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FIFTY-SECOND PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

RAROTONGA, COOK ISLANDS

6 – 10 NOVEMBER 2023

FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ

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FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ

The Fifty-Second (52nd) Pacific Islands Forum was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands from 6 – 10 November 2023, and was attended by the Heads of State, Government, and Territories of Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Samoa, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu. New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu were represented at Ministerial Level. The Forum Leaders Meeting comprised two sessions: The Forum Leaders Plenary, held on 8 November at the National Auditorium – Te A're Karioi Nui in Rarotonga; and the Forum Leaders' Retreat, held on board the Vaka Teariki Moana in Aitutaki on 9 November 2023.

2. In attendance at the Plenary session were: Associate Member Wallis and Futuna represented at Presidential level; Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies, 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); as well as the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC). American Samoa, Guam, Timor Leste, the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations (UN), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and the World Bank also attended the Plenary as Observers.

3. Leaders **expressed** their deep appreciation to the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, and the Government and people of the Cook Islands, for the warm hospitality extended to their delegations. Leaders **commended** the preparations and facilitation of the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum, which enabled Leaders and participants to hold constructive discussions and contributed to the overall success of the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum.

4. Leaders **congratulated** the Federated States of Micronesia on its 37th Independence Anniversary on 3 November 2023, as well as the Government and the People of Tonga on the occasion of the 148th Anniversary of the Constitution of Tonga (Constitution Day) on 4 November 2023.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT – SECRETARY GENERAL'S OVERVIEW

5. Leaders **acknowledged** the region's strategic context as it continues to evolve in response to emerging opportunities and challenges, and as Members contend with the lingering impacts of COVID-19, manage the ongoing challenges and impacts of the climate emergency, and address ongoing economic and connectivity challenges, including debt management. Leaders also

recognised the increasing prominence of digital transformation and new technologies and **urged** a cautious approach to these developments, including Artificial Intelligence.

6. Further, Leaders **noted** the increasing global and geostrategic issues that impact the region. Notwithstanding, Leaders remain resilient and optimistic about their forward-looking economic and development prospects and will **endeavour** to manage issues that arise in a manner that maintains the solidarity of the region and continues to respect the sovereignty of each Forum Member.

7. Reflecting on the ongoing concerns and issues raised by Members through the Secretary General's High Level Consultations, Leaders **noted** the range of issues underway to address these concerns, including through strengthened CROP coordination and collaboration, and ensuring a fit-for-purpose Secretariat. Leaders welcomed the work to develop the 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and **encouraged** its timely conclusion.

2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT

8. Leaders **reaffirmed** the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* (2050 Strategy) as the region's long-term strategic policy document, framing the region's collective direction for the next three decades. Recognising the diversity of the region, Leaders further **reaffirmed** the importance of alignment to the 2050 Strategy across all sectors and partnerships to ensure effective regional cooperation.

9. Leaders **welcomed** and **endorsed** the Implementation Plan for the 2050 Strategy (**Annex A**), which articulates specific goals, outcomes, and regional collective actions across each of the 2050 Thematic Areas. Leaders **emphasised** the importance of the implementation mechanism and reporting arrangements for the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan, including sustained CROP Coordination, effective Means of Implementation, Partnerships and Resourcing, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) by mid-2024. Leaders **further emphasised** the importance of mapping existing regional strategies and linkages of Ministerial decisions.

10. Leaders **endorsed** the Pacific Partnerships for Prosperity (PPfP) as a political prioritisation process to mobilise resources to empower Pacific people to bring about transformational change through national and regional development.

11. Leaders **tasked** the Forum Officials Committee (FOC) to lead discussions to finalise the PPfP *Partner Action and Commitment Engagement (PACE) Plans* before the end of Quarter 1 2024, to enable early implementation of the PPfP, and **urged** regional agencies, Forum Dialogue Partners and Observers, regional civil society and private sector to work together in implementing the PPfP, including finalising PACE Plans as a key delivery mechanism for priorities under the PPfP and report to Leaders at their 53rd Meeting on progress on implementation.

12. Recognising the centrality of the regional system in the delivery of the 2050 Strategy and its implementation plan, Leaders **discussed** the Review of the Regional Architecture (RRA), **noted** the evolving synergies, and **tasked** the FOC to progress and conclude the RRA for consideration by Leaders at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum, and to provide an update on Phase 1 at the Budget Session of the FOC in 2023.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCE

Climate Action and Advocacy Priorities

13. Leaders **committed** to implementing the Paris Agreement, acting on the IPCC's 6th Assessment Report, which represents the most comprehensive and robust assessment of climate change science.

14. Leaders **aspire** to a Just and Equitable Transition to a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific, acknowledging that the pathway is not immediate nor is it one-size fits all.

15. Leaders **committed** to the transition away from coal, oil and gas in our energy systems, in line with IPCC pathways for limiting global average temperatures to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels with a peak in fossil fuel consumption in the near term.

16. Leaders **called on** all development partners to provide substantially greater levels of climate finance, technology and capacity to accelerate decarbonisation in the Blue Pacific.

17. Leaders **agreed** to establish a regional Energy Commissioner for a Just Transition to a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific following the Review of the Regional Architecture.

Pacific Resilience Facility

18. Leaders **reaffirmed** their support for the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF), recognising it as a Pacific-led, Member-owned and managed community resilience financing facility. Leaders **noted** the review, reframe and re-design of the PRF in a post-COVID19 landscape, as considered and endorsed in 2023 by Forum Economic Ministers.

19. Leaders **endorsed** the *Declaration on the Establishment of the Pacific Resilience Facility* (**Annex B**) and **noted** the forthcoming global pledging event to capitalise the PRF. Leaders **recognised** commitments by Australia and New Zealand to contribute to the capitalisation of the PRF, and **strongly urged** all partners to contribute to funding the PRF capitalisation target of USD$500m.

Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility

20. Leaders **noted** the far-reaching impacts of climate change and disasters on human security and mobility in Pacific Islands, with more than 50,000 Pacific people displaced every year due to climate and disaster related events.

21. Leaders **endorsed** the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (**Annex C**) which is a Pacific Partnerships for Prosperity priority and aligns with the 2050 Strategy as well as the *Boe Declaration*. The Framework firmly acknowledges Forum Members' fundamental priority to 'stay in place' in our ancestral homes, including through land reclamation, and is a global first that aims to provide practical guidance to governments planning for and managing climate mobility, while also respecting Members' national laws and policies.

2023 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons Affected by Climate Change-related Sea-level Rise

22. Leaders **emphasised** that securing legal certainty of the Blue Pacific, in the face of the existential threat of climate change, is at the heart of the 2050 Strategy and underpins the security and full realisation of the Blue Pacific Continent, now and in perpetuity. It is fundamental to securing the rights, entitlements, and interests of all states and peoples of the Blue Pacific, and to the maintenance of global peace and security.

23. Leaders **commended** the strong international responses to the 2021 *PIF Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-level rise*, with support from over 100 states, and **further called** on other states and regions to formally support the 2021 Declaration, including through adoption of similar practices to ensure a global norm of maintaining maritime zones and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, notwithstanding climate change-related sea-level rise.

24. **Recalling** their decision in 2022 that due consideration of the complex issues of sea-level rise in relation to statehood and the protection of persons should be guided and informed by applicable principles and norms of international law and relevant international frameworks and standards, Leaders **considered** and **endorsed** the *2023 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise* (**Annex D**) and its Aide-Memoire.

25. Leaders **called on** all states to support the 2023 Declaration and to cooperate in achieving its purposes, consistent with the duty to cooperate and the principles of equity and fairness. Leaders **committed** to continued support to and engagement with the ongoing study by the International Law Commission (ILC), including at its upcoming 75th Session (2024), on the topic "Sea-level rise in relation to international law".

International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Climate Change

26. Noting the urgency of the climate threat and the need for accelerated global climate action and implementation of the Paris Agreement, and recalling its decisions in 2022, Leaders **recalled** the historic occasion of the unanimous adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution A/77/L.58 on 29 March 2023 requesting the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 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 **commended** the Government of Vanuatu for its leadership in achieving this first unanimous referral of a question to the ICJ in the history of the UN.

27. Leaders **strongly encouraged** the participation of all Forum Members in the advisory proceedings of the ICJ, in particular by developing progressive and comprehensive national written submissions by the extended deadline of 22 January 2024, and **noted** that the Secretariat has made an official request for permission from the ICJ Registrar to make a Forum Secretariat submission as per the tasking by the Forum Officials Committee.

REVITALISED PACIFIC LEADERS GENDER EQUALITY DECLARATION

28. Leaders **reaffirmed** their concern that despite the increased support at both regional and national levels, there continues to be concerningly slow progress in achieving gender equality in the region caused by structural and underlying social, cultural, institutional and economic barriers which have detrimental effects on the lives of women and girls.

29. In this context, Leaders **further reaffirmed** their commitment to gender equality in the region and recognised the responsibility and importance of both men and women working towards achieving the Leaders 2050 vision. Leaders **endorsed** the revitalised *Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration* (**Annex E**).

FISHERIES PRIORITIES

30. Leaders **reaffirmed** fisheries as a standing agenda item, and their commitment to sustainably manage and develop their fisheries resources to support Pacific people's livelihoods, food security and economies.

31. Leaders **noted** the Final Report on the Independent Review of Increased Economic Returns from Fisheries and the tasking for the PIF, FFA and SPC to implement specific outcomes of the review and the recommendations from the inter-agency working group (IAWG) of relevance to those organisations.

32. Leaders **welcomed** and **endorsed** the Fisheries Ministers timely Joint Communique on the Pacific Islands Fisheries Ministers East New Britain Initiative (ENBi) to increase economic returns from fisheries.

33. Leaders **noted** the updates on broader fisheries work undertaken by CROP agencies, including the impact of climate change on offshore fisheries, and on coastal fisheries and aquaculture, and **urged** closer collaboration with the PNA.

34. Leaders **welcomed** the Fisheries Ministers' endorsement of the FFA Climate Change Strategy (CCS) and work to develop the CCS Implementation Plan.

35. Leaders **commended** Fisheries Ministers for the agreement on the distribution of funds under the Economic Assistance Agreement related to the US Tuna Treaty.

36. Leaders **welcomed** the announcement from the Solomon Islands and the FFA of the Honiara Summit on the implementation of SDG14.4 to be held from 1 – 3 May 2024.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Trade-Related Issues

37. Leaders **recognised** the strong leadership role played by the Forum WTO members in the adoption of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement at the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference, and **encouraged** the Forum WTO members to ratify the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement and conclude the second wave of negotiations by the thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) to ensure

comprehensive disciplines. Leaders **issued** a Forum Statement on WTO Fisheries Subsidies (**Annex F**) in preparation for MC13.

38. Leaders **endorsed** in principle that the Pacific elevates its sustainable trade and environment agenda.

Labour Mobility

39. Leaders **recalled** their Special Leaders Retreat in February 2023, where they tasked the Secretariat to work with all participating countries to hold further dialogue to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to the Comprehensive Assessment of Regional and Sub-Regional Labour Mobility Arrangements in the Pacific, and **noted** the ongoing national consultations on the Comprehensive Assessment, including in relation to social and economic impact assessment of regional labour schemes.

40. Leaders **reaffirmed** that the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting remains the principal Ministerial Meeting with oversight of this issue, and **acknowledged** the complementary role of Forum Economic Ministers, particularly as it relates to the socio-economic impact of labour mobility on Pacific economies.

41. Leaders **noted** the proposal to develop Pacific regional labour mobility principles, in collaboration with the Implementation Unit of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus), and other relevant agencies to ensure synergies and avoid unnecessary duplication in the proposed development of the principles. Leaders **emphasised** an inclusive approach that ensures Parties to the PACER Plus, as well as non-parties, have equal decision-making role on regional labour mobility issues.

NUCLEAR ISSUES

Japan Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Wastewater Issue

42. Leaders **recalled** the strong concerns by Forum Leaders for the significance of the potential threat of nuclear contamination to the health and security of the Blue Pacific as per the 2022 and 2023 Forum Communiques, and **noted** the extensive Forum dialogue and engagement process taken over the last three years on this matter.

43. Leaders **recalled** the Forum priorities of international consultation, international law, and scientific independent and verifiable assessments, and **emphasised** the importance of this transgenerational and possible transboundary issue particularly in the context of the region's nuclear testing legacy, the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty* (Rarotonga Treaty), and the 2050 Strategy.

44. Leaders **recognised** the sovereignty of Members to determine their own national positions on the discharge by Japan of over a million tonnes of Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) treated nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean.

45. Leaders **acknowledged** the intensive dialogue with Japan, to date, following the high-level dialogue between the PIF Chair and PIF representatives with Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in February 2023.

46. Leaders **acknowledged** the ongoing dialogue with the IAEA, including the visit by IAEA Director General (DG) Rafael Grossi to the Cook Islands in July 2023.

47. Leaders **noted** the *Comprehensive Report on the Safety Review of the ALPS-Treated Water at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station* (IAEA Report) of 4 July 2023 on the *Safety Review of the ALPS-Treated Water at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station*.

48. Leaders **acknowledged** the work of the PIF Experts and their initial advice in response to the IAEA Report.

49. Leaders **acknowledged** the offer by the IAEA to establish an elevated dialogue mechanism with the PIF, and the IAEA's establishment of a permanent monitoring presence at Fukushima.

50. Leaders **noted** the release of the ALPS treated nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean on 24 August 2023 and continuing over the next 30 years, and **recommended** and **encouraged** Japan to:

(a) **embed** the Fukushima issue as a standing item of the PALM agenda; and
(b) **establish** political dialogue annually to ascertain safety issues based on international safety standards and ongoing independent monitoring by the IAEA.

51. Leaders **emphasised** the need to build national and regional scientific capacity and monitoring capabilities to assist the health and well-being of the marine ecosystems of the Blue Pacific including to human health within the region.

Rarotonga Treaty and nuclear testing legacies

52. Leaders **welcomed** the 2023 Report of the Secretary General to Forum Leaders on the status of the Rarotonga Treaty and matters arising under it or in relation to it, in compliance with Article 9(3) of the Treaty, and **noted** the requirements for States Parties to report to the Secretary General on any significant event within their jurisdiction affecting the implementation of the Treaty and to keep each other informed on matters arising under or in relation to the Treaty.

53. Leaders **promoted** full compliance by the Parties to the provisions of the Treaty in pursuit of safeguarding the Blue Pacific against nuclear threats, including nuclear contamination, in accordance with international law and in pursuit of the 2050 Strategy, and **supported** progress and next steps to operationalise the Treaty.

54. Leaders **reiterated** Forum Leaders' invitation to remaining non-Party Forum Members to accede to the Treaty, and **urged** the United States to ratify the Treaty Protocols, as soon as possible, and in accordance with the latest call made under the *2nd US – Pacific Islands Forum Statement on Reaffirming US-Pacific Partnership* of 25 September 2023.

55. Leaders **expressed** ongoing concern regarding outstanding nuclear testing legacy issues and **reaffirmed** Forum Leaders' commitment to continue support towards bilateral, regional and multilateral action to resolve outstanding nuclear testing legacy issues in the Blue Pacific Continent. Leaders **commended** the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Members for the adoption by the Fifty First Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 7 October 2022 of the milestone Resolution 51/35 regarding "Technical assistance and capacity-building to address the

human rights implications of the nuclear testing legacy in the Marshall Islands", and recommended to Leaders to fully support its implementation.

AUKUS

56. Leaders **noted** the update provided by Australia in relation to the Trilateral Security Pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS), and **welcomed** the transparency of Australia's efforts, and commitment to compliance with international law, in particular the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (NPT), the Rarotonga Treaty, and IAEA safeguard agreements.

OCEAN

Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

57. Leaders **acknowledged** the recent adoption of the Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, and **commended** the efforts of the OPOC, CROP and partners in their support to Members to finalise negotiations.

58. Leaders **encouraged** Members to sign onto the BBNJ Agreement, noting that some Members are undertaking necessary national approval processes. Leaders **endorsed** the proposed way forward to provide coordinated regional support on Members' implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, through the OPOC.

59. Leaders **encouraged** Members to join the High Level Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, and continued support and involvement in the ongoing plastics treaty negotiations.

Maintaining the role of the Pacific Oceans Commissioner in a position of strength under the new arrangement

60. Leaders **endorsed** the proposition that OPOC finalises the development of the OPOC five to ten-year (Strategic) Plan and sustainable funding strategy, in close consultation with the Forum Secretariat's Strategic Plan and to be presented for the consideration at the pre-Forum session of the FOC in 2024. Leaders **endorsed** the proposal for a review of the existing institutional arrangements including the mandate and reporting of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (POC) and OPOC, within the context of broader Forum reforms, and to present recommendations for the consideration at the pre-Forum session of the FOC in 2024, and **welcomed** the update from the Palau on the status of the host country agreement with the Government of Palau.

PIF REPRESENTATION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

61. Leaders **recalled** their decision at their Special Leaders Retreat in February 2023 for the Secretariat to undertake further work to consider the establishment and operationalisation of a permanent Pacific Islands Forum Special Envoy Office in the US to manage coordination within the UN as well as Washington, and report back to the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum, and further, **referred** to the 2nd US – Pacific Islands Forum Summit on 25 September 2023 which recognised the importance of enduring partnerships and cooperation and welcomed further opportunities to strengthen reciprocal diplomatic representation between the region and the US.

62. Leaders **noted** the ongoing work to develop a feasibility assessment of a PIF presence in the United States and **further noted** that a revised feasibility assessment will be tabled for Leaders' consideration at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum in 2024.

OTHER MATTERS

Human Rights Council

63. Leaders **supported** the Republic of the Marshall Islands' second Candidature to the Human Rights Council for the 2025 – 2027 elections next year in October, and **commended** the Republic of the Marshall Islands for its leadership and achievements in its first candidature from 2020 – 2023, including in advancing critical issues of climate change in the context of human rights, nuclear issues, fisheries and in strengthening the Council, and **encouraged** Members to take part in the Council.

Unlocking the Blue Pacific Prosperity Plan

64. Leaders **supported** the "Unlocking the Blue Pacific Prosperity Plan", which articulates the goals of: 100% effective ocean management for the region and 30% protection of the Blue Pacific Continent, aligned to Pacific country contexts, priorities, and capacities; robust food systems underpinned by resilient ecosystems resulting in healthy and productive Pacific people; and fit-for-purpose sustainable financing mechanisms that support the implementation of the 2050 Strategy.

65. Leaders **noted** the update as championed by Palau and Tonga, and **encouraged** Members to sign the Plan.

West Papua (Papua)

66. Leaders **reaffirmed** recognition of Indonesia's sovereignty over West Papua (Papua). In recalling their earlier positions on the issue, including the call for open and constructive dialogue with Indonesia, Leaders **appointed** a Forum Envoy comprising of the Prime Minister of Fiji and the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea to facilitate a dialogue with Indonesia on areas of shared interest for mutual understanding.

Teieniwa Vision

67. Leaders **noted** the update on the Teieniwa Vision, including the proposal to establish a Taskforce to oversee its implementation, and **commended** Kiribati for its continued leadership on anticorruption in the Pacific.

Towards greater Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Deep Sea Minerals (DSM) management

68. Leaders **acknowledged** the significant interest in DSM among specific Members, and **reaffirmed** collective commitment to the health and resilience of the Blue Pacific Continent. Leaders **recognised** and **respected** the diversity of positions amongst Members on DSM

development and sovereign decision-making. Leaders **endorsed** the convening of a Pacific Islands Forum Talanoa Dialogue in 2024, to be facilitated by the Secretariat, to facilitate open and inclusive discussion on DSM.

Rising Nations Initiative

69. Leaders **noted** the Rising Nations Initiative, emphasising the need to closely cooperate with the international community to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change and with a view to protecting the statehood of states and safeguard the rights and heritage of their populations from the challenges posed by rising sea levels, and **encouraged** Members to consider joining this initiative.

Pacific Quality Infrastructure Principles

70. Leaders **noted** the need for greater regional focus and effort to support quality infrastructure development in the region in line with Pacific priorities. Leaders **approved** the Pacific regional infrastructure principles, and **agreed** that contingent to resourcing, the Secretariat develop options to support implementation.

Papua New Guinea-led Pacific ICT Ministers Meeting

71. Leaders **noted** the development of the Lagatoi Declaration on Digital Transformation of the Pacific and its links to the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan; and to absorb ICT coordination efforts into the CROP process as a regional collective action to deliver on the Leaders' Vision under the 2050 Strategy.

Forum Troika Guidelines

72. Leaders **noted** the update from the Forum Troika Leaders Meeting and its related *Guidelines to Operationalise the Pacific Islands Forum Chairing Arrangements and Troika Charter*.

New Caledonia

73. Leaders **welcomed** an update from New Caledonia on the ongoing discussions between the parties to the Noumea Accord following the last referendum in 2021, and **encouraged** the Forum ministerial committee on New Caledonia to continue monitoring the self-determination process in New Caledonia in line with recommendations from the recent observer mission report that was welcomed at the 51st Pacific Islands Forum in July 2022.

Connectivity and Air Services

74. Leaders **reaffirmed** their commitment to a well-connected region that ensures inclusive, accessible, secure and affordable ICT infrastructure and services. Leaders **acknowledged** commitments by development partners to support all countries in the region to achieve primary submarine cable connectivity and secure options for redundancy. Leaders **welcomed** the update on the advancement of a second international submarine cable, financed by Australia and New Zealand, to support Tonga's economic development and communication resilience in the face of natural disasters.

75. Leaders **acknowledged** the importance of addressing equitable and accessible air services and air service capacity, including maximising benefits of greater ownership of upper airspace management for Members.

Zone of Peace

76. Leaders **welcomed** Fiji's presentation on the concept of a Zone of Peace and its alignment to the 2050 Strategy and its Implementation Plan, the Biketawa Declaration, the Boe Declaration and other complementary initiatives, and **tasked** the Secretariat to further develop the concept to ensure the initiatives and activities, including of the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHOPS), are aligned with regional security arrangements and strengthens regional cooperation and partnerships, for consideration at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum.

Appointment of the Secretary General

77. Leaders **reaffirmed** the commitment to the Suva Agreement, including their decision at their Special Retreat in Denarau in February 2023 to appoint Baron Waqa as the next Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2024.

78. Leaders **recalled** the *2022 Procedures Governing the Selection and Appointment of the Secretary General* and **reaffirmed** their commitment to the Procedures for any future appointments.

31ST SMALLER ISLAND STATES LEADERS MEETING

79. Leaders **noted** the outcomes of the 31st Smaller Islands States (SIS) Leaders Meeting convened on 6 November 2023 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

80. 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.

NEXT MEETING

81. Leaders **agreed** to hold the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings in August 2024 in Tonga, and **reaffirmed** the Solomon Islands as the Host of the 54th Pacific Islands Forum in 2025.

Aitutaki, Cook Islands
9 November 2023