



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

**Asia Pacific Partnership for Disaster Risk Reduction Forum
8 – 9 December 2021**

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 this Asia-Pacific Partnership for Disaster Risk Reduction (APPDRR) Forum. The APPDRR is an important 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.

The Pacific is on the front line of climate change and disaster risk. According to the World Risk Index 2020, four Pacific Island countries are in the top 10 of 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, particularly on our most vulnerable – our women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

In August 2021, our Pacific leaders reaffirmed that Climate Change is an existential threat to our people. The latest IPCC report 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.

We are somewhat heartened though that the COP26 meeting recently concluded in Glasgow, 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, is encouraging to all Small Island Developing States such as those in the Pacific.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also been a major cause for concern around our resilience building efforts. Fortunately, increasing vaccinations around the Pacific allow us to be cautiously optimistic about the future. Caution is something we must continue to exercise.

The Pacific region has, this past November, commenced the annual season for tropical cyclones which runs to April 2022. We, unfortunately, have experiences from April 2020 in which a few countries were impacted simultaneously by Tropical Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences have made us more vigilant. 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

¹ Vanuatu 1; Tonga 2; Solomon Islands 5; Papua New Guinea 8

Regional Humanitarian and Disaster Response mechanism as requested specifically by our leaders through the Boe Declaration 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's Foreign Ministers.

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 however highlighted that there needs to be more preparedness across multiple risk scenarios with strengthened coordination of resources to enable more effective response and recovery.

Effectively dealing with climate and disaster resilience 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 2017 – 2030 (FRDP).

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.

The Mid Term Review 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 undertake 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.

We always look forward to opportunities such as the APPDRR to be able to share our experiences alongside other colleagues and partners from the Pacific with our friends in Asia. Through the sharing of knowledge and experience in resilience building, we improve our prospects for addressing the increasingly more complex risk environment around us.

We commend UNDRR for continuing its invaluable efforts of connecting the key actors in the Asia-Pacific region.