



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

**2018 PAPUA NEW GUINEA UPDATE – PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN THE
YEAR OF APEC**

Keynote Address: Leadership and the future

Friday, 15 June 2018

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[All protocols observed]

- Apologies for not being with you yesterday. The Highlands were calling!
- It is wonderful to be back home in Papua New Guinea and to be afforded the opportunity to share with you my views on *Leadership and the future*.
- I would like to approach this session's theme by reflecting on regional leadership and taking into account my experience as the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum. In doing so, I will also offer my observations on Papua New Guinea's engagement with the wider Pacific islands region, and its potential for greater regional leadership.

[The regional context]

- Distinguished colleagues, the term leadership is often used to indicate dominance or overt influence, particularly when we use that term in the context of international relations. But I hope that through my discussion this morning, you will come away with a different sense of what leadership means in the context of Pacific regionalism, and the potential for Papua New Guinea in the region. Indeed, dominance is arguably inimical to the very concept of Pacific regionalism, in which we are seeking to all contribute to the wider good of our region. To my mind, key elements of leadership for Pacific regionalism include active participation in discussions, and at the core of participation is persistence and determination to progress our region's priorities.
- With this concept of leadership in mind, let us turn to the current state of our region.

[State of the region]

- In 2013, Sir Mekere Morauta conducted an extensive review of the Pacific region on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum and he concluded that:

“The region as a whole is experiencing significant social, economic and environmental change and challenges; it is also the subject of new levels of geopolitical interests within and beyond its shores. But the region is vulnerable and it remains significantly dependent on the economies and goodwill of others.”
- This statement is now 5 years old, and pre-dated my commencement with the Pacific Islands Forum. But it still rings true to me in describing the state of our region today.
- I am particularly conscious of Sir Morauta's identification of the new levels of geopolitical interest within our region. This level of interest has in fact grown significantly in the past 5 years. The global geopolitical shifts that have taken place, rather rapidly, over the past 1 to 2 years have once again made our region a place of strategic importance. The result is increased attention by both new and

old partners who recognise the strategic importance of our region and who, therefore, are seeking to strengthen their influence over what happens here.

- We see this increased interest and jockeying for influence on an almost daily basis in the news and the media. Countries are calling for our region to support their strategies for increased engagement in the Indo-Pacific region – but with little regard for our region’s reasonable requests for more information about what these strategies consist of and what they will mean for our countries. And with apparently little regard for the institutions and systems we have worked hard to establish at the national and regional levels.
- These geopolitical trends are inextricably connected with a wide range of other economic, social and environmental changes and challenges. We are well used to reading erudite reports on various aspects of our region, but this year my colleagues and I at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat took on the challenge of going out to as many of our Member countries as possible to hear directly from governments, civil society and the private sector about their experiences and concerns and ambitions for the future.
- We visited 15 of our 18 Members, including Papua New Guinea. And across a diverse range of countries, and a broad spectrum of people, we saw common issues emerging, including:
 - The impacts of climate change, particularly on food and water security;
 - Social justice issues including access to quality education, housing, and gender equality;
 - Health issues, particularly non-communicable diseases;
 - The erosion of cultural traditions and heritage;
 - Poor national governance;
 - Connectivity, including air and sea transport and telecommunications technology;
 - Transnational crime; and
 - Threats to the sustainable management of our ocean.

- I am sure that many of these issues will resonate for you in the context of Papua New Guinea. A number of these issues have been discussed in presentations yesterday.
- And so against this backdrop of challenges and concerns, our region has some important questions to ask itself - how do we make our voice heard in the current geopolitical environment? How do we position ourselves and set the terms of engagement for what happens in our own region? How can we work together to address our shared challenges?
- These are questions that speak at a fundamental level to leadership – and the willingness of our region to assert itself and confidently drive our political and developmental ambitions.

[Framework for Pacific Regionalism and the Blue Pacific]

- I believe that we have established in recent years a solid foundation for the Pacific Islands region to proactively and strategically identify our common goals. In 2014, as a result of Sir Morauta’s work the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum endorsed the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The Framework seeks to raise our region’s ambitions for collective and inclusive action in pursuing our Leader’s vision for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity. It also emphasizes the need and importance of reaching “political settlements”.
- And to maximize the potential of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, Forum Leaders in 2017 endorsed ‘the Blue Pacific’ identity. The ‘Blue Pacific’ represents our collective identity, drawing on our common connection to the Pacific Ocean.
- The Blue Pacific identity reminds us of our stewardship of our vast and abundant Pacific Ocean. And it serves to empower us – reminding us of the value and potential of our region. It rejects the characterization which has been in place for too long of a small, isolated and fragile region. As the Blue Pacific, we have a

strong and collective voice, on issues vital to our development as a region. This identity has great transformative impetus for our region in the way we see ourselves, and the way we interact with the wider world.

[Papua New Guinea and the Blue Pacific]

- Let me now turn to Papua New Guinea's role in our current efforts to revitalize and strengthen Pacific regionalism.
- When the idea of the Blue Pacific was being socialized last year and early this year in Papua New Guinea, people asked 'how is the Blue Pacific relevant to Papua New Guinea?' 'What relevance does it have to our populations in the highlands?' People pointed out the obvious differences between us and most other Pacific island countries, with Papua New Guinea's significant land resources, our large population and economy. Indeed, these were questions I also asked myself, as a woman from Papua New Guinea.
- In reflecting on these questions, I kept coming back to a deep belief in the existence and value of the Blue Pacific identity. We are all connected by the Pacific Ocean, whether we live just metres from its shores or faraway in the interior mountains and highlands of our diverse islands. I see the Blue Pacific as conveying to each other and to the wider world our common experiences and our shared commitment to working together to tackle common challenges and harness our strengths.
- Just two weeks ago, Papua New Guinea hosted a meeting of the APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade. And it was encouraging to see Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister, the Honourable Rimbik Pato, conveying the Blue Pacific identity to his ministerial colleagues in APEC. I see this as a very practical demonstration of regionalism, indeed of regional leadership.

[Papua New Guinea and APEC]

- As the only Pacific island economy member of APEC, Papua New Guinea is well-positioned to play an important role in bridging the Pacific and Asian region that other Forum Members do not, or cannot, play. This is particularly significant

when you consider that all air and sea transport and digital data of Pacific island countries must pass through an APEC economy in order to connect with the rest of the world.

- Papua New Guinea's focus, as chair of the APEC this year, on the digital economy is significant for the Pacific islands region. The geographical remoteness of Pacific island countries, and the small size of our markets, make it difficult for businesses in our region to successfully engage in international trade, especially for MSMEs and women-owned enterprises. E-commerce has the potential to offer partial relief to structural constraints experienced by Pacific island countries – and APEC economies represent an important source of support for our Members in accessing infrastructure to develop digital connectivity.
- And while I am pleased to see Papua New Guinea using its role as chair of APEC to shine some light on the interests and concerns of Pacific Islands countries to APEC, I believe that Papua New Guinea still has some way to go to realise its full leadership potential in the Pacific region.
- Our Leaders' policy agenda is replete with issues that are directly relevant to the concerns of Papua New Guinea and which would also benefit from the rich experience and expertise of the people of Papua New Guinea.

[Regional security cooperation]

- Regional security cooperation is one of those issues that come directly to mind. Through the Pacific Islands Forum, our Member countries have developed a rich array of instruments, networks and initiatives to promote cooperation in addressing the wide range of transnational security issues that affect our region. This regional security architecture provided the platform for the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands – which I am sure you are all familiar with, and which stands as one of the most ambitious and successful examples of regional cooperation through the Forum to date.
- At the Forum Leaders meeting in 2017, Leaders recognized the successful completion of the RAMSI mission as an opportunity to revisit our region's

approach to security, so as to ensure that we are well positioned to handle our current and emerging security environment.

- This is a significant area of work that my colleagues are leading on, in close consultation with Member countries and other stakeholders to develop advice o Leaders when they meet in September 2018.
- We will face increased geo-political power struggles in our region.
- We will need to take decisive steps to protect our maritime boundaries, our EEZ. We need to secure our resources: land and sea - our land, our coastal fisheries and our pelagic fisheries. We need to continue to advocate change and build our own resilience facility.
- We need to ensure our people are healthy and address the issue of non-communicable diseases. We need to educate our people. So we now participate at regional & international level with decisiveness.
- We need to participate in the economic growth of our countries whilst also ensuring the active participation of women. We need to secure the future for our youth & children including our people with disabilities.
- We need, above all, transparent strong national governance throughout our region.
- We need to listen and support those who want to determine their own future, without fear of their human rights being abused.
- This all requires collective effort and political settlements.

[PNG's contribution to Pacific regionalism]

- Coming together as the Pacific Islands Forum, the political leaders of our region have identified regional action for the security and prosperity of our Blue Pacific. As the only Pacific island economy member of APEC, Papua New Guinea has

the opportunity to be a compelling advocate for the Pacific Islands region. This is a particularly important community for the Pacific islands region when you consider that because of our geography, almost all of our air and sea transport and digital data must pass through an APEC economy for us to connect with the rest of the world.

- We are at a critical juncture in the history of our region. The decisions and actions we take now and in the next couple of years will have important implications for determining the future of our Blue Pacific. This is a time that demands focused collaboration and cooperation amongst the countries of our region to strategically navigate the complex geopolitical environment. To honour this, our political leadership must remain aligned and focused on delivering for the betterment of the Pacific people – our people.

[Conclusion]

- Distinguished colleagues, I believe that our region is at a critical juncture in the history of our region. The decisions and actions we take now and in the next couple of years will have important implications for determining the future of our Blue Pacific. This is a time that demands focused collaboration and cooperation amongst the countries of our region. I keep reading that APEC will put us, Papua New Guinea, on the map. So what will we do from the experience of APEC?
- We must invest in our talented young people. We must ensure that they carry our country forward by serving at the national, regional and international levels and fostering in them the spirit to contribute decisively with confidence and certainty.
- I sincerely believe that Papua New Guinea has much to gain from Pacific regionalism, and just as importantly, it has much to offer the wider Blue Pacific. It has much to contribute. It requires persistence and determination to be constantly at the *talanoa* table, with stakeholders so as to reach the collective decision.
- I thank you.