

**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM
SPECIAL LEADERS RETREAT**

Nadi, Fiji

24 February 2023

FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ



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The Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders Retreat was held in Nadi, Fiji, on 24 February 2023, and was attended by Heads of State, Government, and Territories from the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. French Polynesia was represented by its Vice President, and New Zealand by its Deputy Prime Minister. Australia and Papua New Guinea were represented at Ministerial level. The Special Leaders Retreat was held at Denarau Island, Nadi.

2. Leaders **expressed** their appreciation to the Prime Minister of Fiji, and the Government and the people of Fiji, for the warm hospitality extended to all delegations, in what was their second time meeting in Fiji over a span of 8 months. Leaders **commended** the preparations and facilitation of the Special Leaders Retreat, which enabled Leaders to ‘Reflect’ on the rich history and culture of the Blue Pacific and the achievements and challenges they have faced together, and to ‘Renew’ and ‘Celebrate’ their solidarity as a Forum Family.

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE FORUM FAMILY

3. Leaders **expressed** support and condolences to the Government and people of New Zealand for the disastrous impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle, a stark reminder of the real impacts of climate change and the growing frequency of natural disasters, as well as the importance of regional solidarity to collectively address these security threats. Leaders also **shared** condolences with His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kiribati, for the passing of Mr Michael Sarbane Foon, Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of Kiribati, and recognised Mr Foon’s longstanding work and contribution to the region.

4. Leaders **welcomed** the return of the Republic of Kiribati to the Pacific Islands Forum and **reaffirmed** their collective commitment to the Blue Pacific Continent, which is their collective home, ocean, lands and common heritage.

5. Leaders **further reaffirmed** the value of the *Pacific Way*, recognising the depth and uniqueness of the region’s cultural and traditional diversities, and celebrating the kinship of the Forum Family and the historical ties and linkages within the region that, taken together, underpins the solidarity of the Pacific Islands Forum and its shared heritage.

6. In marking its return to the Forum Family, the Republic of Kiribati **acknowledged** the exemplary and reconciliatory efforts of the Forum Chair, the Honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, in re-engaging with Kiribati at the highest political level to reconcile and renew relations through our own *Pacific Way*.

SUVA AGREEMENT

7. Leaders **reaffirmed** their commitment to uphold the *Suva Agreement*, recognising it as the basis for reforms to strengthen the Pacific Islands Forum moving forward, and **congratulated** the Government of the Republic of Kiribati on its signature of the *Suva Agreement* in accordance with the *Denarau Addendum* to the *Suva Agreement*.
8. Recognising the importance of relationships within the Forum Family, Leaders **acknowledged** the positions made by the Micronesian Presidents Summit as related to the *Suva Agreement* in the *Palikir Communiqué*.
9. Leaders **approved** the establishment of a new Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific Islands Forum in the Republic of Kiribati.
10. Leaders **appointed** Dr Filimon Manoni of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the position of Pacific Ocean Commissioner.
11. Leaders **approved** the establishment of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner in the Republic of Palau.
12. In accordance with the Leaders' agreement for the rotation of the position of Secretary General, Leaders **appointed** Mr Baron Waqa of Nauru as the next Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2024.
13. Leaders **thanked** Australia and New Zealand for their initial offers of transitional funding of NZD\$3 million towards the operationalisation of the *Suva Agreement*, and the further commitment by Australia of up to NZD\$1 million, for the period 2023 – 2026, and **reaffirmed** that all Members will make a contribution to ongoing implementation from 2026.

2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT AND THE REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

14. Leaders **reaffirmed** their collective Vision for 2050:

“As Pacific Leaders, our vision is for a resilient Pacific Region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives.”

15. Leaders **renewed** their collective support for the Leaders' Commitments to 2050 as articulated in the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* and **committed** to progress and nurture collective political will to deepen regionalism and solidarity in the Pacific region.
16. Leaders **discussed** the Review of the Regional Architecture (RRA) and **emphasised** the importance of strengthening the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) in order to ensure greater coherence and alignment to national government processes and directions when it comes to appointing nationals and the recognition of national days as to not clash with major regional meetings.

17. As part of the Review, Leaders **called** for consideration of the feasibility of other sub-regional offices within the Forum architecture.

18. Leaders **directed** the Secretariat and Senior Officials to continue to work efficiently so as to ensure the timely completion of the Implementation and Monitoring Plan and Phase 1 of the RRA for Leaders to consider at the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in the Cook Islands.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF OUR PACIFIC OCEAN

19. Leaders **reaffirmed** the region's stewardship of the Blue Pacific Continent, including through collective responsibility, commitment and investment in its ocean and lands. Leaders **recognised** the significant ecosystem-based services that the region provides to the planet and emphasised the importance of policy choices, partnerships and investments that adopted a forward-looking approach to protect the region's biodiversity, and **called for** the urgent conclusion of the negotiations for an international legally binding instrument under the *1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ).

20. Leaders **recalled** 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.

21. Leaders **commended** the effort of the PIF High-Level Delegation that visited Japan to discuss this issue at the highest political levels, and in the spirit of deep mutual respect, cooperation and friendship, and the outcomes achieved, in particular the agreement to intensify political and scientific dialogue, and **reaffirmed** the importance of science and data to guide the decision on the discharge.

22. Leaders **acknowledged** the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as the international authority on nuclear safety standards, and the work of the PIF Panel of Independent Experts providing independent guidance and advice to Forum Members. Leaders continued to **support** ongoing intensive dialogue with Japan and the IAEA.

23. Leaders **acknowledged** Japan's reassurance that discharge will not take place if it is not verifiably safe to do so, and not before the publication of the IAEA Report.

COUNTRY INITIATIVES

Update on Australia bid to co-host COP31 with the Pacific

24. **Leaders** recalled their endorsement of the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment in 2021. The region continues to bear the human and economic cost of severe weather. Leaders **welcomed** Australia's initial AUD30 million contribution to support, in partnership with the Pacific Meteorological Council, delivery of Weather Ready Pacific. This will enhance the region's early warning systems and increasing resilience to climate change. Leaders **welcomed** the update by Australia on their bid to co-host COP31 in 2026 in partnership with the Pacific, and **agreed** to work together to advocate for the joint bid.

Recognised Seasonal Employers Scheme and Labour Mobility Schemes

25. Leaders **noted** the update by Samoa that it is conducting a review on existing labour mobility arrangements for the seasonal work programme.

26. Leaders **tasked** the Secretariat to work with all participating countries to hold further dialogue to better understand challenges, opportunities and report back to Leaders as required, mindful that certain issues can only be resolved at national level.

UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution for an Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of States in respect of Climate Change

27. Leaders:

- (i) **noted** and **supported** the Draft *Resolution to the UNGA seeking an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of States in respect of climate change* is consistent with the decision of Leaders in July 2022;
- (ii) **noted** and **supported** the update by Vanuatu on the Draft Resolution, and in particular:
 - (a) that the Draft Resolution has undergone final consultation with UN-based Missions, and has been finalised and uploaded onto the relevant UN e-portal;
 - (b) that Forum Members are encouraged to co-sponsor the Draft Resolution, with a deadline of 1 March 2023; and
- (iii) **noted** the invitation by Vanuatu to the 2nd Pacific Ministerial Dialogue on Pathways for the Global Just Transition, to be held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, from 15 – 17 March 2023.

Graduation deferral from LDC status

28. Leaders **noted** and **supported** Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Kiribati LDC graduation extension request for a further three years from December 2024 to December 2027.

Human Rights Council

29. Leaders **noted** the interest by the Republic of the Marshall Islands to stand for election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the term 2025 – 2027.

Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS)

30. Leaders **supported** the invitation by Tuvalu for Forum Members to join the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS).

OTHER MATTERS

31. In recognising the increased interest in the Blue Pacific region, including at the United Nations level and with the United States of America, Leaders **tasked** the Secretariat to undertake further work to consider the establishment and operationalisation of a permanent Pacific Islands Forum Special Envoy Office in the United States of America to manage coordination within the United Nations as well as Washington, and report back to Leaders at the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in the Cook Islands.

32. In concluding, Leaders **expressed** once again their sincere appreciation to the Prime Minister of Fiji for his leadership, and **congratulated** the Cook Islands for taking over the role of Forum Chair.

Denarau, Nadi, Fiji
24 February 2023