

**THIRTIETH SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM**  
**Koror, Republic of Palau**  
**3-5 October 1999**

**FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ**

The Thirtieth South Pacific Forum was held in Koror, Republic of Palau, from 3 - 5 October 1999 and was attended by Heads of State and Government of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and representatives from Australia, the Fiji Islands and Papua New Guinea. The Forum Retreat was held at Carp Island Resort.

2. The Forum congratulated the people and Government of the Republic of Palau on their Fifth Independence Anniversary and acknowledged with appreciation the warm welcome and generous hospitality provided all delegations to the Forum and related meetings and for the arrangements made for its meeting.

3. The Forum observed a moment of silence in remembrance of the former President of the Federated States of Micronesia, HE Bailey Olter; the former President of the Republic of Nauru, HE Lagumot Harris; the former Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon Tofilau Eti Alesana; the former Prime Minister of Tonga, HRH Prince Tu'ipelehake; and the former Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Hon Father Walter Hadye Lini; all of whom passed away during the last twelve months, and acknowledged their substantial respective contributions to the region.

4. The Forum considered a range of key issues of concern to the region presented through reports of Ministerial Meetings and the report of the Chairman of the Forum Officials Committee, which met immediately prior to the Forum. Ministerial Meetings that met in the course of the year included the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting, Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, Forum Aviation Ministers Meeting, Forum Communication Ministers Meeting, the Pacific ACP Ministers Meeting and the Forum Ministerial Committee on New Caledonia. The report from the Chairman of the Forum Officials Committee covered several key issues including major political and international issues as well as economic and trade issues.

#### New Name

5. Leaders agreed on a new name for the Forum. The Forum is to be called "Pacific Islands Forum" following a one year transition period to allow time for the necessary administrative changes associated with the change.

#### Forum Trade Ministers Meeting

6. The Forum welcomed the outcomes of the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM), held in Suva, the Fiji Islands, on 2 June 1999, and thanked the Government of the Fiji Islands for hosting the meeting.

7. Leaders recognised the 'spearhead' role of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Trade Agreement in liberalizing trade and agreed that one of the key strategies for dealing with globalisation and trade liberalization is to establish a regional free trade agreement.

8. The Leaders endorsed in principle a free trade area among Forum members noting that this would be implemented in stages over a period of up to 2009 for developing Forum Island Countries (FICs) and 2011

for the Smaller Island States and Least Developed Countries. The Forum tasked the Officials to negotiate the details of the draft Agreement, including negative lists and measures to provide for the application of the arrangements to Australia and New Zealand.

9. Leaders acknowledged the importance of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as the world's most significant international opportunity for negotiation of trade and commercial issues. They therefore agreed to establish a Forum delegation in Geneva and to establish a working group of Forum Island Trade Officials that are members or observers of WTO to develop common positions.

#### Forum Economic Ministers Meeting

10. The Forum endorsed the Forum Economic Action Plan : 1999 Review, the outcome of the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) held in Apia, Samoa, on 1-2 July 1999 and thanked the Government of Samoa for hosting the meeting. The Forum reiterated the importance of a whole-of-Government approach and decisive political leadership to the success of each member's economic reform programme.

11. The Forum recognised the value of lessons learnt through sharing the experiences of its members and how these could enhance the success of members' economic reform programmes. The FEMM process provided a valuable opportunity for peer review in this area and should therefore be continued. Leaders reaffirmed their support for private sector action in ensuring sustainable development and the importance of engaging the private sector in economic policy discussions. The Forum also highlighted the need to ensure that economic reform discussions take account of social safety net needs and the desirability of enlarging the dialogue to involve consultation with civil society.

12. Leaders recalled their discussions in Pohnpei on the fundamental importance of education and training in enhancing the adaptability of Pacific Islanders to a rapidly changing world and region and, in particular, to economic reform.

13. The Forum agreed to an ad-hoc meeting of Forum Ministers of Education to consider the results of the work that Forum Economic Ministers have commissioned to be undertaken in the area of human resources development.

#### Forum Aviation Ministers Meeting

14. The Forum welcomed the outcome of the Forum Aviation Ministers Meeting held in Nadi, the Fiji Islands, on 15 September 1999 and thanked the Government of the Fiji Islands for hosting the meeting. It endorsed the "Forum Aviation Plan : 1999 Review" and supported the convening of a further Forum Aviation Ministers Meeting in 2000, noting, in particular, the special circumstances of Smaller Island States with respect to aviation.

#### Forum Communication Ministers Meeting

15. Leaders reiterated the critical importance of efficient and effective communications services for economic and social development and the constraints placed by the relatively high cost structures of telecommunication networks for Forum Island Countries. They emphasized again the need to promote competitive telecommunications markets and, while taking into account social and rural/urban equity concerns, the need to discourage cross subsidy between service sectors, as well as working towards a cooperative approach to information infrastructure.

16. The Forum endorsed the outcomes of the Forum Communication Ministers Meeting held on 26 April 1999 in Suva, the Fiji Islands, at the Forum Secretariat. In particular, Leaders agreed to adopt a “Forum Vision for the Pacific Information Economy” (attached as Annex 1) and tasked the Secretariat to coordinate the development of an appropriate mechanism for regional regulators’ cooperation, in association with relevant organisations.

#### Forum Ministerial Committee Visit to New Caledonia

17. The Forum welcomed the signing of the Noumea Accords between the two main political parties in New Caledonia, the FLNKS and the RPCR, and the French Government in May 1998. Leaders noted the report of the Forum Ministerial Committee, which visited New Caledonia from 23-27 August 1999, and expressed the Forum’s appreciation to the Government of France and the Government of New Caledonia for facilitating the Committee’s visit.

18. The Forum further reaffirmed its support for continuing contact with all communities in New Caledonia and its recognition of the rights of the people of New Caledonia to self-determination. In this regard, Leaders agreed to a continuing future monitoring role for the Ministerial Committee on New Caledonia during the implementation process of the Noumea Accords and encouraged the Government and all parties in New Caledonia to continue to maintain their commitment to the implementation of the Noumea Accords in keeping with the intent and spirit of the Accords.

19. The Forum also called on its members, which are able to do so, to consider making available training awards for the Kanak people in their own training institutions.

#### East Timor

20. The Forum issued a statement on East Timor, which is attached as Annex 2.

#### Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

21. The Forum reaffirmed its position on Climate Change set out in its 1998 Communiqué (Annex 3). Leaders called on all States to implement the Buenos Aires Plan of Action in order to bring the Kyoto Protocol into force at the earliest possible date. Leaders also called upon the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to further strengthen support for the full range of measures for adaptation in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in particular, through capacity building and transfer of technology.

22. Leaders also called for strengthened efforts to build capacity in Forum Island countries to understand and respond to climate change including strengthening the observational network for climate in the region.

23. The Forum resolved that members should, with support from the Forum Secretariat, SPREP and other regional organizations, continue their efforts to advance the UNFCCC negotiations, and in particular, that the Chair and the Secretary General, and members, take appropriate opportunities to advocate these positions, individually and collectively in the course of the UNFCCC COP5 and other later and related UNFCCC meetings.

#### Outcomes of the United Nations Special Session on Small Island Developing States (UNSSSIDS)

24. The Forum welcomed the broadly satisfactory outcomes of the review of the Barbados Plan of Action undertaken at the Twenty Second Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly. These include encouraging the multilateral trading system to consider as appropriate the grant of special and differential treatment of SIDS in recognition of their vulnerabilities and the difficulties they experience in participating in world trade; the recognition of AOSIS as representing the interests and concerns of SIDS and their sustainable development in the UN system; and the call to strengthen SIDSNET.

25. Leaders also acknowledged the ongoing work of the region in support of the Barbados Plan of Action and renewed their commitment, including the completion of strategies as appropriate, aimed at achieving sustainable development.

#### Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

26. Leaders recalled their 1995 decision urging members to become parties to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea at the earliest opportunity, and further urged members, which have not yet done so, to become parties to UNCLOS at the earliest opportunity.

27. Leaders welcomed the recent initiatives taken by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies to assist FICs to understand their rights and obligations under UNCLOS and in providing FICs with a legal and policy framework to implement UNCLOS.

28. The Forum endorsed the conclusions and outcomes of the recent South Pacific Regional Follow-Up Workshop on the Implementation of UNCLOS which was held in Vava'u, Tonga, from 23-27 August 1999, in particular, the six priority areas identified by the workshop which are: national and regional Ocean Policy and legislation; marine scientific research and cooperation; delimitation of maritime zones including continental shelves; human resource development; special technical assistance and support and cooperation of regional institutions; ratification of UNCLOS and linkages to relevant treaties; and surveillance cooperation and exchange.

29. The Forum urged members which have already become parties to UNCLOS, to implement UNCLOS and, in particular, the outcomes and conclusions of the Follow-Up Workshop and encouraged relevant CROP agencies to continue to provide assistance to FICs in implementing UNCLOS, particularly in the six priority areas identified.

#### Shipment of Radioactive Materials

30. The Forum reiterated its view that shipments of radioactive materials and Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel through the region posed a continuing concern and agreed to adopt a consistent position on the issue, taking into account the risks of an accident occurring and the consequences of such an accident. It reiterated the expectation that such shipments should be carried out in a manner which addressed all possible contingencies and the concerns of relevant countries, including coastal states of the region. The Forum expected that shipments would be made only if the cargo was of demonstrably minimal risk, ships are of the highest standard and shipping states agree to promote the safety of the material and provide compensation for any industries harmed as a result of changes in the market value of the region's fisheries and tourism products in the event of an accident.

31. The Forum noted the constructive dialogue that had taken place between Forum members and government and nuclear industry representatives from France, Japan and the United Kingdom on the current liability and compensation regime for the shipment of radioactive materials and MOX fuel through the region. It reaffirmed its desire to continue to pursue discussions with France, Japan and the United Kingdom on a liability regime for compensating the region for economic losses caused to tourism, fisheries and other industries affected as a result of an accident involving a shipment of radioactive materials and MOX fuel even if there is no actual environmental damage caused.

32. The Forum agreed to pursue innovative arrangements and assurances with representatives of the Governments of France, Japan and the United Kingdom and nuclear industries to meet members' continuing concerns in this area.

33. Leaders urged those members which are also members of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to pursue within these international agencies, a strong regime of prior notification to, and consultation with, coastal states on planned shipments of radioactive materials and MOX fuel (consistent with security requirements), the development of a regime for the preparation of Environmental Impact Statements and Emergency Response Plans.

#### South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty

34. The Forum noted there had been no further signatures or ratification of the Rarotonga Treaty since 1997 and reiterated its call upon the United States to ratify the Protocols to the Treaty.

#### Environmental Vulnerability Index

35. The Forum welcomed progress in developing a vulnerability index and reiterated its call for a comprehensive vulnerability index, encompassing such factors as environmental and capacity considerations that could be broadly applied and included in the criteria for determining Least Developed Country (LDC) status and for deciding on concessional aid and trade treatment. In this regard, it commended the positive developments in the United Nations and within the Commonwealth, as well as in the region, towards the development of a comprehensive vulnerability index.

36. Leaders commended recent work done by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) on developing an Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) and encouraged development partners to support SOPAC's ongoing work in this area.

37. The Forum agreed to pursue further in the United Nations, with its development partners as well as in other fora, a deferral of any decision on graduation from LDC status until work is completed on developing an internationally accepted vulnerability index that includes economic and social as well as environmental factors.

#### Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

38. The Forum, in pursuit of genuine and universal nuclear disarmament, urged its members, its development partners and all those other countries which have not done so, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in view of the end of the three year period on 30 September 1999, after the Treaty was opened for signature.

39. The Forum also encouraged those of its members who have been chosen to host monitoring stations under the International Monitoring System of the global verification regime provided for under the CTBT, to expedite completion of national arrangements required for setting up the stations as soon as practicable.

40. Leaders encouraged members to participate in the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to ensure that the region's concerns and priorities are taken into account in the outcomes of the Conference.

#### Regional Security Cooperation

41. Leaders noted with concern that, while the region remains relatively stable, the security environment had become more fluid and uncertain with globalisation which has brought new and emerging threats to the region. These include international financial crime, cyber crime, Y2K issues, people smuggling, increasing incidents of civil unrest and drug trafficking, most of which required new investigative and evidence gathering techniques to ensure successful prosecution of criminals. The impact of climate change and illegal fishing were also recognized as posing continuing threats to members.

42. The Forum agreed that these new elements in the region's security environment pose concerns, which require concerted collective effort by members as well as the region's development partners.

43. The Forum noted that substantial progress has been made in the implementation of the legislative priorities of the Honiara Declaration, with the majority of members likely to meet the Year 2000 deadline by the end of the year.

44. Leaders noted the principles and recommendations outlined in the "Honiara Initiative" on a Common Approach to Weapons Control adopted by the 28th South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference and directed that work be undertaken to produce a draft legal framework upon which common weapons control measures could be based.

#### Forum Observership

45. Leaders formally admitted New Caledonia as Observer to the South Pacific Forum.

46. Leaders welcomed the representatives of the Government of New Caledonia and the representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General who attended the Forum as observers.

47. Leaders welcomed the increasing interest in the Forum and its related meetings and endorsed the following criterion for observership by Pacific Territories: "A Pacific Island territory on a clear path to achieving self-government or independence may be eligible for observer status at the Forum, subject to the approval of Forum Leaders".

#### Dialogue Partner Status – Philippines

48. The Forum welcomed the interest by the Government of the Philippines in becoming a Post-Forum Dialogue Partner and agreed to admit the Philippines as a Dialogue Partner to the Forum at the 12th Post-Forum Dialogue Partners Meeting in 2000.

## Trade Office in the People's Republic of China

49. Leaders welcomed the proposed "China-South Pacific Forum Cooperation Fund" with an initial funding of US\$3 million for among other things, the full establishment and operation of the Trade Office in China and directed the Secretariat to work with China to finalise the details of the management and operation of the fund.

## Fifth Session of the Multilateral High Level Conference on Tuna Fisheries (MHLC5)

50. Leaders welcomed the substantial progress being made in the Multilateral High Level Conference on Tuna Fisheries and the expectation that a convention will be finalised in 2000. Leaders reiterated their determination that the tuna resources of the Western and Central Pacific must be managed on a sustainable basis for future generations.

51. The Forum stressed the importance of a strong agreement, including a decision-making process, which is respected by all, and a system of compliance that will ensure maximum effectiveness of management controls established by the proposed Commission. The Forum noted the importance of regional solidarity and the implementation of existing regional commitments on fisheries issues.

## Vessel Monitoring System

52. Leaders agreed that the FFA Vessel Monitoring System needs to be fully implemented by all FFA members within two years. Leaders reaffirmed the importance of a coordinated regional approach to the issue of maintaining fish stocks at a sustainable level in the Western and Central Pacific.

## Japan-Forum Leaders' Summit

53. The Leaders recalled the positive outcomes of the inaugural South Pacific Forum-Japan Leaders' Summit held in October 1997 in Tokyo and the recent communication with the Government of Japan concerning a possible follow-up Summit in the near future. The Forum highlighted the importance of the Summit in expanding further, the already strong links between the region and Japan and tasked the Secretariat to pursue discussions with Japan on the timing of the next Summit.

## Taiwan/Republic of China-Forum Countries Dialogue

54. The Leaders discussed the matter of the treatment of the "Taiwan/Republic of China-Forum Countries Dialogue" by the Forum. After discussing the respective countries' policies on the matter, the Meeting agreed to reaffirm the protocol arrangements agreed to by the 1992 Forum, reiterating the need to ensure a proper venue.

## Guam Request for Support

55. The Leaders received and noted the request by Guam for support from the Forum in its negotiations with the United States.

## Culture of Peace

56. The Forum endorsed the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on a Culture of Peace and requested the Secretariat to consider how the Declaration might be supported at the regional level.

#### Commonwealth Secretary-General Position

57. The Forum noted the importance of the Commonwealth, both at the regional and international level, and that Forum member countries constitute one fifth of the Commonwealth's total membership. It also noted that the position of the Commonwealth Secretary-General would be decided upon at the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting in Durban, South Africa next month.

58. Leaders warmly endorsed and agreed to promote the New Zealand Government's candidate, the Rt Honourable Don McKinnon for the position.

#### Appreciation

59. The Forum commended the outgoing Chairman, HE Mr Leo A Falcam, President of the Federated States of Micronesia, and his Government for his leadership of the Forum over the past year.

#### Date and Venue of next meeting

60. The Forum reaffirmed its appreciation and acceptance of the kind offer by Kiribati to host the 31st South Pacific Forum in the year 2000. The date for the Forum will be finalised by the Republic of Kiribati in consultation with the Secretariat.

## **A Vision for the Pacific Information Economy**

The Forum recognises the significance of the Global Information Infrastructure to the region's future economic and social development. While the development of national information infrastructures remains the key in development efforts, the Forum also recognises the complementary role of regional cooperation. Regional and national policies for development should be formulated in consultation with all stakeholders, both public and private.

Forum Leaders look towards developing a regional community in which: · The processes of work, commerce, learning, education and training, social interaction and government are being facilitated and enhanced by communication and information technologies, enabling all citizens to take part in the opportunities brought home by the global information economy.

All citizens, particularly those outside the major towns and cities, have unprecedented access to communications, information, government services such as health and education, entertainment and culture, goods and services from around the region and the world; and have the skills and knowledge to access what they need on-line, the opportunity to share experiences about cultures and ways of life throughout global society and to make creative contributions to the stock of ideas and products available.

The education and training systems promote the development of a citizen body which can confidently take advantage of the benefits of on-line technology and produce high quality information professionals with up-to-date skills.

Investment, job creation and trade within the information economy bring growing and continuous benefits to the region's economy, generating revenue, jobs and economic efficiencies for the whole regional economy.

Cultural life is flourishing and diverse, with the information economy reducing isolation and providing a vehicle for indigenous cultures to reach wide audiences through use of multimedia and on-line communications.

The people of the region are significant contributors of content to the on-line world in an environment in which innovative content creation is able to flourish.

The unique qualities of the Pacific are maintained and enhanced.

The opportunities and demands of the global information economy encourage a culture of trade, innovation and enterprise in which business increasingly takes Pacific ideas, goods and services to markets all over the world, enhancing the region's competitiveness in the global economy.

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**EAST TIMOR**

South Pacific Forum Leaders, at their meeting in Retreat at the Carp Island Resort on 4 October, discussed the current situation in East Timor.

Leaders warmly commended the strong contribution of South Pacific Forum members to regional security, in partnership with one another and with the international community.

In particular, they applauded the central role played by South Pacific Forum countries in responding to the crisis in East Timor, welcoming in this context Australian leadership of the multinational force, INTERFET, at the request of the UN Secretary-General. Leaders further welcomed Indonesian agreement to the establishment of INTERFET and the early success of INTERFET's work in restoring peace and security, and facilitating humanitarian assistance. They called for the early establishment of a UN transitional administration and of a UN peacekeeping force.

Leaders urged all East Timorese parties to lay down their arms, work strenuously for reconciliation, and to do all in their power to help the refugees to return home.

Leaders indicated their willingness and desire to provide practical support, as required and within their resources, for UN operations in East Timor, including for the current INTERFET operation.

## **EXTRACT FROM 1998 COMMUNIQUE CLIMATE CHANGE**

1. The Forum recognised and endorsed members' deep concerns regarding the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on rising sea levels and changing weather patterns on all Forum members, especially low lying island nations, as recorded in the "Forum Leaders' Statement on Climate Change" issued at the 28th South Pacific Forum and the "Statement on Climate Change and Sea Level rise" issued by the 7th Economic Summit of Smaller Island States Leaders.
2. The Forum recognised the legally binding commitments agreed in the Kyoto protocol as a significant first step forward on the path of ensuring effective global action to combat climate change.
3. The Forum encouraged all countries to sign the Kyoto Protocol and to work toward its earliest possible ratification.
4. The Forum urged that the momentum achieved in Kyoto be maintained and built upon at the Fourth Conference of the Parties (COP4) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Buenos Aires in November 1998.
5. The Forum highlighted the importance of implementation of measures to ensure early progress toward meeting these commitments. They urged all Annex 1 Parties, especially the United States, European Union, Russia, Japan, Canada and other major emitters to take urgent action in this regard.
6. The Forum called for the achievement of substantial progress in establishment of the rules for international implementation mechanisms, particularly emissions trading, the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation to ensure that these mechanisms assist the effectiveness of greenhouse gas reduction efforts in the attainment of Kyoto commitments.
7. The Forum noted the recognition in the Kyoto Protocol of the importance of the adaptation needs of vulnerable Pacific Island states. Leaders urged all parties to recognise the need for adaptation measures to be undertaken within Pacific Island States. They called for adequate resources to be generated through the implementation mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol and the Global Environment Facility for the full range of adaptation measures.
8. The Forum recognised the importance of COP4 initiating work to develop verifiable, enforceable, effective and transparent accountability mechanisms through emissions inventory monitoring, recording and reporting requirements, and supported the need for an effective compliance regime to back the legally binding commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. They called for work to commence at COP4 on the elaboration of procedures and mechanisms for non-compliance with the Protocol.
9. The Forum stressed that an effective global response to the problem of climate change required ongoing active cooperation and strengthened action by all countries, in accordance with the principles of the UNFCCC, including of their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and that developed country parties should take the lead in combatting climate change and the adverse effects thereof. The Forum commended recent work done by SPREP in support of PIC's in their international negotiations and recommended that this continue. The Forum stressed the urgent need to initiate a process to develop procedures and future time frames for wider global participation in emission limitation and reduction efforts

in which significant developing country emitters would enter into commitments which reflect their individual national circumstances and development needs.

10. The Forum recommended that these positions should be actively advocated by Forum member countries and the Forum Chair, who would work together to advocate these positions to other countries and any broad grouping that members can influence in the lead up to, and at, COP4 in Buenos Aires and beyond.