Site at Runit Dome on Runit Island of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which is expected to commence in the second half of 2022, to provide the evidentiary basis for ongoing Forum advocacy on nuclear legacy issues.

**UPDATE ON LEADERS' DECISION TO INCREASE ECONOMIC RETURNS FROM FISHERIES**

50. Leaders **encouraged** Members to continue efforts to stay at the forefront of regional tuna fisheries management, address IUU fishing, and to secure sustainable benefits from tuna resources. In recognising that a socially sustainable fishery that upholds Pacific values is equally as important as ensuring a biologically and economically sustainable fishery, Leaders further **encouraged** Members to expedite work to improve labour standards for fishing crew as well as continue to address the safety and wellbeing of observers.

51. Leaders, in **noting** the importance of fisheries and aquaculture to the region for food security, recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainable development, economic resilience, protecting the cultural heritage of the region, and adapting to the impacts of sea-level rise and climate change in the region, **stated** that the priorities:

- (i) for coastal fisheries and aquaculture: are expanding climate change impact adaptation and mitigation support including developing evidence-based planning, policy and management strategies, and climate smart initiatives for more resilient and sustainable coastal fisheries and aquaculture development; and
- (ii) for oceanic fisheries: are expanding climate change impact adaptation and mitigation support including securing and defining offshore fisheries rights, enhancing evidence-based planning, harvest strategies, policy and management strategies, and climate smart initiatives for more economically resilient tuna fisheries.

52. Leaders **encouraged** all WTO Forum Members to work together to conclude the remaining pillar of the fisheries subsidies negotiations on Overcapacity and Overfishing to protect the sustainability of fish stocks and provide appropriate Special and Differential Treatment for developing and least developing countries.

## **REPORT OF THE FORUM MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE TO NEW CALEDONIA OBSERVER REPORT ON NEW CALEDONIA'S 3RD REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE**

53. Leaders **welcomed** the report of the Forum Ministerial Committee to New Caledonia, following its mission to observe the 2021 New Caledonia Referendum on Independence, and **supported** the Forum's continued engagement with New Caledonia through established Forum processes.

### **30<sup>TH</sup> SMALLER ISLAND STATES LEADERS MEETING**

54. Leaders **noted** the outcome of the 30<sup>th</sup> Smaller Islands States (SIS) Leaders Meeting that was convened on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 in Suva, Fiji.

55. Leaders **noted** that SIS Leaders had re-asserted the strategic importance of the SIS grouping, as well as their critical role in forewarning the world on the existential threats of the climate crisis, and that SIS Leaders had endorsed in principle a joint approach to SIS ambitions and priorities under the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

### **OCEAN CONSERVATION CREDIT INITIATIVE**

56. Leaders **commended** and **supported** the Government of Niue on its Ocean Conservation Credit initiative as a sustainable financing mechanism, noting the ongoing challenges in accessing climate finance.

### **NEXT FORUM LEADERS MEETING**

57. Leaders **agreed** for the Cook Islands as the host of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and Related Meetings in 2023, the Kingdom of Tonga in 2024, and Solomon Islands in 2025.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva  
14 July 2022