

T H E P A C I F I C P L A N

FOR STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

niu pasifika



A PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT **QUARTERLY PUBLICATION** JAN - FEB 2007 **ISSUE 01-07** VOLUME 2



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM & ITS SECRETARIAT

The Pacific Islands Forum, formerly the South Pacific Forum until a name change in October 2000, was founded in August 1971 and comprises 16 independent and self-governing states in the Pacific. The Forum is the region's premier political and economic policy organisation. Forum Leaders meet annually to develop collective responses to regional issues.

In October 2005, Forum Leaders endorsed the Pacific Plan. At the regional level, coordination of the implementation of the Pacific Plan is, in the first instance, the responsibility of the Forum Secretariat.

The Forum's membership has increased from the original seven founding members (Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Tonga and Western Samoa – now Samoa) to also include the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Niue, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. New Caledonia and French Polynesia, previously Forum Observers, were granted Associate Membership in 2006. Current Forum Observers include Tokelau (2005), Wallis and Futuna (2006), the Commonwealth (2006) and the Asia Development Bank (2006), with Timor Leste as Special Observer (2002).

The Forum has no formal rules governing its operations or the conduct of its meetings. The agenda is based on reports from the Secretariat and related regional organisations and committees, as well as other issues that members may wish to raise. Decisions by the Leaders are reached by consensus and are outlined in a Forum Communiqué, from which policies are developed and a work programme is prepared. The annual Forum meetings are chaired by the Head of Government of the Host Country, who remains as Forum Chair until the next meeting.

Since 1989, the Forum has held Post Forum Dialogue Meetings with key Dialogue Partners at Ministerial level. There are currently thirteen partners – Canada, People's Republic of China, European Union, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States. A review of the Post Forum Dialogue process was commissioned by the Forum Secretariat following the directive of the Forum Leaders for a reassessment of its arrangements and the criteria for membership. The report and its recommendations were considered at the 2006 Forum Leaders Meeting, and work towards improving the quality of dialogues remains in progress.

The Forum's administrative arm is the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, based in Suva, Fiji. It acts as the Secretariat for Forum-related events, implements decisions by the Leaders, facilitates the delivery of development assistance to member states, and undertakes the political and legal mandates of Forum meetings. The Secretariat is funded by contributions from member governments and donors with a total budget in 2006 of around FJS\$36 million.

The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General. The Forum Officials Committee (made up of representatives from all Forum Governments) is the governing body for the Secretariat and oversees its activities. The Secretary General is also permanent Chair of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) that brings together ten main regional organisations in the Pacific region:

- Fiji School of Medicine (FSchM)
- Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)
- Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP)
- Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC)
- Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC)
- South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA)
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)
- Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
- South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO)
- University of the South Pacific (USP)

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FORUM MEMBER COUNTRIES

AUSTRALIA COOK ISLANDS FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA FIJI
KIRIBATI NAURU NEW ZEALAND NIUE PALAU PAPUA NEW GUINEA
REPUBLIC OF MARSHALL ISLANDS SAMOA SOLOMON ISLANDS TONGA
TUVALU VANUATU

FORUM ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

FRENCH POLYNESIA NEW CALEDONIA

FORUM OBSERVERS

TOKELAU WALLIS AND FUTUNA COMMONWEALTH
ASIA DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB) TIMOR-LESTE

Warm greetings to our readers from the across the Pacific region and beyond.

The New Year brings with it a familiar sense of rejuvenation for many. As promises of 2007 resolutions are being enthusiastically put into action, children return to school to tell their friends and teachers of their holiday escapades. It is only natural, I would assume, to embrace the New Year with such fervour. After all, the year ahead holds whatever we will make of it. The challenge remains for us to make the right choices and commitments, and to take the best actions for the wellbeing of our families, communities, nations, and Pacific region as a whole.

This is indeed the case for the Pacific Plan for strengthening regional cooperation and integration – it is facing a fresh start in 2007. The Plan has now been revised in line with its status as a 'living' document, responding to the region's challenges and emerging priorities. The Plan has been improved to better respond to the needs and priorities of Pacific peoples.

The first Pacific Plan Annual Report was presented to Forum Leaders at their 2006 Annual Meeting held in Nadi, Fiji, in October. The gathering marked one year of existence for the regional document, originally endorsed by Leaders at their 2005 meeting held in Papua New Guinea. Read on for more details on the Plan's revision, progress, challenges faced, and anticipated way forward.

This year also marks a new beginning for recently-appointed Young Professionals at the Forum Secretariat. The Young Professionals Scheme is an initiative born out of the Pacific Plan in recognition of the need to foster the development of young people with policy skills within the region, the need to scale up human resources required for our strengthened policy mandates and the associated effective implementation of the Plan. I wish them all the best with their endeavours and welcome them to the Secretariat.



I would like to congratulate the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), previously the South Pacific Commission, for accomplishing a milestone 60 years of service to the people of the Pacific. SPC, a member of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), is involved in a substantial way with the implementation of a number of Pacific Plan initiatives, and the Forum's partnership with this important regional implementation agency, and other such agencies and stakeholder groups, continues to play a vital role in driving regional development priorities forward.

On a final note, I would like to mention some of our region's security and governance developments. The November 2006 riots in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and the military overthrow of Fiji's government in December not only triggered waves of distress throughout the respective nations, but across the region and further afield. "Security" and "Good Governance" are two of the four priority areas of the Pacific Plan, along with "Economic Growth" and "Sustainable Development". Without one, it is very difficult to accomplish the other. While it is, first and foremost, a nation's sovereign right to tend to its internal affairs, the deeply-entrenched alliance of the Pacific Islands Forum remains dedicated to assisting its members steer towards peace and stability.

I wish you all a prosperous and safe 2007.

Greg Urwin

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Secretary General



2006 Forum Leaders' Meeting, Nadi, Fiji



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ON BOARD

The Young Professionals Scheme, an initiative born out of the Pacific Plan, kicked off in January at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

The Secretariat, located in Suva, Fiji, is placing a total of six young professionals from the region across its programmes.

“We have taken on the services of these young professionals in recognition of the need to foster the development of young people with policy skills within the region,” says Forum Secretary General, Mr Greg Urwin.

“We also recognise the need to scale up human resources required for our strengthened policy mandates and the associated effective implementation of the Pacific Plan.”

Mr Urwin explains the Scheme seeks to provide a framework by which outstanding undergraduate and post-graduate students from diverse backgrounds may be assigned to the Forum Secretariat where their educational experience can be enhanced through practical work assignments.

“We hope to foster greater understanding of challenges facing the Pacific, while providing the Secretariat with the assistance of highly qualified young people,” says Mr Urwin.

The young professionals will be specialising in various fields within the four key areas of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

The Young Professionals Scheme was established to progress Pacific Plan Initiative 154, which calls for exchanges and sharing of services and expertise for regional capacity building.

The Pacific Plan was adopted by Forum Leaders in 2005 as the region’s blueprint for development, cooperation and enhanced regional integration. It was recently revised in support of Leaders’ decisions taken during the Forum Leaders’ Meeting in Nadi, October 2006, ensuring the Pacific Plan remains a ‘living’ document able to respond to the region’s challenges and emerging priorities.

The Forum Secretariat implements decisions by Forum Leaders, facilitates delivery of development assistance to member states, and undertakes the political and legal mandates of Forum meetings.

The position of Media Young Professional had yet to be filled when this publication went to print.

Constance Tafua-River, YP Legal

“Working at the Forum to strengthen regional development and cooperation is both a privilege and a great opportunity to give something back to the Pacific. I am keen to make the most of my time here to help make a difference to our region’s development.”



Navitalai Tuvuniwai, YP Economic Policy

“It is a privilege to be a pioneer of the Young Professionals Scheme. I intend to effectively utilise the practical learning opportunities to build my skill base and knowledge around extra regional and intra regional development, particularly on economic policies and reforms.”



Luisa Senibulu, YP Policy, Coordination and Advice

“I hope to gain as much experience as possible from my time at the Forum Secretariat and look forward to efficiently supporting the Policy Coordination and Advice programme, as well as gaining a thorough understanding of the Pacific Plan and its initiatives on Good Governance.”



Ma’ake Komailevuka, YP Private Sector Development

“I am excited about this opportunity and look forward to broadening my understanding of the dynamics of the region’s business environments. I am determined to help the private sector flourish and continue to add value to the growth of Pacific island economies.”



Mona Giheno (PNG), YP Trade

“This is an excellent way of getting young people involved in the visionary plans of the region. I would like to explore how we can use our skills to assist with the development of our country, and ultimately, the whole region. I look forward to learning and experiencing as much as I can.”



PACIFIC PLAN UPDATED

The Pacific Plan has now been revised in line with its status as a ‘living’ document, responding to the region’s challenges and emerging priorities.

The Pacific Forum Leaders meeting in October 2006, and the resultant ‘Nadi Decisions on the Pacific Plan’, prioritised a number of key commitments in order to further strengthen regionalism in the Pacific.

Says Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Deputy Secretary General, Mr Iosefa Maiava: “This was based on consultative reporting to Leaders throughout the year on progress made in implementing the Plan, the key challenges to be overcome for its effective implementation, and recommendations on a number of key commitments in order to move the Plan forward.”

In the Nadi Decisions, Leaders committed their Governments to take responsibility for implementing and reporting on the Plan, and to ensure that national policies and mechanisms on regionalisms are in place by the 2007 Forum Meeting.

“This is extremely important for the long-term success of the Plan,” says Mr Maiava. “It is at the country level that development must materialise to have a real impact on the lives of Pacific peoples.”

Among other things, Leaders affirmed the importance of long-term energy security to the future prosperity of the region, the need to coordinate intensified regional trade and economic initiatives, and agreed that greater attention be given to encouraging participatory democracy.

A new initiative adopted by Leaders, now reflected in the updated Pacific Plan, includes the recommendation that water, sanitation and hygiene challenges facing the region be directly addressed under the Plan.

The Pacific Plan was endorsed by leaders at the Forum meeting in October 2005, as the blueprint for regional development to enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

The revised document is posted on the Pacific Plan website, www.pacificplan.org, as well as the Forum Secretariat’s website, www.forumsec.org.



COOK ISLANDS LAUNCHES NATIONAL STRATEGY IN LINE WITH PACIFIC PLAN

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat has congratulated the Government of the Cook Islands for progressing the implementation of the Pacific Plan at the national level.

This was marked with the launch of the Cook Islands’ National Sustainable Development and Preventive Infrastructure Master Plans in January.

“Forum leaders at their meeting in Fiji last October made a commitment to progress the implementation of the Pacific Plan through initiatives at the national level,” said Forum Secretary General, Mr Greg Urwin. “It is therefore encouraging to note the Cook Islands government meeting this commitment.”

The Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2007–2010 and the Preventive Infrastructure Plan (20 years) were launched at a national forum from 24–25 January in Rarotonga.

The NSDP, entitled “Te Kaveinga Nui”, is the strategic framework that provides guidance and support to the Cook Islands national vision. It is centred on the three pillars of sustainable growth to allow people to enjoy the highest quality of life; sustainable growth consistent with the aspirations of the people; and sustainable growth in harmony with the country’s culture and environment.

Cook Islands Prime Minister, Hon. Jim Marurai said: “Te Kaveinga Nui provides a platform for the people of the Cook Islands to embark on a journey that carries the long term dreams and hopes of our people and communities.”

The Forum Secretariat, along with other partners, assisted the Cook Islands government draw up the NSDP.



PNG APPOINTED INTERIM FORUM CHAIR

Papua New Guinea has taken on the position of Interim Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

The Forum Secretariat last December announced that, in consultation with Forum Leaders, it was agreed that Rt Hon Grand Chief, Sir Michael T Somare, Prime Minister of PNG, the immediate past Forum Chair, be asked to take on this position.

The Secretariat was advised that Sir Michael has agreed to this arrangement.

Said Forum Secretary General, Mr Greg Urwin: “This decision was made on the basis that the actions of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) prevented deposed Prime Minister, Mr Laisenia Qarase, from exercising his leadership of the Fiji Government, and consequently made it impossible as a matter of practicality for him to fulfil his duties as Forum Chair.”

The overthrow of Fiji’s elected government in December by the RFMF led to the appointment of an interim administration.

Mr Urwin said PNG would assume the position until such time as a lawful Head of Government in Fiji was able to re-occupy the position, or until the next Leaders’ meeting – whichever occurred sooner.

In line with the usual practice that the host country of the Forum Leaders’ Meeting takes on the position of Forum Chair, Fiji this year assumed the position following the Leaders’ meeting held in Nadi in October.

Mr Urwin reiterated that the crisis in Fiji must be resolved through negotiation, within the Constitution and with respect for the rule of law.

“We are pleased that a fact-finding mission by the Forum Eminent Persons’ Group (EPG) was acceptable to the RFMF-installed regime” said Mr Urwin.

The group undertook a mission to Fiji recently to underscore the importance of democratic principles under the Biketawa Declaration, consult with government and other stakeholders about the current political situation and come up with recommendations on how Fiji and the Forum can work together to return the country to democratic and constitutional rule.

Added Mr Urwin: “As one of the founders of the Forum in 1971, and as a member of our family of Pacific island countries, the Forum remains dedicated to assisting Fiji steer towards a peaceful and lawful resolution of the current situation.”



REGIONAL “OPEN SKIES” AGREEMENT GAINS MOMENTUM

Further endorsement of the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement (PIASA), commonly referred to as the region’s “open skies” agreement, was announced last November.

Official instruments of ratification for PIASA were received by the Forum Secretariat from Tonga and Nauru.

This brought the total number of countries to have formally ratified PIASA to four, including Samoa and the Cook Islands.

PIASA will come into force when six countries in total have officially ratified it.

Members were also informed that Kiribati had signed the Agreement.

“The fact that PIASA is gaining momentum is greatly encouraging for the future of the region’s aviation industry,” said Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Transport Sector Adviser, Seiuli Alvin Tuala.

“The highly regulated nature of regional air travel, which manifests itself in the lack of frequent direct flights and

high cost of travel between Forum Island Countries (FICs), presents a major barrier to growth in the industry, and hinders associated economic benefits.”

The “Nadi Decisions on the Pacific Plan”, released by Leaders at the 2006 Pacific Islands Forum Meeting held in Fiji in October, affirmed the importance of intensified regional action to ensure effective transportation within the region, focusing on the needs of Smaller Island States (SIS).

SIS members include the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau and Tuvalu.

PIASA, said Mr Tuala, would entail the liberalisation of air transport services between participating FICs, which could significantly help countries strengthen and develop.

“There would be three stages of liberalisation under PIASA intended to assist participating governments and airlines gradually adapt, by encouraging FIC airlines to build their capacity within the region first, so they can eventually survive in an international market.”

KEY FACTS ABOUT PIASA

- **PIASA, the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement, will provide for a multi-lateral basis for liberalising air services between Forum Island Countries (FICs).**
- **To enter into force, PIASA must be ratified by six FICs.**
- **Currently, four countries have ratified the Agreement: Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga and Nauru.**
- **PIASA was opened for signing at the 2003 Forum Leaders’ Meeting in Auckland, New Zealand.**

Mr Tuala explained that PIASA would not apply to services between FIC and non-FICs, where bilateral agreements would continue to operate.

“PIASA’s central intention is to give Pacific airlines a basis from which to grow and expand. Pacific carriers can then increase their sphere of activities to take advantage of the benefits of regional alliances and cooperation.”

Added Mr Tuala: “PIASA may not be the panacea to solve all of our region’s aviation challenges, but it does go a long way in addressing existing barriers to growth and development, with many achievable benefits for FICs and their people.”

The development of regional transport services is addressed in the Pacific Plan under the priority area of “Economic Growth”, seeking the implementation of the Forum Principles on Regional Transport Services (FPRTS) for improved efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure development and associated service delivery.

FUELLING A GROWING DEPENDENCY

The impact of rising fossil fuel cost on Pacific Island Countries has many seriously reassessing their ever-increasing energy needs.

“Transportation and electricity remain our predominant petroleum consumption areas,” says the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Import Management Adviser, Mr Jared Morris.

“When you look at the potential areas of economic growth that everyone’s talking about – fisheries, forestry, agriculture, tourism – you will notice that the technology required is highly petroleum-based.

“We need planes to get tourists to our countries, we need harvesting and agricultural machinery – you name it, it uses petroleum products.”

Mr Morris believes the Pacific is in a critical situation, and while having strategic reserves of petroleum on our islands, the on-going issue of whether we can afford them remains a real concern.

He explains that the Forum Secretariat maintains a database of international petroleum prices, which are tracked and monitored on a weekly basis.

“The information is available to government energy departments, public utilities, international organisations – anyone really, you just need to give us a call, or visit the Forum’s website.”

Mr Morris says that because Pacific energy sectors are heavily regulated, rising fuel cost inevitably permeate into areas such as electricity tariffs, public transportation rates, and general goods price increases.

“Energy remains a basic requirement for sustainable development and economic growth, and the 2006 Forum Leaders meeting clearly identified that.

“As a result, we are expecting a Pacific Energy Ministers’ Meeting to be called early 2007, where they will be looking at what we have available, access to modern energy services to remote rural areas, the feasibility of bulk purchase of petroleum, as identified in the Pacific Plan, and the need for competitive energy for the masses.”

For the moment, Mr Morris remarks that the general trend has been to promote energy efficiency and conservation, and notes the increased work being put into the area of renewable energy by regional and international organisations.

For more information on the Forum Secretariat’s Energy Work Programme, visit www.forumsec.org





A NUCLEAR WEAPONS-FREE PACIFIC: Forum commemorates 20 years of the Treaty of Rarotonga

The Pacific Islands Forum last December recognised the 20th anniversary of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, better known as the Treaty of Rarotonga.

The Forum called on all countries of the world to continue working towards the global abolition of nuclear weapons.

“The entry into force of the Treaty of Rarotonga on 11 December 1986 was an historic day for the Pacific region,” said the Forum’s Deputy Secretary General, Mr Iosefa Maiava.

“The Pacific islands have a long history of supporting disarmament, born of the region’s harsh experience with nuclear testing by colonial powers in the Pacific,” he said.

“The Treaty of Rarotonga established only the second populated Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the world, and demonstrated the leadership of Pacific Islands Forum members on the key international security issue of the day.”

Mr Maiava added: “In the 20 years since the Treaty’s entry into force, Forum members have continued to work in support of international peace and security, and against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

“The Parties to the Rarotonga Treaty are proud to be part of a

growing global network of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones.

“We particularly welcome establishment of a new Zone by five Central Asian states this year, and support and encourage the efforts of states in South Asia and the Middle East towards establishing those regions as Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones.”

Mr Maiava also welcomed the support of China, the former USSR, France and the United Kingdom, which had become Parties to the Treaty’s three Protocols since its entry into force. The Protocols bind nuclear weapons states not to undertake activities involving nuclear weapons, including nuclear testing, within the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

The US government has signed but has yet to ratify the Protocols.

“We urge the US to demonstrate its commitment to global nuclear non-proliferation, and cement its credibility in the region as a responsible nuclear weapons state, by ratifying the Protocols,” said Mr Maiava.

The Pacific Plan calls for improved political and social conditions for stability and safety in the region. It also seeks improved transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency in the management and use of resources in the Pacific.



REGIONAL CONFERENCE TARGETS SMALL-BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

As part of its ongoing work in the development of the private sector in Forum Island Countries (FICs), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific (USP), organised a three-day Regional Conference on Small Business Development in Suva, Fiji, from 22-24 November 2006.

“The conference introduced its 45 participants to key small business development services including online training programmes and business tools offered by the USP’s Graduate School of Business,” explains Ms Alise Faulalo-Stunnenberg, Marketing Officer of the Forum Secretariat’s Private Sector Development Unit.

“One of the main goals of this event was for participants to further disseminate their newly acquired knowledge via local business networks in their home countries.

“The conference provided an interactive forum for key private sector stakeholders to share ideas and network. It came as a revelation and a relief to most of them that they share common issues and constraints as small businesses in the Pacific.”

Ms Faulalo-Stunnenberg adds that the Forum Secretariat’s Private Sector Development Unit is now planning national

workshops based on participant requests following the conference.

Some of the topics covered at the three-day event included:

- Establishing linkages through networking with regional and international businesses and institutions;
- Identifying challenges and opportunities for small businesses in the Pacific;
- Outsourcing technical assistance and support, technologies and systems to assist small businesses in the Pacific;
- Creating awareness of international best practices;
- Using Internet-based business tools to support business formation and acceleration;
- Applying basic and practical steps towards starting a business; and
- Analysing their business performance and business plan strategies using benchmarking business tools.

Participants comprised private sector and government representatives from the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.





FORUM WELCOMES UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Pacific Islands Forum has welcomed the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, passed by the UN's General Assembly last December.

Deputy Secretary General of the Forum Secretariat, Mr Iosefa Maiava, said persons with disabilities in Pacific Island countries are among the poorest and most marginalised members of their communities.

Mr Maiava noted that disability may limit access to education and employment and other basic social services, leading to economic and social exclusion, while disabled people and their families face prejudice, discrimination and rejection.

"Many face social, attitudinal and physical barriers every day in the forms of direct and indirect discrimination," he said. "This Convention will be of considerable value and relevance to people of the Pacific."

The Convention was passed by the UN General Assembly on 13th December 2006. The UN called on its 192 member states to ratify the convention, which enshrines the rights of people with disabilities to participate in economic, political, social and cultural life.

Said Forum Secretariat Social Policy Adviser, Dr Helen Tavola: "Like other UN conventions, such as the Convention for the Rights of the Child, it will be legally binding in terms of compliance and its implementation will be monitored and evaluated."

Dr Tavola explained that Forum Leaders acknowledged the importance of addressing the issue of disability in the Pacific at their 2003 Leaders' Meeting, where they endorsed the Biwako Millennium Framework for action.

"Signing and ratifying the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would strengthen commitment to improving the lives of Pacific Islanders who live with disabilities," said Dr Tavola.

"The Framework provides a set of goals for Pacific Island countries to work toward over the next ten years to support their citizens with disabilities."

Dr Tavola added: "Leaders acknowledged that immediate priorities for Pacific governments should be to encourage policies that dismantle barriers and improve access and coordination for people living with disabilities."

Disability is also included in the Pacific Plan, which identifies a range of initiatives to be addressed, including the ratification and implementation of rights-based international and regional conventions and agreements.

According to Dr Tavola, research on Forum island countries indicates a general lack of legislation and services for people with physical and mental disabilities.

The population of persons with disabilities around the world is estimated at 5-10% of any country's population, which equally applies to the Pacific.



An eye on PROGRESSING PARTNERSHIPS

"We seek partnerships with our neighbours and beyond to develop our knowledge, to improve our communications and to ensure a sustainable economic existence for all."

Extract from the Forum Leaders' Vision in the Pacific Plan



SPC celebrates 60 years of service to the Pacific

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) celebrates 60 years of service to the people of the Pacific region on 6th February.

"Genuine development is about effective partnerships," says SPC Director General, Dr Jimmie Rodgers. "SPC's ability to respond effectively to the priorities and needs of our members has been greatly facilitated by the commitment of our development partners."

SPC, formally known as the South Pacific Commission until a name change in 1998, was founded in 1947 under the Canberra Agreement by six participating governments that were then administering territories in the Pacific: Australia, France, New Zealand, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

All 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories are now full members of SPC, along with four of the founding countries (the Netherlands and UK are no longer members).

SPC is an active member of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) that comprises 10 Pacific regional organisations.

Dr Rodgers adds: "We greatly acknowledge the support of our members and development partners, and look forward to further strengthening this collaboration to help lift our services to the region to another level during 2007."

SPC is involved in a substantial way with the implementation of certain Pacific Plan initiatives. Many of the initiatives for which SPC is either the lead or co-lead agency are actively part of its work programme, and cover the whole SPC membership.

Pacific ACP countries call for political intervention in EPA negotiations

Trade Ministers from Pacific African, Caribbean & Pacific (PACP) countries have agreed on the need to intensify political interventions in the negotiating process of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU), as the December 2007 deadline for the conclusion of negotiations approaches.

The region must also insist on appropriate levels of interaction between the European Commission (EC) and PACP Officials.

These decisions were among several made during a one-day meeting of the PACP Trade Ministers in Port Vila, Vanuatu

in November 2006. The Trade Ministers met after a Joint Meeting with the PACP Fisheries Ministers during which they endorsed the legal text of a draft Multilateral Fisheries Partnership Agreement to be negotiated with the EU as part of an EPA with EU.

“EPA negotiations have progressed slowly with significant differences of interests between the EU and the ACP on issues such as development cooperation, EPA adjustment and services,” said Hon. James Bule, Chair of the meeting and Vanuatu’s Minister of Trade, Commerce, Industries and Tourism.

“To date the Pacific ACP States have not received satisfactory responses from the EC on the issues of interest to PACPS.

“But we must remain optimistic and maintain PACP solidarity and continue to drive home our positions. Political focus was needed on the issues that were of interest to the PACPS.”

The meeting was attended by trade ministers and representatives of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Pacific media delegation visits China

A 12-member Pacific delegation of media representatives visited the People’s Republic of China last October as a means of contributing to better understanding of China-Pacific relations and on-going cooperation.

The group visited the cities of Beijing, Jiangsu, Wujiang and Shanghai.

The delegation held meetings with senior Chinese officials, visited cultural and scenic sites, and was hosted to a luncheon with Ambassadors from Pacific Island Countries organised by

Fiji journalist, Dionisia Tabureguci (left) gives an interview to PNG’s Illan Kapurangi in China



the Pacific Islands Forum Trade Office in Beijing.

The annual initiative is a joint undertaking by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, and the Forum Secretariat in collaboration with the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA).

Participants included media representatives from Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue, the Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, as well as a delegate from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat who played a coordination role.

FSM, Palau and Peace Corps celebrate 40-year partnership

*By Eric Adams
Programming & Training Officer
Peace Corps Micronesia & Palau*

For 40 years, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau have partnered with Peace Corps to support their regional, national and state development agendas and strengthen international collaboration per John F. Kennedy’s vision of fostering peace and friendship.

In speaking of the relationship, Palau President Tommy E. Remengesau Jr. noted that Palau has enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the Peace Corps over the years. He emphasised the great benefit that Palauan students would continue to receive from the new volunteers who teach English, mathematics and science to students in rural elementary schools.

“It’s been working, it’s been around, and I hope that it will continue to be around for a long time to come,” said Remengesau of the Peace Corps programme.

Peace Corps volunteer Stephanie Freeman with girls at Gigil Elementary School, Yap, FSM



Stephanie Freeman, Gigil Elementary School, Yap, FSM

I teach Science and English three days a week to 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The other two days a week I work with the village of Riken to establish a Marine Protected Area. I enjoy getting my students out of the classroom to look at their natural surroundings through a scientific eye and teaching them to appreciate the environment.

One memorable experience was taking my 7th grade class on a field trip to the Marine Protected Area. Students, teachers, parents and local fishermen accompanied us to go snorkeling and see things we had been studying in Marine Science class. We had underwater identification cards along with underwater paper and clipboards so that students could identify fish and invertebrates. It was rewarding to see the knowledge from the classroom come out during our field trip as students picked up sea cucumbers, starfish and shells to talk about their anatomy. We also went to a giant clam farm where students “adopted a giant clam” to name and take care of. Local fishermen also spoke with the students about traditional bamboo traps that none of the students had seen in their lifetime. I am grateful to the school and to Peace Corps for what I feel is a perfect assignment that incorporates teaching and conservation.

FSM President, HE Joseph J. Urusemal, praised the positive relationship with Peace Corps, noting his own experience with volunteers when he was young, and asked the new volunteers to “encourage our youth to appreciate and understand what they have, while preparing them to move on to a career or to higher education.”

Peace Corps’ Country Director for Micronesia, David Reside, noted “For 40 years our partners in Micronesia have worked closely with Peace Corps volunteers to create relationships that have endured through time and across great distances, fulfilling the promises put forward by President John Kennedy when he established the Peace Corps: that America would provide volunteers to assist host countries in meeting their needs; volunteers who would demonstrate the diversity of America to those in other countries; and, volunteers who would be capable to helping other Americans better understand the promise and potential of nations far from our shores.”

The first volunteers to arrive in 1966 partnered with schools to teach English and were soon followed by a group of legal advisors. In the 1970s, Peace Corps volunteers moved into agriculture, health, community development and cooperative management projects. In the early 1980s, volunteers worked in water/sanitation, forestry and fisheries. From 1990-2006, programming shifted to youth development, health, marine resource conservation, terrestrial resource conservation and library development.

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Niu Pasifika welcomes opinion, story and photograph contributions.

Contact Mue Bentley, Media Officer, Pacific Plan, via mueb@forumsec.org.fj to make a contribution to the next issue.

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