



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

**7th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
23 – 28 May 2022**

Statement by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

We extend our sincere gratitude to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction for the kind invitation extended to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to attend the 7th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP22) in Bali, Indonesia. The GP22 is an important global milestone as we progress with the Mid Term Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and look forward to the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to be held in September 2022 in Brisbane, Australia.

2. The Pacific is on the front line of climate change and disaster risk. According to the World Risk Index 2021, three Pacific Island countries make up the top three most at-risk countries in the world¹. Our countries are frequently exposed to many extreme natural events and when we are impacted by them, the effects are devastating economically and socially particularly on our most vulnerable – our women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

3. In August 2021, our Pacific Island Forum Leaders reaffirmed that Climate Change is an existential threat to our people and remains the single greatest facing our region. The latest IPCC Sixth Assessment report re-confirms the seriousness and urgency of the climate change crisis. Global temperatures will continue to increase until at least 2050 under all emissions scenarios, and the 1.5°C warming threshold will be exceeded before 2040, unless there is a significant reduction in carbon emissions in the coming decade.

4. We are somewhat heartened though that the COP26 meeting in Glasgow in November 2021, amongst other things, resolved to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, increasing humanity’s chances of survival in the future. Other achievements, such as the finalisation of the Paris Rulebook and the full operationalization of the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage, are encouraging to all Small Island Developing States such as those in the Pacific. We now look forward to more positive outcomes for the upcoming COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt.

5. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also been a major cause for concern around our resilience building efforts. While most countries globally are now on the path to economic recovery, most Pacific Island Countries are still in lock down and are still grappling with their second and third waves of the pandemic. The increasing vaccination levels around the Pacific

¹ Vanuatu 1; Solomon Islands 2; Tonga 3

allow us to be cautiously optimistic about the future, but the uncertainty of a post COVID 19 recovery is a real concern for Pacific Island Countries given the spiraling economic cost the pandemic is imposing on Pacific economies, including debt burdens.

6. Our recent experiences dealing simultaneously with COVID-19 and disasters such as cyclones, volcanoes, earthquakes reasons for us to be more vigilant in relation to the multifaceted risks faced by our region. At the regional level, we established the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 (PHP-C) to help facilitate the movement of much needed medical supplies and equipment to enable our countries to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. We also continue to progress the development of a Regional Humanitarian and Disaster Response mechanism as requested specifically by our leaders through the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security Action Plan*. Such a mechanism once fully operational will significantly enhance our efforts at coordination and ensure that we can provide the relevant assistance to those who need it the most within the shortest possible timeframes. This has now been complemented in December 2021 by a renewed emphasis on the importance of disaster preparedness planning as articulated by the Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers.

7. In 2019 our Leaders also endorsed the establishment of the Pacific Resilience Facility – a forward looking small grants financing mechanism seeking to build resilience and preparedness in vulnerable communities.

8. Historically, the Pacific’s disaster preparedness efforts anchored by the National Disaster Management Offices have understandably focused on natural hazards. Our Health ministries have also understandably focused on epidemics and pandemic planning. The COVID-19 experience has highlighted that there needs to be more preparedness across multiple risk scenarios with strengthened coordination of resources to enable more effective response and recovery.

9. Effectively dealing with climate and disaster resilience in an integrated manner in the Pacific is an ongoing priority of the Pacific Islands Forum. The overarching regional guidance for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management in the Pacific is provided through *the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP) 2017 – 2030* and its implementing arm the Pacific Resilience Partnership.

10. Our policy commitments and related initiatives bolster our efforts to effectively address the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions on movement, increased awareness and vigilance amongst the public, increased investments in risk information and increasing access to financing for resilience building and disaster response, put us in a better position to address the intent of the Sendai Framework. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for the Pacific Island region; acknowledging that our previous risk reduction, preparedness, and response efforts need to be significantly enhanced if we are to effectively deal with all types of disaster risk. We need to fully embrace and implement the ‘Build Back Better’ principle in our efforts; ensuring that all our

systems of governance including policy, legislation, institutional arrangements, and financing mechanisms are oriented towards addressing multi-risk scenarios.

11. The Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Sendai Framework is a good opportunity to build from our experiences and learning around COVID-19, and natural hazard events, to help strengthen policy and programming around resilience building. In the Pacific we will also be undertaking a mid-term review of the FRDP in 2023. We see the MTR for the Sendai Framework as something we can glean from to inform the FRDP mid-term review and generally strengthen our resilience building efforts.

12. We always look forward to opportunities such as the GPDRR 2022 to be able to share our regional experiences alongside other regions. Through the sharing of knowledge and experience in resilience building, we improve our prospects for addressing the increasingly more complex risk environment around us.

13. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat reaffirms its commitment as a regional organisation in coordinating and supporting the various efforts to build resilience in our region. As the premier political body in the Pacific, we have an important role to play in convening high-level dialogue and coordinating regional efforts to assist Pacific Island Countries to achieve their development goals and aspirations.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Suva, Fiji
24 May 2022