48th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Communiqué,
8 September 2017, Apia, Samoa

THE BLUE PACIFIC – OUR SEA OF ISLANDS – OUR SECURITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

Leaders reaffirmed the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR) as their platform for a renewed commitment to collective action to drive the region’s policy agenda towards the realisation of the Leaders vision for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives.

Leaders further reaffirmed the value of ownership of the regional agenda through an inclusive and transparent policy development process. Leaders recognised the value of dialogue processes with the Associate Member, Observers, Forum Dialogue Partners, CROP Heads, civil society and private sector to inform the Leaders meeting.

Leaders endorsed The Blue Pacific identity as the core driver of collective action for advancing the Leaders vision under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. Through this endorsement, Leaders recognised The Blue Pacific as a new narrative that calls for inspired leadership and a long-term Forum foreign policy commitment to act as one “Blue Continent”. In considering the shifts in the global and regional contexts, Leaders recognised the opportunity of The Blue Pacific identity to reinforce the potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and reaffirms the connections of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment, culture and livelihoods.

Leaders further recognised The Blue Pacific as being about all Pacific peoples comprising our ocean of islands, who recognise their needs and potential, who plan and own their development agenda, and who can act collectively for the good of all, rather than a few. The Blue Pacific is the catalyst for deeper Pacific regionalism.

Leaders reiterated their support for existing regional ocean policy and declarations, and strengthening of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner for coordination and advocacy of cross-sectoral ocean issues. Leaders called for the commencement of the negotiations in the UN for a new Implementing Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity on Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

Leaders committed to fast track the development of policies to ban the use of single-use plastic bags, plastic and styrofoam packaging and called on Pacific Rim partners to join and commit to action on addressing marine pollution and marine debris, to maintain the environmental integrity of the Pacific Ocean for people, planet and prosperity.

Leaders called for a united regional effort that establishes and secures international recognition of the permanent protection and integrity of the maritime zones and sovereignty, from the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise. Leaders noted the leadership of Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Palau and Vanuatu toward integrated ocean management of their maritime and exclusive economic zones.
ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND FINANCING
In considering the need for coherent implementation of the Forum Leaders’ decisions as well as the need to address the current fragmentation of actors in their support of the regional policy agenda, Leaders confirmed they are the apex of the regional architecture and the driver of regional priority setting and resource allocation. Leaders’ committed to ensuring a whole-of-government engagement with the regionalism agenda to strengthen the regional architecture and maximise effective use of resources regional actions and initiatives; embed the Forum agenda across the CROP and its member agencies, including at ministerial and institutional governance levels; and commence a Member-driven process to converge regional meeting platforms and agenda setting processes.

In relation to implementing the Forum agenda, while recognising national needs and priorities, Leaders encouraged donors and partners to the region to align their resources, including through a regular regional donor roundtable linked to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM).

Leaders instructed CROP and its member agencies to ensure that meetings and their agendas are rationalised to take forward the Forum agenda in a synchronised way, and directed the CROP Chair to work closely with the Heads of CROP agencies and their respective Governing Boards to develop an implementation plan of the recommendations above and to report to Leaders on progress.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES
In endorsing the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, Leaders reinforced the centrality of the FPR in contextualising global commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway. Leaders acknowledged with appreciation the work of the SDG Taskforce and all key stakeholders in preparing the PRSD. Leaders committed to focusing their national as well as regional collective efforts to ensure that “no one is left behind” and requisite resources are secured. Leaders recognised that the five elements of the Roadmap provided the requisite guidance for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda by the region. Specifically, the elements are: (i) leadership and coordination; (ii) advocacy and communications; (iii) regional monitoring and indicators; (iv) integrated reporting; and (v) supporting the means of implementation.

Leaders agreed to strengthen Pacific solidarity by ensuring collective efforts through improved ownership and returns from The Blue Pacific by way of specific initiatives including the following regional priorities:

**Fisheries**
Leaders acknowledged the progress made by the Fisheries Task Force in implementing its agreed work programme, and noted the need for national level policy coherence to support regional policy positions as highlighted in the Tuna Political Mapping Report and noted the need to consult further with the relevant fisheries experts on the proposed recommendations in the report. Leaders recognised from their dialogues with stakeholders that the increasing demands
for fisheries resources across the region requires coherent and coordinated approaches to address multidimensional issues including illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing, and monitoring, control and surveillance. Leaders noted with concern reports that the negotiation of a new management measure for tropical tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission is being used by some WCPFC members, including some Forum Dialogue Partners to undermine zone based measures, that Forum Members have developed in exercise of their sovereign rights under international law. Leaders called on such partners to withdraw proposals for flag State based measures and to actively support Forum members’ efforts to gain benefits from sustainable management of fisheries in their EEZs.

Climate Change and Resilience

Leaders reaffirmed their call for the Framework for the Resilient Development of the Pacific (FRDP) to be fully elaborated to reflect the outcomes of the Paris Agreement and called on the Secretariat to undertake a process for this elaboration.

Leaders supported, on a trial basis for an initial period of two years, the proposed Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) governance arrangements agreed by the PRP Working Group to ensure effective implementation of the FRDP while encouraging flexibility to allow the participation of Members in the Task Force; and committed the Forum Secretariat to support the successful implementation of the FRDP.

With regard to the issue of fragility and vulnerability, Leaders reiterated their call to the World Bank for an expanded definition of “fragility” to take into account the vulnerabilities faced by Forum Island Countries.

Leaders welcomed the early entry into force of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in November 2016, at the twenty-second Conference of the Parties (COP 22), in Marrakech, and reaffirmed the Pacific Islands Forum’s commitment to continue to work with others who remain steadfast on their obligations under the Paris Agreement. Leaders welcomed the adoption of the Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (“Montreal Protocol”) and urged countries to accede to the amendment.

Leaders recognised the unique opportunity that the twenty-third Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides to the Pacific, building up on the outcome of the UN Ocean Conference, and expressed their support towards Fiji’s COP 23 Presidency.

Leaders acknowledged Fiji’s five key priorities for the COP 23 presidency, namely: (i) facilitative dialogue; (ii) implementation guidelines and the Paris Agreement Rule Book; (iii) Gender, local communities and indigenous peoples platform; (iv) Adaptation and loss and damage; (v) Oceans pathway through 2020 that strengthens the ocean-climate change nexus.

Recognising the significant vulnerability of Forum Island Countries to the adverse impacts of climate change, Leaders called for urgent, ambitious action from the global community to address climate change, including the provision of finance to implement the Nationally
Determined Contributions (NDCs), finalising the Paris Agreement Guidelines by 2018, and launching an inclusive process to elaborate the Facilitative Dialogue.

Leaders **tasked** the Forum Secretariat to coordinate, in consultation with Members, the work of CROP agencies in preparations leading up to the COP 23 in Bonn, Germany. Leaders **agreed** to remain fully engaged in the upcoming regional and global preparatory meeting, including the pre-COP meeting to be held in Nadi from 17 – 18 October. Leaders supported eligible Member’s application to the Green Climate Fund, including that of Nauru.

**PACER Plus**
Leaders **acknowledged** the signing of PACER Plus on 14 June, 2017 in Nuku’alofa, Tonga, as a milestone achievement noting that eleven Forum member countries have already signed.

**SECURITY**

Radioactive contaminants in the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Leaders **recalled** that the Republic of the Marshall Islands was placed by the international community under the trusteeship of the United Nations administered by the United States of America, both of which therefore have ongoing obligations to encourage a final and just resolution for the Marshallese people. Leaders **welcomed** the recommendations in the Special Rapporteur’s report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2012, and that the statement of the UN Secretary-General on 14 August 2016 that “finding a solution to this issue is critical for the future of the Republic of the Marshall Islands’ and his assurance that the relevant United Nations entities stand ready to respond to requests for assistance.

Leaders **supported** bilateral, regional and multilateral action to assist the Republic of the Marshall Islands in its efforts to engage the United States towards a justified fair and just resolution to the U.S. Nuclear Testing Programme and agreed to submit letters to the US Government urging the US to take further action to meaningfully address the ongoing impacts resulting from the US Nuclear Testing Programme, and to the United Nations Secretary General regarding any requests for assistance submitted to relevant United Nations agencies by the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and any other measures which may assist to address the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Leaders **recalled** their decision from 2016 and reaffirmed that the Forum Secretariat coordinate assistance by CROP Agencies to the Republic of the Marshall Islands in addressing ongoing impacts of nuclear testing, including, inter alia, human rights, environmental contamination, and health impacts. Leaders further **tasked** the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat General to report to the 49th Pacific Islands Forum on actions taken in this regard.

**RAMSI**

In reflecting on the state of Pacific regionalism since the Forty-Seventh Pacific Islands Forum in 2016, Leaders **acknowledged** the conclusion of RAMSI and recognised it as a true testament to
the benefits of regionalism and a shining example of regional cooperation and diplomacy, embodying more than a decade of partnership and cooperation amongst Forum members.

Leaders congratulated the Government and the people of Solomon Islands for the success of RAMSI and acknowledged with appreciation the support of all Forum countries to RAMSI through the deployment of personnel, and to Australia and New Zealand for the significant investment of resources to RAMSI.

In considering the recommendation by Forum Foreign Ministers to expand and strengthen collective action for regional security due to emerging security threats to the region, Leaders agreed to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum security related declarations as a foundation for strategic future regional responses recognising the importance of an expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change. Leaders tasked the Forum Secretariat to initiate consultations on developing a comprehensive ‘Biketawa Plus’ declaration for Leaders consideration at their next meeting.

In their dialogues with various stakeholders, Leaders acknowledged the need to strengthen cooperation and information sharing in maritime domain awareness. Leaders also recognised the importance of addressing cyber-security issues.

Tensions in the North Pacific

Leaders condemned repeated efforts by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to test nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and the threat posed to Guam, which constitutes a threat to the wider Pacific Islands region. Leaders also agreed on the importance of ensuring the full implementation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

Leaders committed to deregistering any DPRK trading or fishing vessels currently flagged on Pacific states’ shipping registers. New Zealand and Australia will assist other member states with intelligence gathering to identify illegally flagged DPRK vessels and offered to off-set the financial burden incurred.

West Papua (Papua)

Leaders recognised the constructive engagement by the Forum countries with Indonesia with respect to elections and human rights in West Papua and Papua and to continue a dialogue in an open and constructive manner.

FORUM MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS

Inspired by The Blue Pacific and building on the panel format initiated by the Government of Samoa in this year, Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to reinvigorate their dialogue with all stakeholders in order to ensure more meaningful and robust engagement.
Ministerial Meeting Charters Consistent with this, Leaders also considered meeting charters aimed at ensuring greater alignment and coherence to a prioritised regional agenda, in support of the delivery of the vision and objectives of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

Leaders endorsed the meeting charters for the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting and the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting respectively.

Leaders endorsed fisheries and climate change to be standing agenda items for Forum Leaders given that they are both key regional priorities that require whole-of-government approach, foremost Leaders close oversight.

Forum Membership

Leaders noted that French Polynesia has deposited its instruments of ratification to formalise its membership status. New Caledonia is close to concluding its instruments of ratification. Leaders agreed that the authoritative text be in English only.

Leaders further noted that future applications should be subject to agreed criteria and due process.

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGY

Leaders emphasised the need to demonstrate members’ equitable ownership of the Secretariat and ensure adequate and predictable funding of the Secretariat in order to safeguard its role as an independent body providing high quality policy advice to advance Pacific regionalism.

Leaders agreed to delay implementation of the Sustainable Funding Strategy of the Secretariat, which updates the membership shares in the 2000 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat tasking further work to be carried out on the new sustainable funding arrangements to be implemented, to be tabled at the next meeting. Leaders noted the special position of Smaller Island States, especially their smallness and lack of capacity.

RENEWAL OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL’S TERM

Leaders unanimously agreed to reappointing Meg Taylor, DBE, as Secretary General for a second, three-year term.

COUNTRY INITIATIVES

Insurance Facility

Leaders considered the concept of a Pacific Island Climate Change Insurance Facility (PICCIF) to cover the impacts of Climate Change and noted a taskforce would be established to further
elaborate it. Leaders further supported the idea that the taskforce would report to the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) in 2018 and later to the Leaders meeting.

Leaders also received an update on the establishment of the PCRAFI initiative which is now operational.

**Pacific Connect**

Leaders noted the *Pacific Connect* initiative of Australia, which aims to forge stronger relationships between Pacific and Australian leaders across the public and private sectors.

**Visa Fee Free Entry (Papua New Guinea)**

Papua New Guinea advised that they are formalising visa fee free entry for all Pacific Island Forum members and encouraged members to consider offering similar arrangements to strengthen regional integration.

**Upper Air Space and Air Services**

Leaders acknowledged the importance of addressing equitable and accessible air services, including maximising benefits of greater ownership of upper airspace management by SIS. Leaders further recognised the urgency of addressing air services and upper airspace management and the importance of addressing these as separate issues.

**UN CC Displacement Resolution**

Leaders considered a proposal for a United Nations General Assembly Resolution to Give Protection to People Displaced by Climate Change.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**Smaller Island States Leaders Outcomes**

Leaders noted the SIS Leaders’ Summary of Decisions.

**Candidacies**

Leaders:

- **Reaffirmed** their support for the Cook Islands’ candidacy, as endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2016, for a position on the Executive Board of UNESCO for the term 2017 - 2020;

- **Supported** Fiji’s candidacy to the Human Rights Council for the term 2019 – 2021; and
• **Reaffirmed** their support for Australia’s candidacy, as endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2016, for the UN Human Rights Council for 2018 – 2020.

**(a) Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean**

Leaders expressed strong solidarity with the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, and the Caribbean region following the destruction and loss of lives in the wake of Hurricane Irma. The Forum Leaders noted that this was one of the strongest Category 5 storms to visit the Caribbean region and called on the international community to urgently consider the provision of necessary support and immediate relief supplies.

Leaders recalled the impact of recent cyclones in the Pacific and in particular the significant destruction to infrastructure and economies of small states. The Leaders reiterated the importance for the international community to recognize the ‘existential threat’ climate change poses to the Pacific, the Caribbean and throughout the Commonwealth and the critical need to provide the necessary support as small states continue to adopt resilient and innovate approaches to pursue a development agenda and to meet the goals of the SDGs.

**VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING**

Leaders confirmed Nauru as the host for the 2018 Forum.