
Securing our future in the Pacific



Pacific Islands Forum
with United Nations Missions
Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

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**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GENERAL STATEMENT FOR THE
HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2020.**

DELIVERED BY

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***PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM CHAIR & PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
TUVALU***

Greetings,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 Member States of the Pacific Islands Forum with presence here at the United Nations, namely; Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Tuvalu.

COVID-19 and the Pacific

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing unprecedented disruption on our Blue Continent. While prompt action by Pacific Governments has so far curtailed the introduction and spread of the virus in the region, there will still be significant economic and social disruption which is expected to be long-lasting.

The onset of COVID-19 and the region's continuing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters heighten the necessity for effective policies and programmes that strengthen resilient communities.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda will support this resilience and must progress across the region.

Sustainable fisheries, tourism sectors and remittances will all be heavily impacted by Covid-19 and the need for social protection has intensified, with the virus impacting the most vulnerable more intensely.

The international community must be ready to provide support through predictable financing, supply chains must remain open and questions of border security must be carefully weighed as our region seeks to build back better.

Ongoing challenges

The achievement of gender equality in the Pacific region continues to be hampered by structural and underlying social, cultural and economic barriers. Despite progress made in recent years, women remain under-represented in leadership roles and formal employment while gender-based violence remains a major concern.

More than 1 million persons with disabilities in the Pacific continue to face deep inequalities and multiple barriers. They are still over-represented among the poor, have significantly fewer economic opportunities than persons without disabilities and women with disabilities are even more likely to experience violence.

There is a need for accelerated national action to reform economic and labour policies that target key growth sectors, with specific attention required to address gender inequality in employment and limited job opportunities for the region's youth population.

In the health sector, despite progress being made under the Pacific NCD Roadmap, substantial efforts are still required to strengthen leadership, governance and financing to accelerate national action on non-communicable diseases.

Development providers must also ensure that the specific vulnerabilities of SIDS inform access to concessional finance. In particular we urge reform to incorporate an economic vulnerability measure into the United Nations development funding eligibility criteria.

The Pacific in action

While much remains to be done, the Pacific region is pursuing innovative solutions to its challenges in the context of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development and the S.A.M.O.A Pathway.

The Pacific Island Forum has established the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C) to ensure required medical and humanitarian personnel and equipment can efficiently reach Member countries. It responds to requests for support to combat COVID-19, together with partners including the Pacific Community, WHO, UN, Forum Dialogue Partners, Pacific private sector and civil society.

In waste management, the Cleaner Pacific 2025 strategy integrates actions to address municipal solid waste, asbestos, electrical and electronic waste, healthcare waste, chemicals, used oil and lubricants, marine litter, ship-sourced pollution, disaster waste and sewage and trade waste. However, there remains a need for some Pacific Island countries to elevate waste management in their development agenda.

We are also looking at climate-smart agri-production methods, alternatives to packaging of products, reducing our carbon footprints, and identifying innovative processes for connectivity and climate risk analysis.

A number of socioeconomic impact surveys and assessments are being planned or undertaken, including by CROP and UN agencies in the Pacific, which will inform the way the Pacific responds as a region. However, despite such improvements in data gathering and analysis, national statistical systems are still heavily dependent on external technical and financial support. There is a need for additional resources

for national and regional statistical stakeholders to ensure that high quality data is produced.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also elevated the use of digital platforms and mechanisms as a means for communication in our region. This has brought to the fore the need to establish and or strengthen e-commerce legislations across Pacific Island economies.

Voluntary National Reviews

This year, four Pacific Islands Forum member countries will be presenting their VNRs, with the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands reporting for the first time and Samoa for the second time.

The nine Pacific VNRs completed since 2016 confirm that while country systems, policies and processes are largely in place, there is a need for greater effort to build institutional and personnel capacity to enhance national planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and reporting systems and processes.

Implementation of the 17 SDGs will promote Pacific resilience and must progress across the region, fulfilling the Blue Continent's commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Our region is clear-eyed about our collective challenges and stands ready to work constructively during this High Level Political Forum and beyond.

I thank you.