

## **The Eminent Persons' Group Review of the Pacific Islands Forum, April 2004**

### **Statement by Rt Hon Sir Julius Chan GCMG, KBE, Chair of the Eminent Persons' Group**

We have approached this Review in the belief that all of us in the Pacific need to remain open to change. We should respect the past, certainly, but must also confidently challenge the present and be well prepared for the future.

We live at a time in which the forces of globalisation are dominant. People and countries are more interconnected than ever before, but differences remain and often we are driven apart by our individual interests. Too often prejudice and greed continue to dominate discussion of the issues – typically difficult and sensitive – that divide rich and poor countries. Problems cannot be solved while these attitudes remain, nor will they be solved by chance or wishful thinking.

The difficulties facing the Pacific can only be overcome through foresight, determination and regional integration, with a view to overcoming tensions and designing effective outcomes. We need a visionary plan for our nations and our region. The needs and desires of Pacific people must lie at its heart.

Let us begin from within. It is time to put aside suspicions and differences by explicitly recognising that we are all – whether from Small Island States or more prosperous Australia and New Zealand – peoples of the region. We are political partners and equal members of the Forum.

Members must build on the successful regional contributions they have already made, while always remembering the need to protect their own national interests and work for the betterment of their own people.

We can be sure that in our fast-changing world there will always be new challenges approaching over the horizon. Nevertheless, sound planning, deep integration and enhanced cooperation will help us successfully meet these, as well as the familiar challenges. In this day and age, not the least of the issues confronting us will centre on security concerns.

If the Pacific Islands Forum consistently develops programmes that benefit future generations in the Pacific, it will win stronger support from all our countries and also promote the creation of a clearer regional vision.

The findings and suggestions in this Review have been distilled by us, but they really belong to the hundreds of people who have shared with us their views of the Forum and the environment in which it operates. We could not have achieved much at all without the full cooperation of Forum Leaders; dialogue partner representatives; member government officials at all levels; representatives of international and regional agencies, Pacific NGOs and other civil society communities; the private sector and Churches. To all of you, we give our heartfelt thanks.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank the members of the Review's Reflection Group, all of them very highly qualified Pacific people, who provided much valuable feedback on our draft. The Review was inspired by an insightful presentation right at the start by the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, the New Zealand Prime Minister, Rt Hon Helen Clark. This set the tone for our consultations. We thank the New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hon Phil Goff, and the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade – including our personal assistants – for their hard work in making the Review possible within a very tight time frame, even after the onslaught of Cyclone Heta.

During our long journey around the member countries of the Forum, Pacific peoples have honoured us with their kindness and hospitality, and we have made many new friends. To all of you, too, our sincere thanks.

No regional agenda can ever be complete in such a fast-changing and challenging global environment. However, we hope the outcome of this Review will be flexible enough to adapt to changing times. For the present, we have tried to suggest a course that we hope will help our Leaders with the challenging task of charting the sometimes unpredictable way ahead.

**Rt Hon Sir Julius Chan, GCMG, KBE , Chair, Eminent Persons' Group  
Pacific Islands Forum Review, March, 2004**

## **Foreword**

We have been asked by the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, the New Zealand Prime Minister, Rt Hon Helen Clark, to carry out a Review of the Forum's role, functions and Secretariat. This is the first comprehensive review of the Forum since its inception. It comes as a new Secretary General, Greg Urwin, takes up his position.

Our assignment was summarised in the final communiqué of the 34th Forum meeting in Auckland in 2003. Leaders called for a refreshed mandate and vision – and improved capacity – that would allow the Forum to provide leadership on regional cooperation and integration, and closely reflect the aspirations and needs of Forum members.

This has been a demanding task. In less than a month we talked face-to-face with hundreds of people – regional Leaders, politicians, public servants, Forum Dialogue partners, Church leaders, members of civil society and international and regional agencies – in countries right around the Pacific. We heard a wide range of views, many of them impassioned, about the future of the region and the role of the Forum within it. Many more individuals and agencies sent us their thoughts in writing. We thank them all for their commitment and contributions.

We returned from our consultations weighed down by submissions, papers and our own lengthy notes. From these we have endeavoured to find themes, patterns and common threads that we could synthesise into a set of robust, practical recommendations. If the report that has emerged has one overriding theme, it is the importance of change – not for change's sake, but so that the Pacific Islands Forum remains strong, vital and relevant to the lives and needs of Pacific people.

In some areas we have felt able to make specific recommendations. In others, such as the Pacific Plan, we have highlighted an urgent need for intensive investigation and the continued engagement and support of Forum Leaders.

It has not been possible to incorporate every suggestion we were given, nor to attribute those ideas we have used. We hasten to assure those we have consulted that neither omission implies any disrespect. On the contrary, we are grateful for the quality of the comment and guidance offered to us.

We present our report mindful of its limitations but hopeful that it will provoke new thought about the challenges facing our region and the Forum. We must move forward. We respectfully ask that Leaders consider our recommendations closely. They represent authentic Pacific opinion and, in our view, outline practical steps for the positive development of the region's pre-eminent political grouping.

**Sir Julius Chan, Bob Cotton, Dr Langi Kavaliku, Teburoro Tito, Maiava Iulai Toma  
The Eminent Persons' Group, March 2004**

## **Executive summary**

### **A note on structure**

In this report, consideration of the Pacific Islands Forum flows from observations about the sort of Pacific we might all want to live in. These observations are expressed as a Pacific Vision, which we offer initially on and develop further in the subsequent section entitled **The way forward. The Vision** underpins the key recommendation of this report, the [Pacific Plan](#) for intensified regional cooperation.

Recommendations made early in the Review focus generally on the biggest issues facing the Pacific Islands Forum: its role within the Pacific, the need to preserve relevance through a clearer focus on people, and its key areas of interest.

Later, the Review addresses key questions relating to the Forum's political process – its meetings, and the role of Leaders, the Chair, Ministers and officials. It goes on to make recommendations concerning the Forum's links with other regional agencies through the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP). Finally the Review considers the engine room – the Suva-based Forum Secretariat – and the vital role of the Forum Secretary General.

Appendices are limited to the essentials: the people involved in carrying out the Review and its Terms of Reference.

Recommendations are made in two ways. They are listed in the section [Recommendations in full](#) with page references to their first appearance in the text. They are also listed in numbered form at the end of the section to which they relate.

### **Summary**

The Pacific is facing considerable challenges, both external and home-grown. Overcoming them will require concerted action, not only by national Governments but also at the regional level.

Success will depend on the region having a clear vision of its future and a plan for getting there. This Review proposes both. The Vision acknowledges both Pacific traditions and 21st century realities. It involves a redefinition of the traditional "Pacific Way" of doing things. The plan – named here the Pacific Plan – is intended to build on the generally successful process of regional cooperation that has evolved during the past several decades.

We suggest a range of areas in which early progress might be made, but precisely how far and in which direction the Plan evolves is a question for Leaders. The bottom line is that future inter-country relationships will need to be closer and more mutually supportive if the region is to avoid decline and international marginalisation. Enhanced regional cooperation and integration, and the sharing of resources of governance, are likely to be features of future developments. New thinking about the relationships between sovereign states may hold the key to future sustainability.

The Pacific Islands Forum, as the pre-eminent political grouping of the Pacific region, has a pivotal leadership role in helping to ensure the Pacific Islands community of states survives, prospers and is secure. In order to carry out its role effectively in a fast-changing world, it is imperative that the Forum reconsider its strategic role and way it functions.

We consider that the Vision, mandate and work plan of the Forum should be clearly defined and directly relevant to the lives of Pacific people and their daily concerns. The Forum must be clear about its key priorities, which we assess as economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security. The efforts of the Forum should reflect and be guided by a strong sense of Pacific heritage and cultural identity.

We also consider that the Forum should mainstream the concerns of the vulnerable Small Island States into its work and seek closer engagement with Pacific territories outside the Forum. It must reach out to women and the burgeoning youth population, and engage more closely with regional civil society.

It is not enough that the Forum does these things. It must also be seen to do them, and this has profound implications for the Forum's communications strategy. We suggest this should be enhanced to improve communications among member countries – and between member countries and the Secretariat – and to overcome a lack of regional awareness about the role and work of the Forum.

Forum finances are under considerable pressure as a result of a growing range of activities and an expanding workload. We encourage the Forum Secretariat to exercise good stewardship of existing funds, while recognising that increased resources may be required – particularly given the likely demands of the proposed Pacific Plan. Members must be clear that a large part of the Forum's current financial difficulties are the result of slow payment of dues. In our view, members should be required to complete payment of dues by a certain date each year and it might be appropriate to charge the Secretary General with reporting on a range of measures appropriate to the management of non-payment.

Redefinition of the Forum's strategic role will open the way to simplifying Forum programmes and processes that are currently over-full and insufficiently prioritised. Impossibly long meeting agendas and an overload of paperwork militate against good decision-making. The Leaders' meeting, particularly, needs to be rethought so that more time is spent in discussion and less in "ticking off" large volumes of paperwork provided by Ministers and officials. The key, we believe, lies in tasking the office of the Secretary General with consulting widely to produce a short Retreat agenda, perhaps even focused on a single theme. We also suggest means of condensing the over-full plenary agenda.

It would be helpful to leave more time between the pre-Forum Officials' Committee (FOC) meeting and the Leaders' gathering. A gap of around three weeks would mean Leaders had much more time than at present to consider recommendations.

The Post Forum Dialogue should be enhanced so that both Forum members and representatives of partner countries are able to achieve full value from it.

Ministers could usefully be given more decision-making authority to enable Leaders to focus on issues that require Head of Government attention.

Both the Forum Chair and the Secretary General need to have a clear mandate to take a proactive stance in advancing agreed Forum concerns, particularly in terms of coordinating responses to regional crises and major issues.

While the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) is a valuable means of ensuring cooperation between regional agencies, we consider that it suffers from a lack of clarity in its structure and management. In particular, we believe the role of the Forum Secretary General as CROP chair needs to be more carefully spelt out. The CROP Charter may need to be reviewed.

The Forum Secretariat is a highly professional body but is overloaded with work – some of which lies outside its core functions. Its role as an agency for policy, coordination and assistance with implementing Leaders' decisions needs to be restated, and the importance of its task with regard to support for Small Island States re-emphasised.

The early appointment of a second Deputy Secretary General would help to free up the Secretary General to play a more proactive regional consultative role. A strong case could be made for the allocation of further Secretariat resources, especially in the increasingly important governance area. The agreement setting up the Secretariat should be redrafted to reflect changing demands and responsibilities.

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We suggest a range of areas in which early progress might be made, but precisely how far and in which direction the Plan evolves is a question for Leaders. The bottom line is that future inter-country relationships will need to be closer and more mutually supportive if the region is to avoid decline and international marginalisation. Enhanced regional cooperation and integration, and the sharing of resources of governance, are likely to be features of future developments. New

thinking about the relationships between sovereign states may hold the key to future sustainability.

The Pacific Islands Forum, as the pre-eminent political grouping of the Pacific region, has a pivotal leadership role in helping to ensure the Pacific Islands community of states survives, prospers and is secure. In order to carry out its role effectively in a fast-changing world, it is imperative that the Forum reconsider its strategic role and way it functions.

We consider that the Vision, mandate and work plan of the Forum should be clearly defined and directly relevant to the lives of Pacific people and their daily concerns. The Forum must be clear about its key priorities, which we assess as economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security. The efforts of the Forum should reflect and be guided by a strong sense of Pacific heritage and cultural identity.

We also consider that the Forum should mainstream the concerns of the vulnerable Small Island States into its work and seek closer engagement with Pacific territories outside the Forum. It must reach out to women and the burgeoning youth population, and engage more closely with regional civil society.

It is not enough that the Forum does these things. It must also be seen to do them, and this has profound implications for the Forum's communications strategy. We suggest this should be enhanced to improve communications among member countries – and between member countries and the Secretariat – and to overcome a lack of regional awareness about the role and work of the Forum.

Forum finances are under considerable pressure as a result of a growing range of activities and an expanding workload. We encourage the Forum Secretariat to exercise good stewardship of existing funds, while recognising that increased resources may be required – particularly given the likely demands of the proposed Pacific Plan. Members must be clear that a large part of the Forum's current financial difficulties are the result of slow payment of dues. In our view, members should be required to complete payment of dues by a certain date each year and it might be appropriate to charge the Secretary General with reporting on a range of measures appropriate to the management of non-payment.

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allocation of further Secretariat resources, especially in the increasingly important governance area. The agreement setting up the Secretariat should be redrafted to reflect changing demands and responsibilities.

## Recommendations in full

The recommendations here are listed under the same headings or major sub-headings as in the text. Recommendations are also listed numerically at the end of each section.

**We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

### A Pacific Vision

- Adopt the Vision proposed in this report as a guide to [Forum actions and policies](#).

### The Pacific Plan

**Endorse and lead the development of the Pacific Plan, intended to create stronger and deeper links between the countries of the region. We propose that the Plan should:**

- Assess options and provide a strategy for deeper and broader regional cooperation.
  - Identify the sectors and issues in which the region can gain the most from sharing resources of governance and aligning policies.
  - Provide clear recommendations to Leaders on the sequence and priorities for intensified regional cooperation.
  - Be used as a springboard for stimulating debate on how to shape the region's longer-term future.
  - Be carried out by a Task Force of people from within the region, managed by the Secretary General.
  - Be overseen by an open-ended group of Leaders (perhaps formed around a core group of three, comprising the immediate past, current and incoming chairs).
  - Be started as soon as possible. The Forum Secretariat could be asked to complete an assessment of existing mechanisms and processes for regional cooperation in time for the 2004 Apia Forum, along with draft terms of reference and recommendations from the Secretary General for membership of the Task Force. (see [The Pacific Plan](#))
- **Develop a [digital strategy](#) for the region, based on the 1999 Communications Action Plan.**

### A focus on people

- Endorse our proposal that the maintenance and strengthening of [cultural identity](#) be a core theme for Forum leaders.
- Encourage closer contacts with non-sovereign Pacific territories, through progressively granting them observer status at Leaders' meetings and associated meetings of the Forum Officials Committee. [New criteria for participation](#) should be developed, grounded in the region's interests.
- Encourage the development of [national human rights machinery](#). This might involve engagement with the Asia Pacific Human Rights Forum.
- Address the [low participation of women](#) in all levels of decision-making processes and structures, as well as the reduction and elimination of domestic violence, and the improvement of women's literacy and health status.

- Listen to the needs and aspirations of the burgeoning population of [young people](#) in the region, and recognise the impact of bigger and more youthful populations on the resources required for education and vocational training, healthcare, and job opportunities.
- Strengthen Forum engagement with [civil society](#). The Secretary General could be asked to discuss options for this with representatives of regional civil society. One option could be for civil society to organise a forum just prior to the Leaders' meeting, with a report conveyed to Leaders via the Secretary General.

### Key Forum interests

- Define the [key interests](#) of the Forum as economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security.
- Give the greatest possible support to maintaining and increasing efforts by the Forum Secretariat to enhance the [governance capabilities](#) of Forum members.
- Mandate the Secretary General, in consultation with the Chair, to call a meeting of Leaders or Forum Foreign Ministers in [times of crisis](#) with a view to galvanising regional action.

### Spreading the word

- Task the Secretary General with developing a Forum Secretariat communications and publicity strategy with a view to [strengthening links](#) between the Secretariat and members, and also between the Secretariat and Forum Dialogue partners, and agencies, both regional and international.

### Finance

- Encourage good stewardship of existing funds by the Forum Secretariat, while recognising that the proposed Pacific Plan may impose additional [financial demands](#).

### The Leaders' meeting

- Task the Secretary General or a delegate with [consulting in member capitals](#) several months prior to the annual Leaders' meeting and developing a short Retreat agenda list. We suggest this initiative be adopted immediately.
- Require Ministers and CROP heads to provide only [written reports](#) to Plenary sessions, unless Leaders decide otherwise.
- Retain the system of [annual, alphabetical rotational](#) Leaders' meetings in member countries, with the option of hosting them at the Forum Secretariat headquarters in Suva if requested by the host country.

### The role of the Chair

- Assist the Chair to be proactive in taking a strong regional leadership role in respect of agreed Forum responsibilities and positions, including on the international stage. We suggest that the country acting as [Forum Chair](#) should be responsible for organising a caucus before international meetings to assess common ground among Forum countries.
- Authorise [Secretariat support](#) for the Chair, as and when requested.

### The Post-Forum Dialogue

- Maintain and build on the 2003 precedent of a [post Forum briefing](#) of Dialogue partners by the Chair.
- Revise the [panel system](#) to ensure that panellists are able to concentrate exclusively on the Dialogue process. Panel members should be chosen – on the basis of recommendations from the Secretary General to the Chair – from among Forum Ministers.

### Ministerial meetings

- Mandate Forum [Ministerial meetings](#) with decision-making power on all issues except those where Ministers determine that a decision by Leaders is required. Leaders would of course retain the right to reconsider issues.

### The Forum Officials' Committee (FOC)

- Set a date for the [pre-Forum FOC meeting](#) that is about three weeks before the Leaders' annual August meeting rather than just a few days before as at present.
- Keep in mind the option of holding the [pre-Forum FOC meeting in Suva](#), unless the incoming Chair urges that it be held in the Forum host country.
- Bring forward the [budget-setting FOC meeting](#) so that allocations can be better aligned with tasks set by Leaders.

### The Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)

- Task the Secretary General, in consultation with CROP heads, with ascertaining whether a redrafting of the CROP Charter would help to define more clearly the relationships between CROP agencies, the Forum Secretariat and the Secretary General. The aim of any change would be to ensure that the most [effective use](#) is made of the scarce resources of the region.

### The Forum Secretariat

- Authorise the early appointment of a [second Deputy Secretary General](#) to improve the capacity of the Secretariat and enable the Secretary General to take up a more proactive regional role in support of the Chair.
- Appoint a working group of Forum members to draft a [new agreement](#) that updates and clearly sets down the role, functions and responsibilities of the Secretariat. In particular, the document should emphasise that the primary roles of the Secretariat are policy advice, coordination and assistance in implementing Leaders' decisions, rather than the project implementation and technical assistance functions that it has acquired over the years.
- Task the Secretary General with developing a [corporate plan](#) that identifies the resources and structure necessary to carry out the functions of the Secretariat, as well as ensuring that the Secretariat has effective budget, performance management and corporate planning systems.
- Task the Secretary General with ensuring that the considerable needs of [small island members](#) are mainstreamed into all levels of Secretariat work.
- Enforce the provision that [Secretariat staff](#) be hired for no more than two three-year terms of employment, so that people with skills developed at the Secretariat can use these in the service of their home countries. It may be necessary to offer the Secretary General a transition period in which to apply this provision to current staff.

### The Secretary General

- Encourage the Secretary General to take a [proactive role](#) in setting Forum agendas and coordinating responses by members to regional events, particularly crises. Such action would need to be taken in close consultation with the Chair and within limits set by Leaders.

## Challenges and opportunities

For years, the Pacific was romanticised internationally as a peaceful, content and rather sleepy backwater, somehow removed from – even immune to – the stresses faced by the rest of the developing and post-colonial world. This picture was, of course, a misrepresentation of a diverse, widespread and vibrant region facing unique development challenges.

Now there is a risk that well-publicised problems are giving rise to an equally simplistic but this time negative image: the Pacific as a region of trouble. Glib characterisations such as these do the region no favours.

We know there are major challenges facing us. Globalisation, with its multi-national businesses, trans-national crime, pervasive global popular culture and high rate of change, has put several Pacific countries at great risk. Those same global pressures are also seriously affecting Pacific languages and cultures. Smaller nations, particularly, are finding it increasingly difficult to pass on their traditions and languages to a new generation.

The shrinking world has other negative implications for our region. Geographic isolation is no longer any guarantee of freedom from terrorism, drug and people smuggling, or trans-national organised crime. This sort of activity thrives where governance is weak.

Ease of travel has brought with it serious threats to health, notably HIV/AIDS. Changed patterns of living and an increase in the availability of consumer goods have contributed to an upsurge in “lifestyle” diseases. Diabetes, particularly, is an epidemic within the Pacific.

Many islands are vulnerable to climate change. Natural resources are threatened by over-exploitation. An increasing availability of consumer goods presents new problems in terms of pollution and waste disposal.

As well as the consequences of globalisation there are issues that, to a greater or lesser extent, are particular to the Pacific. Natural resources in most Pacific countries are very limited and natural disasters, particularly cyclones, are an almost annual occurrence. Distances are great, raising the costs of exports, imports and regional travel. Telecommunications and transport infrastructure across the vastness of the Pacific Ocean are generally weak.

Variable standards of governance have produced at their worst instability, violence, corruption and a breakdown of the democratic process. These problems have exacerbated the generally slow pace of economic growth and, in some cases, led to economic decline. Poor governance has a direct impact on the lives of Pacific people. It affects not only their rights as individuals and as communities, but also the delivery of basic services such as health care, education and the management of scarce resources. Improved participation in government processes, particularly by women, is also essential – the Pacific has one of the lowest rates anywhere of women’s representation in government. Addressing governance and security issues with sustained determination may be one of the most significant means of ensuring the relevance of Forum activities to people in the region.

Populations of many Forum countries, especially in Melanesia, are expanding rapidly. In particular, the fast-growing youth population poses major challenges for education, job creation and social well-being.

There is, then, no shortage of challenges. But equally the region has great strengths and problems can be opportunities. Globalisation has delivered the prospect of fast travel, instant communications and access to global information flows. Advances in these areas offer tangible opportunities to the Pacific, a region far away from major world centres. The time has come to take advantage of these developments to build stronger connections with each other and the rest of the world.

Features of the Pacific that some might see as disadvantages – for example, small land mass and isolation – can be seen equally well as advantages; it comes down to a question of perspective. The seafaring peoples of the Pacific see the region not as small islands separated by the vastness of the ocean, but as a bountiful ocean filled with islands.

But the real strength of the region lies in the character of its people, who have demonstrated throughout their history a high level of resourcefulness and resilience. We are well used to surviving, and eventually prospering, in the face of hardship, invasions and natural disasters.

It is our view that the Pacific has much to be thankful for and already has, in the form of its remarkable patterns of regional interaction, a strong foundation on which to build a positive future. Good strategic thinking, planning and cooperation – as are envisaged in the Pacific Plan – along with strong and coordinated regional organisations, will present new opportunities for positive development.

Seizing these will require the energies and knowledge of all people, not just those in positions of power. Women, youth and civil society groupings, particularly, can be integrated more effectively into national and regional decision-making processes. Openness and a free flow of information need to be seen as positive factors, not threats. The role of the news media as an essential check and balance on power needs to be better understood. While some Pacific countries have had a difficult relationship with journalists, experience shows generally that media are better informed and more constructive if valued and drawn closer to political life.

We hope this Review demonstrates that while the Forum has played a pivotal role in the development of the Pacific, its role and functions will need to be rethought if the many expectations now being placed on it are to be realised. Enhanced regional cooperation and pooling of effort is required. Anything less will mean a deepening risk of marginalisation, economic decline, increased insecurity and a more impoverished region.

The Forum must have a clear vision, a strong strategic sense, carefully defined responsibilities and the capacity to achieve these. Above all it must have direct and practical value to the Pacific people it serves.

## **The Way Forward**

### **The Pacific Way**

**Leaders believe the Pacific can, should and will be a region of  
peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity,**

**so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives.**

**We treasure the diversity of the Pacific and seek a future in which its cultures and traditions are valued, honoured and developed.**

**We seek a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values, and its defence and promotion of human rights.**

### **Recommendation 1**

The ambitious Vision that we offer Leaders has at its heart the well-tested values of the Pacific Way. In our view this concept or style – which is often mentioned but seldom defined – implies honesty, mutual respect and tolerance. It is based on a recognition and acceptance of differences, but with an underlying awareness of the need to find unity and consensus. The Pacific Way is guided by a sense of justice, compassion, tolerance and understanding. It is about working together. The Pacific Way is one of the region's greatest assets, but the concept must evolve and be reasserted if it is to remain relevant.

The powerful notion of the Pacific Way will need to embrace new ways of thinking and acting. We hope it can denote a style of governance that is respected for its inclusiveness, effectiveness and freedom from corruption. We hope, too, that it can be people-centred and democratic in spirit. It needs to reach into communities and address the issues that are important to them. These include poverty in all its forms, the position of women and youth in society, education, “lifestyle diseases,” and the growing threat of HIV/AIDS. The Pacific Way should deal openly, honestly yet respectfully with problems including failures of governance and corruption.

But however much it evolves to meet the demands of a changing world, The Pacific Way will have at its core one unchanging truth: regional interconnectedness, the idea that there is a Pacific way of doing things that is open to, but different from, the way Americans or Europeans or Asians might do things. It is this idea of a unifying regional consciousness that inspires the Pacific Plan.

### **The Pacific Plan**

The history of the Forum has been one of steadily growing cooperation among the countries of the region. Indeed, the Forum is one of the most successful examples anywhere of countries working together for mutual benefit.

There is growing evidence, however, that current levels of cooperation are not a strong enough force to address the challenges now facing the Pacific. Globalisation and the uncertainties of the international security environment present major challenges. Most Pacific Island countries are small, have limited resources and are distant from major markets. Some exist close to the knife-edge of economic and social viability. Given that a weakness in one country is, in terms of our Vision, a weakness for us all, there is no doubt in our minds that the future prosperity of the region will depend on our acknowledging our inter-connectedness, and finding new and creative means of harnessing our collective capacities. New thinking on the relationships between sovereign states may be required. Where practical and appropriate, the pooling of regional resources in a range of areas of governance would offer improved efficiencies in the delivery of services and economic development.

We propose to Leaders the endorsement of the Pacific Plan to create stronger and deeper links between the countries of the region. The Plan should identify existing areas of inter-country cooperation, including their strengths and weakness. It should then seek to provide clear recommendations to Leaders on a sequence and priorities for intensified regional cooperation. It should identify the sectors and shared concerns where the region might make the most useful gains from sharing resources and aligning policies. Above all, the Plan should be a vehicle for placing the “big idea” of Pacific inter-dependence squarely at the front of the regional political agenda.

With goodwill and commitment, the Pacific Plan could become the overarching strategy for weaving the region closer together. It would be not a “Forum Plan” as such, but an active partnership involving the Pacific in its widest sense, including the whole family of Pacific regional organisations.

The Pacific Plan lies at the heart of this Review. Its success – which will require a major philosophical commitment by all countries – will depend on Leaders accepting the “big idea” and then making an early start on a sequence of practical steps.

While members of our group have clear ideas of their own about how the Plan might advance and precisely what it might consider, it would be inappropriate to present these now. For one thing, the precise content of the plan should be based on comprehensive research and analysis. For another, commissioning this work clearly falls within the mandate of Leaders. We are putting forward an idea and a process, rather than a blueprint.

We ask Leaders not only to endorse the concept of the Pacific Plan, but also to be bold and innovative in pursuing it. Greater sharing of resources is the first step. We hope that Leaders will be prepared to go further, to consider regional integration that runs deeper than that established already under regional trade arrangements. We suggest that it would be timely for Leaders to consider options for future economic and political integration – possibly to develop a model that is unique for the Pacific.

Thinking outside the boundaries of current political and economic realities is difficult and challenging work. This we freely concede. Yet we believe it is essential that we do not shy away from the task. Failure to engage now with the biggest issues facing our region can only limit our choices in the future.

We recommend that the first task to be accomplished in putting the Plan into action should be the creation of a framework for action. It is important for the momentum and profile of the Plan that it take shape quickly, and that some confidence-building gains are made early in its existence. With this in mind we recommend that the Forum Secretariat complete an assessment of existing regional cooperation and integration arrangements in time for the 2004 Apia Forum. Draft terms of reference and recommendations from the Secretary General for membership of a Pacific Plan Task Force should also be presented to Leaders at the Apia Forum. This Task Force would have responsibility for developing the Pacific Plan and would be critical to the success of the proposal. We recommend that Leaders task the Secretary General with managing such a group, working directly to a small but open-ended group of Leaders. It might be appropriate to form the Leaders’ Group around a core of three: the previous, current and incoming chairs.

It is clear that the Pacific Plan would have significant resource implications for the Forum Secretariat, and this issue we consider further in our sections on [Finance](#) and the [Secretariat](#).

We have suggested already that a precise programme of action for the Plan is beyond the scope of this Review. Nevertheless we would be failing in our duty if we did not indicate some specific areas that we consider demand intensified cooperation.

Given the vast expanses of ocean that separate us, and the difficulties of trade and travel within the region, there is little doubt that transport is a prime candidate for prompt action under the Plan. This area is already under investigation through the Regional Transport Study. Its agreed recommendations could be incorporated into the Pacific Plan.

Other areas that would benefit from greater shared effort and the pooling of resources include standards and conformance, quarantine services and customs, increased trade facilitation, judicial and public administration, security and financial systems, processes for meeting international legal demands, regional law enforcement aimed at trans-national crime, and regional representation at international meetings. It might be possible to consider introducing a regional panel of judges, a common list of Pacific prosecutors, a regional shipping registry, a regional financial intelligence unit and intensified training courses for regional managers, administrators and parliamentarians. These are only a few examples of the sorts of resources that might be shared in the Pacific of the future.

We would argue, too, that security must fall within the ambit of the Plan. In the region we have a number of agreements – notably the Honiara, Biketawa and Aitutaki Declarations – providing for regional cooperation on security and law enforcement issues, but there is no clear and efficient mechanism by which their words can be given teeth. We encountered in the countries we visited a strong feeling that government breakdown, insurrection and other emergencies demand rapid and effective engagement. Further, this engagement should involve a wider range of countries than is typically the case. We speculate on neither the possible shape of crisis response machinery nor on its management, but we do believe that consideration of these questions is an essential part of “big picture” regional planning. We note that conflict prevention is an even more important goal than conflict resolution.

The development of a digital strategy would allow huge gains to be made through the countries of the region working more closely together. We regard this as an area requiring urgent, concerted action and so offer some reasonably detailed thoughts.

The regional information technology (IT) infrastructure is limited in its reach and accessibility. Few Pacific people have good access to electronic communication of any type, and those who do face indifferent service and high prices. In a world increasingly divided into the “information rich” and “information poor,” there is a real risk that the Pacific is beginning to slide down the wrong side of the digital divide. That can only lead to marginalisation and isolation, both economically and socially.

Better digital communication offers vast potential for drawing the countries and people of the Pacific closer together, and linking them more firmly to the wider world. It offers a means of harnessing the process of globalisation to our advantage through opening up new forms of economic and social development in which remoteness and small land area are less relevant than is the case now. Improved digital communications would provide opportunities across all sectors and in both urban and rural areas. There would be likely spin-offs in terms of reduced need for business or official travel, and for distance learning education.

Better digital communication within the region would radically improve inter-country consultation on Forum issues, as well as the flow of information in and out of the Forum Secretariat and with other regional organisations.

There are some barriers standing in the way of implementing better digital communications. Problems exist with limited and unequal access to communications technology, high costs of equipment and services, insufficient telecommunications bandwidth, low investment in networks and a limited number of Internet service providers. Regulatory frameworks at the national level

have not kept up with the pace of technological development and in many cases they are outdated and incomplete.

The **1999 Forum Communications Policy Ministerial Meeting** agreed a comprehensive Action Plan, along with a vision for the Pacific Information Economy. This was reaffirmed in 2002, although Ministers noted then that progress had depended on domestic capacities and national priorities.

We recommend that Leaders seek urgent progress on the 1999 Action Plan. This should include, as a first step, a detailed investigation of how closer cooperation at a regional level might further the implementation process [Recommendation 3](#).

The development of a digital strategy should be considered a high priority element of the Pacific Plan.

### **The Pacific Plan at a glance**

- A far-reaching strategy and programme for creating stronger and deeper links between the countries of the region.
- To stimulate consideration of regional integration deeper than that already established under current trade arrangements.
- Based on an assessment of existing regional cooperation and integration arrangements. This could be carried out by the Forum Secretariat and presented to Leaders at the 2004 Apia Forum, along with draft terms of reference and recommendations for membership of a Pacific Plan Task Force.
- To involve the development of proposals for greater cooperation, common structures and pooled resources in a wide range of sectors. These might include transport, information technology, security, standards and conformance, quarantine services, customs, increased trade facilitation, judicial and public administration, security and financial systems, processes for meeting international legal demands, air traffic control, regional law enforcement. Specific innovations might include the introduction of a regional panel of judges, a common list of Pacific prosecutors, a regional shipping registry, a regional financial intelligence unit, and intensified training courses for regional managers, administrators and parliamentarians.
- To include an implementation plan and schedule.
- Driven by a Leaders' Group, possibly formed around a core membership comprising the previous, current and incoming Forum chairs.
- Carried out by a Task Force of people from within the region, managed by the Forum Secretary General.
- Momentum to be created by seeking early gains in the most achievable sectors.
- More complex areas to be considered in time.
- Early consideration to be given to resource issues, both human and financial, to assist the Secretary General in developing the Plan.

### **Recommendations - The way forward - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

1. Adopt the [Vision](#) proposed in this report as a guide to Forum actions and policies.
2. Endorse and lead the development of the Pacific Plan, intended to create stronger and deeper links between the countries of the region. We propose that the Plan should:

- Assess options and provide a strategy for deeper and broader regional cooperation.
- Identify the sectors and issues in which the region can gain the most from sharing resources of governance and aligning policies.
- Provide clear recommendations to Leaders on the sequence and priorities for intensified regional cooperation.

- Be used as a springboard for stimulating debate on how to shape the region's longer-term future.
- Be carried out by a Task Force of people from within the region, managed by the Secretary General.
- Be overseen by an open-ended group of Leaders (perhaps formed around a core group of three, comprising the immediate past, current and incoming chairs).
- Be started as soon as possible. The Forum Secretariat could be asked to complete an assessment of existing mechanisms and processes for regional cooperation in time for the 2004 Apia Forum, along with draft terms of reference and recommendations from the Secretary General for membership of the Task Force.

3. Develop a digital strategy for the region, based on the 1999 Communications Action Plan.

## **The Role of the Forum**

### **Building on the past**

Since it first met in Wellington in 1971, the Pacific Islands Forum has been a driving force in the development of a Pacific regional consciousness. It has grown steadily in membership and stature, consolidating its position as the pre-eminent political grouping in the region.

Initially the Forum had just seven members who gathered, usually once a year, to discuss regional issues and present collective views to the international community. Through the founding years, economic development was the predominant theme of meetings. One of its earliest goals was the establishment of a Pacific economic union – a vision that remains incomplete, though still a relevant objective.

Now the Forum has 16 members representing all the independent states of the Pacific. Its annual meetings function as Pacific regional summits, attracting media and civil society attention from around the world. Twelve countries or groupings from outside the region – including the US, the EU and China – make the journey to the Forum Chair country each year to attend a Post-Forum Dialogue to share views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. Others are seeking Post-Forum Dialogue membership. The political apparatus of the Forum is supported by a Secretariat employing some 70 staff.

The Forum works closely with a number of other regional agencies. The largest is the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), a technical development agency that covers all states and territories in the Pacific and predates the Forum. The SPC and nine other regional agencies, including the Forum Secretariat, are linked through the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), which is chaired by the Forum Secretary General.

It is clear from our consultations around the region that there is an overriding perception among Leaders, Ministers, officials and civil society that the Forum is immensely valuable – essential in fact – to the development and well-being of the Pacific and its peoples. This confidence is well founded. The grouping has galvanised regional will on fisheries cooperation, nuclear issues and climate change.

Step by step, it is moving the Pacific towards more open trade through the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) and the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA). It has adopted far-reaching measures on regional security and helped restore calm to Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) and the stand-alone South Pacific Regional

Environmental Programme (SPREP) – all of which have emerged from Forum initiatives – have successfully harnessed regional energies in resource management and conservation.

These are substantial achievements of which the region can be proud. Perhaps the Forum's most fundamental achievement, though uncelebrated because it has become commonplace, is in facilitating networking across almost all sectors of member country concern. The Forum founders would be gratified to see what their far-sighted initiative has achieved. The task before us now is to re-express the role of the Forum and build on its successes to ensure that it remains valuable and relevant into the 21st century.

## **A focus on people**

In setting out to consider the future role of the Forum, our first task is to establish whom it exists to serve.

The answer has to be "people". The Forum is not immune to the tendency of structures and bureaucracies everywhere to lose touch with their roots. The Forum has to work for the practical and direct benefit of Pacific people. If it does not do this – if it has no real connection with those it seeks to serve – then its value to the region is seriously limited.

Our discussions in the region led us to the view that the Forum needs to develop closer connections with the people of the Pacific if it is to remain truly relevant and useful.

A Forum that serves Pacific people must clearly acknowledge in its work the matters that preoccupy them. The issues that families across the region wrestle with every day – earning an adequate income, and providing their families with a home, health care and educational opportunities – are not necessarily uppermost in the mind of those engaged in regional deliberations. Regional goals of economic growth and sustainable development must be pursued with every awareness and consideration of these fundamental human needs. Furthermore the link between, on the one hand, economic growth and the sustainable development of the community and, on the other, the individual well-being of individuals, needs to be understood and clearly articulated. In considering these issues, the Forum could draw on the resources of universities, policy institutes and think tanks around the region.

**In our view, the areas that deserve immediate attention in this respect are:**

### **(i) Cultural identity**

Our cultures link us with other Pacific peoples, and with our sea, land and ancestors. They stimulate national unity and self-confidence and provide a constantly renewed source of wealth. Our cultures and languages are a major part of who we are. Yet, with each passing year, they are eroded by growing migration, urbanisation and material aspirations, as well as the increasing dominance of mass communications and global popular culture.

This represents an obvious loss – not only to our sense of Pacific identity but also economically. We should not forget that traditional industries create wealth and employment while maintaining and strengthening community relations, particularly in rural areas. Trade in cultural goods has grown immensely over the past two decades but often its present and potential monetary value is unrecognised.

We believe strengthening Pacific cultures and languages in the face of external pressures should be a central concern for Forum Leaders. As we suggest in our proposals on [governance](#), the pursuit of increased democratic representation and more open political processes can be

managed in ways that are entirely consistent with the reinforcement of cultural beliefs and values. Further, it is possible to combine modern economic ideas with traditional and cultural practices to create stronger national economies.

We ask Leaders to endorse our proposal that the maintenance and strengthening of cultural identity be a core theme, and that the work of the SPC in this area is fully supported.

[Recommendation 4.](#)

#### **(ii) Regional inclusiveness**

There is an almost unanimous view in the region that the current Forum membership criterion – independent statehood – is appropriate. The Forum is a government-to-government body and its authority depends on the sovereignty of members.

Nevertheless there is also a strong view that the Forum needs to better connect with Pacific communities that currently do not have a voice in the Forum process. The key omissions are the French and US Pacific territories [Recommendation 5.](#)

Observer status at the Forum for these entities would be a useful step towards enhanced regional inclusiveness and cooperation. We ask Leaders to consider integrating all the French and US territories into the Forum as observers, and to be open to approaches from other non-sovereign Pacific territories. New criteria for participation should be developed, grounded in the region's interests.

#### **(iii) Sub-regional representation**

A number of sub-groups, including Small Island States and the Melanesian Spearhead, have developed within the Forum. These groups have shown that they can strengthen the work of the Forum by progressing issues of particular relevance to their members and by setting standards that other members may wish to adopt.

Our consultations revealed, however, that often Small Island State members are frustrated by a feeling that they cannot fully participate in or benefit from the Forum.

Leaders of small island countries spoke to us about their limited capacity to successfully assimilate and respond to Forum officials' recommendations, the serious difficulties they encounter in implementing Forum measures, the heavy costs they face taking part in Forum activities and the limited support that is available to them from the Secretariat.

We ask Forum Leaders to give urgent attention to the special needs of small island member states. The Forum has an important advocacy role to perform on their behalf.

#### **(iv) Human rights**

The Forum should support the work of members in developing national human rights machinery. As part of this process, those Leaders whose governments are not already engaged with the Asia Pacific Human Rights Forum might consider becoming so. This would draw in practical assistance from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [Recommendation 6](#)

#### **(v) Women and gender**

There is a view within the region that Pacific institutions and processes are not as gender sensitive as they should be. Given the changing roles and responsibilities of men and women,

and the increasingly recognised role that women play in society, the Forum needs to acknowledge and encourage the participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

The challenges facing Pacific Island Leaders are to: increase the current low level of participation by women at all levels in decision-making processes and structures; reduce and eliminate domestic violence; put in place programmes to improve the literacy rate of women; and promote and improve the health of women [Recommendation 7](#).

#### **(vi) Youth**

Young people make up an increasingly large proportion of our societies. Around 40 percent of the total Pacific Islands population is under 15 years of age. Each year nearly 200,000 people – nearly the equivalent of the population of Vanuatu, or twice the population of Tonga – are added to the total Pacific population through new births. Each of these children will require education, healthcare and, eventually, job opportunities and basic life skills. If we fail to provide them with these things, the young people who should be our most important resource will become a liability.

We encourage Leaders and our communities to listen to the interests and concerns of our young people, and plan to meet their needs. At stake is not only their future, but also that of all our societies [Recommendation 8](#).

#### **(vii) Civil society**

The global rise of civil society and a strong desire among Pacific NGOs to be more closely involved in regional decision-making have significant implications for the Forum.

Although the Forum is intrinsically a government-to-government process, it is desirable that ways are found to draw on the knowledge, policy views and grass-roots connections that many civil society groups possess. Civil society includes not only NGOs, but also other groupings and institutions with a wealth of expertise that could usefully be better harnessed in the regional decision-making process. At present, civil society input is limited to gatherings at the time of the Forum that lack a formal mechanism for communicating with Leaders, Ministers or officials.

Although civil society representatives are free to liaise with the Forum Secretariat or Chair whenever they wish, we believe it is important that they have the opportunity for a more direct association with the annual Forum meeting. One means of handling this would be for a Pacific Civil Society Forum – organised by representatives of civil society themselves – to be held each year just prior to the Leaders' meeting. This Forum could be structured around themes directly relevant to the Forum agenda, with the Secretary General invited to receive an agreed report for conveying directly to Leaders. We suggest the Secretary General explore options with representatives of regional civil society [Recommendation 9](#).

### **Key Interests**

While accepting that the Forum must be flexible enough in its scope to meet the needs of a diverse membership, we believe it is vital to define clearly its core areas of activity. An excessively broad mandate contributes to crowded meeting agendas, escalating costs, potential duplication of effort, and capacity overload. These problems were repeatedly highlighted during our consultations and are addressed later in the paper.

Our talks around the region showed up some differences in perception of the Forum's primary areas of activity, but certain themes recurred. We were told that the key interests of the Forum should be:

- Economic growth;
- Sustainable development;
- Governance; and
- Security **Recommendation 10**.

These core themes are discussed in greater detail below:

### **(i) Economic growth**

Improvement in the material well-being of Pacific people and the opportunities available to them will depend on expanding opportunities for the generation of increased wealth from the region's natural and human resources.

Sustained economic growth implies both macro- and micro-economic policies that facilitate the creation of businesses and jobs, and also the development of a trading environment that allows equitable access to export markets and lower cost imports. In this area the Forum has been especially active in recent years and we acknowledge the efforts that have been and are being made to strengthen regional trade and economic integration.

Significant progress has been made with PACER, which provides stepping stones to allow Forum island countries gradually to become part of a single regional market and integrated into the international economy. It also usefully establishes a Regional Trade Facilitation Programme. A key first step towards the single market goal is PICTA, a free trade agreement in goods between the Forum island countries. Both agreements have now [entered into force](#).

Service industries such as tourism and professional sports provide substantial opportunities for the region to derive greater benefit from its physical environment and human abilities. It is important that the benefits obtained from providing services in the region and abroad are fairly shared with the smaller island states.

The Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting (FEMM) has an important role to play in spearheading economic reform and regional integration. It is vital that it focus on practical measures to enhance economic governance and development, especially through regional cooperation. The next meeting will provide a timely opportunity for Ministers to review the FEMM's focus and work programme.

### **(ii) Sustainable development**

The greatest risk attached to economic development is that of destroying what one seeks to protect. The Pacific's natural environment is bountiful but fragile. Traditional subsistence approaches to farming and fishing have generally supported sustainability, but pressure from resource use has become intense. Non-sustainable resource use threatens not only the natural resources of the region, but also the livelihoods and traditional way of life of many Pacific people.

Forum countries and CROP agencies have made substantial efforts to ensure that economic development is sustainable. Fishing is a noteworthy example. The Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific will do much to protect the migratory tuna stocks that are so important to many Forum countries.

The voice of Forum countries on responsible use of the world's oceans has made itself heard not only regionally but also internationally. It should be a matter of some pride for Forum island countries that they were instrumental in having the concerns of small island developing states about rising sea levels adopted virtually complete in the plan produced by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

We believe the sustainability issue is one in which the Forum has demonstrated impeccable credentials and we urge it to maintain its efforts.

### **(iii) Governance**

The support and promotion of strong national governance is an area of increasing Forum activity. This reflects a growing global and regional focus on issues including political transparency and openness, social justice, human rights, and sound political and economic management. The quality of governance has a significant effect on the well-being of Pacific people, just as it does on others around the world.

Good governance inspires confidence among citizens and partners, both regional and international. In fact, we would argue that observation of the principles of good governance is vital to the future development of the Pacific. The promotion of good governance must be carried out in ways that are meaningful to Pacific societies and people. Often in the Pacific there is tension between inherited political and legal structures and pre-existing cultural traditions. There is a need to work towards achieving a better “fit” between the two in order to achieve more relevant, responsive and accountable patterns of governance.

We recommend that Leaders give the greatest possible support to maintaining and increasing efforts by the Forum Secretariat to enhance the governance capabilities of Forum members.

[Recommendation 11](#). See also with regard to [Small Island States](#) in The Secretariat.

### **(iv) Security**

Trans-national and regional security issues are seen by many in the region as likely to dominate Forum attention for at least the next few years. There is also concern about security at the community level, and work is already underway to address this through the regional policing initiative.

At one level, this reflects global concerns about issues ranging from trans-national crime and terrorist threats to disease pandemics and natural disasters. Security concerns have also arisen as a result of the crises within the Pacific that led to recent regional response agreements such as the Biketawa Declaration.

In our proposals for a Pacific Plan we have suggested that there is considerable scope for enhanced cooperation and a more comprehensive regional approach to shared security interests. In particular, there is widespread agreement that regional effort on trans-national and regional security crises needs to be harnessed effectively. We recommend that the Secretary General be mandated to call, in consultation with the Chair, an early meeting of Forum Leaders, Foreign Ministers or their representatives with a view to galvanising regional action to prevent or respond to a crisis [Recommendation 12](#).

## **The Forum in the world**

When the Forum speaks clearly with one voice, it has a powerful position in the world community. Its large membership guarantees that its presence cannot be overlooked. We have seen evidence of this power in, for instance, the Forum’s substantial influence in Law of the Sea negotiations.

We note the leadership role played in recent years by Forum Chairs – for example, by New Zealand at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Nigeria; by Fiji at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002; and by Nauru in New York during the 2001 UN Conference on Children. Forum members hold regular meetings at the United Nations in New York and we commend this initiative.

Routine regional caucusing before significant international meetings would help to ensure that the Forum’s international visibility and influence remains consistently high. Arranging such contact could be the responsibility of the country chairing the Forum see [Recommendation 18](#) and [The role of the Chair](#).

## **Spreading the word**

In this section we have so far considered whom the Forum exists to serve, its key interests and its global role. A related question that should be raised here is how the Forum might better communicate its work to member countries and the wider world.

During our travels around the Pacific we were disappointed to find that many aspects of the work of the Forum were poorly understood outside the central Government and core Ministries of member countries. Even some well placed Ministers and officials suggested they were uncertain about Forum functions and activities. The picture was bleaker still among representatives of civil society and the wider community. Without broad understanding within governments and communities in member countries, the Forum cannot hope to enjoy the support of the people in whose interests it functions.

It is also clear that many Forum members do not have a clear idea of regional initiatives that are being pursued within other Forum countries. This represents another failure of communications.

It is important, therefore, that ways be found to improve the flow of Forum information both within and beyond the region. We ask Leaders to task the Secretary General with developing a wide-ranging Forum communications and publicity strategy aimed at enhancing the flow of information among members, between members and the Secretariat, and with Forum partner countries and agencies [Recommendation 13](#).

## **Finance**

### **(i) The question of resources**

The growing range of Forum activities and its expanding workload have placed serious pressure on financial resources. In recent years increased demands have been met mainly through extra-budgetary contributions from donors.

While the proposals contained in this Review for tightening the focus of Forum work onto areas of core activity may ease some pressures, it is inevitable that the development of the Pacific Plan would produce a whole new range of demands.

Good stewardship will require effective prioritisation and efficient use of existing funds. It would be regrettable, though, if after re-prioritisation of existing funds there were still insufficient resources for the efficient operation of the Forum or the development of a plan that has the potential to bring great benefits to Pacific people. It is likely that a strong Forum Secretariat that is efficient and productive in implementing the Forum mandate will require increased financial resources, and we ask Leaders to give specific attention to this issue [Recommendation 14](#) and [The Secretariat](#). The donor base may need to be expanded and the Secretary General will need to give consideration to this.

It goes almost without saying that the financial well-being of the Forum is heavily reliant on the observation of the highest standards of [financial stewardship and auditing](#).

### **(ii) Member contributions**

It needs to be made very clear that a large part of the financial difficulties suffered by the Forum are the result of members not paying their dues on time.

We believe Leaders must state in unambiguous terms that non-payment of dues will affect the viability of the Secretariat and the services it provides.

It is appropriate that all Forum members be required to complete payment of their dues by 30 June each year, and that the Secretary General be requested to report on a range of measures appropriate to managing continued non-payment. In our view these should contain sanctions that will enable the Forum Secretariat to carry out its work with the anticipated level of funding.

**Recommendations. The role of the Forum. We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

4. Endorse our proposal that the maintenance and strengthening of cultural identity be a core theme for Forum leaders.
5. Encourage closer contacts with non-sovereign Pacific territories, through progressively granting them observer status at Leaders' meetings and associated meetings of the Forum Officials' Committee. New criteria for participation should be developed, grounded in the region's interests.
6. Encourage the development of national human rights machinery. This might involve engagement with the Asia Pacific Human Rights Forum.
7. Address the low participation of women in all levels of decision-making processes and structures, as well as the reduction and elimination of domestic violence, and the improvement of women's literacy and health status.
8. Listen to the needs and aspirations of the burgeoning population of young people in the region, and recognise the impact of bigger and more youthful populations on the resources required for education and vocational training, healthcare, and job opportunities.
9. Strengthen Forum engagement with civil society. The Secretary General could be asked to discuss options for this with representatives of regional civil society. One option could be for civil society to organise a forum just prior to the Leaders' meeting, with a report conveyed to Leaders via the Secretary General.
10. Define the key interests of the Forum as economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security.
11. Give the greatest possible support to maintaining and increasing efforts by the Forum Secretariat to enhance the governance capabilities of Forum members.
12. Mandate the Secretary General, in consultation with the Chair, to call a meeting of Leaders or Forum Foreign Ministers in times of crisis with a view to galvanising regional action.
13. Task the Secretary General with developing a Forum Secretariat communications and publicity strategy with a view to strengthening links between the Secretariat and members, and also between the Secretariat and Forum Dialogue partners and agencies, both regional and international.
14. Encourage good stewardship of existing funds by the Forum Secretariat, while recognising that the proposed Pacific Plan may impose additional financial demands.

**The Leaders' meeting**

Older Pacific Leaders speak fondly of the time when the Forum was a small club in which people knew each other well and could speak as friends on the issues that concerned them.

In recent years this intimacy appears to have diminished. Leaders change more frequently than they used to and there are not the same personal bonds between them. The Forum has become a function of its success, a much larger organisation covering a wider spectrum of sub-regional interests. At the same time, the formal Plenary sessions of Forum Leaders' meetings have become more complex affairs involving long agendas and numerous presentations, reports and briefing papers. Even the informal Retreats – which Leaders generally consider the most valuable part of Forum meetings – are now intensive gatherings compared with their relaxed informality in the early days.

Although we do not want to suggest narrowing the breadth of activities undertaken by the Forum, we believe the Leaders' gathering would be considerably improved by reducing the number of issues considered at both the Retreat and Plenary sessions.

There was a strong perception among those we talked to that Leaders regard their annual meeting as being too driven by officials. Leaders would be assisted if the interval between the Forum Officials' Committee meeting and the Leaders' meeting ([The Forum Officials' Committee](#)) were to be increased. This would allow Leaders more time to digest and formulate responses to the information presented to them.

### **The Retreat**

The Retreat is at the heart of the Forum process. It remains an embodiment of the informal decision-making tradition that characterises both the Forum and the Pacific Way. It should be an opportunity for free and frank discussion – for “building togetherness,” as one of our group put it. In practice, however, both informality and free discussion are limited by the high workload.

Different Forum Chairs have taken different approaches to managing the consideration of issues at the Retreat. We consider that a brief agenda – perhaps two or three “Forum priorities” – is ideal, and this should be prepared in advance of the meeting. The Retreat agenda need not mirror the broader meeting agenda, although some elements might overlap.

In our view, the Secretary General or a senior Secretariat manager should visit all member countries several months before each Leaders' meeting to discuss with Governments possible Retreat agenda items [Recommendation 15](#), as well as seek early notice of issues Leaders may wish to place on the agenda for the Plenary.

A final Retreat agenda draft, reflecting the major concerns of the region, should then be prepared by the Secretary General in consultation with the Chair. Such an agenda might comprise a single major theme. Of course Leaders will raise additional issues and conduct the Retreat in the way that seems most appropriate to them.

### **The Plenary**

At present, the formal Plenary sessions of Leaders' meetings tend to be time-consuming and ritualistic. The agendas prepared by officials are usually extensive and the presentation of Ministerial and CROP agency reports mechanical. While not wishing in any way to diminish the role of Plenary participants, we consider that this pro-forma segment of the meeting should be considerably simplified and shortened.

As a first step towards improving efficiency, we urge Forum officials to minimise as far as reasonably possible the Plenary agenda and the volume of supporting paperwork. The assessment of agenda priorities gained by the Secretary General during visits to member capitals in the months before the Forum meeting should help in this regard.

As a second step, Leaders might consider discussing written Ministerial meeting and CROP agency reports only where they have concerns that they wish to explore. Otherwise the written reports could simply be “received”, thereby saving meeting time [Recommendation 16](#).

For this to succeed, Ministers should have the delegated authority to sign off their own work following consultation with the Secretary General ([Ministerial meetings](#)).

### **Setting the venue**

On this subject there is very little dissent among Pacific Leaders and Ministers. The common view is that rotating Leaders’ meetings alphabetically among all member capitals is an acceptable and valued procedure. Although this sometimes creates heavy financial and logistic demands on the smaller countries, it is an opportunity for them both to showcase their country and emphasise their willingness and ability to shoulder a regional responsibility.

The idea of holding alternate meetings at a central venue, ie. the Forum headquarters in Suva was raised in a few capitals only, and usually without enthusiasm. Although this would produce cost savings and possibly attract higher-level representatives from outside the region to the Post-Forum Dialogue process, it is clear that most members – particularly small countries – fiercely value the opportunity to host the Leaders’ meeting on a rotational basis. It was pointed out that if alternate year meetings were held in Suva, countries would have the prospect of hosting the Forum only once every 32 years. This was not considered attractive.

Nevertheless, it should be made clear to members that no Government need feel embarrassed if it considers itself unable to host the Leaders’ and associated Forum meetings in its own country. Countries in such circumstances could instead host meetings at the Secretariat headquarters in Suva or, following consultations between the Chair, other Leaders and the Secretary General, in another Forum country. [Recommendation 17](#).

### **Recommendations - The Leaders’ Meeting - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

**15.** Task the Secretary General or a delegate with consulting in member capitals several months prior to the annual Leaders’ meeting and developing a short Retreat agenda list. We suggest this initiative be adopted immediately.

**16.** Require Ministers and CROP heads to provide only written reports to Plenary sessions, unless Leaders decide otherwise.

**17.** Retain the system of annual, alphabetical rotational Leaders’ meetings in member countries, with the option of hosting them at the Forum Secretariat headquarters in Suva if requested by the host country.

### **The role of the Chair**

The Forum Chair – the Head of Government of the host country – plays a vital role in steering the Leaders’ meeting and in setting the agenda for the following year.

The primary job of the Chair is to give political leadership and confidence to the Forum process, including to the Secretariat and the Secretary General. In turn the Secretary General is able to offer a great deal of support and advice to the Chair, and this is to be encouraged.

In general, the Forum has flourished – in terms of both internal direction and external projection – when it has had strong leadership from the Chair. Inevitably the style and quality of leadership will vary according to the personality and style of the incumbent, but it is important for the consistent functioning of the Forum that the status of the office remains high and can be respected by all members.

Leaders consulted for this Review support Forum Chairs taking a more active role in managing the political activity of the Forum, especially as regards speaking on behalf of the Pacific on the international stage [Recommendation 18](#). We propose that the country chairing the Forum, or a nominee, should be responsible for organising a caucus of Forum countries before major international gatherings. This would allow discussion of objectives and cooperation with a view to achieving the best possible outcome for the Pacific region.

Leaders we spoke to would also welcome early contact by the Chair and the Secretary General in helping to set priorities for the [Leaders' meeting](#).

A number of Forum countries have insufficient resources to adequately support their Heads of Government in chairing the Forum. For this reason there is a good case for directing, when necessary, some Secretariat resource towards supporting the Chair [Recommendation 19](#).

#### **Recommendations - The role of the Chair - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

**18.** Assist the Chair to play a proactive role in taking a strong regional leadership role, in respect of agreed Forum responsibilities and positions, including on the international stage. We suggest that the country acting as Forum Chair should be responsible for organising a caucus before major international meetings to assess common ground among Forum countries.

**19.** Authorise Secretariat support for the Chair, as and when requested.

#### **The Post Forum Dialogue**

The Post Forum Dialogue is an annual opportunity for senior Ministers and officials of 12 countries and groupings from outside the Pacific to meet representatives of the Forum. In theory the Dialogue is an enormously valuable means by which the countries of the Pacific can collectively express their views to a major world audience. In practice its potential has not been realised. There are difficulties in several areas.

While partners value the Dialogue as an opportunity to engage with the Pacific on a collective and bilateral basis, there is a perception within the Forum grouping that some partners attend more from a sense of duty than from any feeling that they or the Pacific will particularly benefit from the contact. There is a strong sense among both Forum members and Dialogue partners that the Dialogue is an awkward set-piece exchange of formal positions, and that freer dialogue, with more open discussion between well-informed and interested parties, needs to be encouraged.

There are also consistent reports that Dialogue partners feel frustrated by a lack of opportunity to talk to Forum Leaders. Most Leaders have left the Leaders' meeting by the time the Dialogue takes place. In this regard, the collective briefing of Dialogue partners by the Forum Chair, Rt Hon Helen Clark, at the 2003 Auckland Leaders' meeting was a positive development to which all partners gave their wholehearted support. We strongly urge that this continue [Recommendation 20](#).

Other criticisms of the current Dialogue process have focused on the Ministerial panel system by which the Forum presents its views to partners. One description referred to these briefings as “bland, boring and incredibly generalised”. It is widely perceived that panel members are often not particularly keen on their task and, in the heat of the meeting, lack the time to become fully familiar with the issues before them.

We consider that the current panel briefing system should be retained as a useful opportunity for exploring bilateral and other issues. However, it should be enhanced to improve quality and the value that can be obtained from it by both Pacific countries and Dialogue partners.

Currently the two Forum panels conducting the Post Forum Dialogue are made up of representatives of the immediate past, present and future Chairs. We propose instead that panel members be Ministers selected each year from around the Forum region and on the basis of their interest in the Post Forum Dialogue. Each year the Secretary General could be asked to identify possible panel members on the basis of regional consultations, and make recommendations to the Forum Chair. The aim should be to give adequate geographical representation and, more particularly, a committed and informed panel. The sole responsibility of these ministerial panel members would be their Post Forum Dialogue duties and they should be supported by the Secretariat in preparing for this specialist role. The system of two panels of three members is logical and we suggest this be retained [Recommendation 21](#).

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To provide a solid basis of discussion at both the Leaders’ and panel briefings, focused agendas for the Post Forum Dialogue meetings should be prepared through the office of the Secretary General well in advance of the annual Forum meeting. This could be done in parallel with agenda preparations for the Leaders’ gathering. It is important that Dialogue Partners, as well as Forum Governments, be consulted in order that the agendas are relevant to all parties.

#### **Recommendations - The Post Forum Dialogue - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

**20.** Maintain and build on the 2003 precedent of a post-Forum briefing of Dialogue partners by the Chair.

**21.** Revise the panel system to ensure that panelists are able to concentrate exclusively on the Dialogue process. Panel members should be chosen – on the basis of recommendations from the Secretary General to the Chair – from among Forum Ministers.

### **Ministerial meetings**

The frequency of regional Ministerial meetings linked to the Forum has expanded to a point where the capacity of the Secretariat to service them has been placed under serious strain. The quality of Secretariat papers and their timeliness has suffered as a result. We consider, however, that Ministerial meetings are essential to good regional cooperation and we see no good case for reducing their number except in terms of lifting pressure from the Secretariat. We would argue that the appropriate means of managing Secretariat stress is to reorganise and provide greater capacity to the Secretariat.

At present, Forum Ministerial meetings have little formal decision-making authority. Ministerial reports are presented to Leaders at the Plenary in the form of reports requiring formal approval. In our view this is an unnecessarily limiting requirement that fails to make full use of Ministers’ abilities and experience, and adds to the considerable demands already placed on Leaders.

We consider that Ministers – working in close consultation with the Secretary General – should have the delegated authority to make final decisions on issues within their area of responsibility [Recommendation 22](#). This would mean that Ministerial reports to the Plenary would be, in the normal scheme of things, for the information of Leaders rather than for their approval. It is important that Ministers retain the ability to ask for a determination by Leaders if they feel this is necessary.

**Recommendations - Ministerial meetings - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

22. Mandate Forum Ministerial meetings with decision-making power on all issues except those where Ministers determine that a decision by Leaders is required. Leaders would of course retain the right to reconsider issues.

**The Forum Officials' Committee (FOC)**

Two FOC meetings are held each year: one a policy meeting in the Forum host country a few days before the Forum Leaders' meeting and the other – a budget-setting meeting – at the Forum Secretariat in Suva in November.

There is some concern among Leaders and Ministers that officials are playing too great a role in deciding Forum outcomes. In particular, the pre-Forum FOC meeting is seen as having the potential to “railroad” the Forum Leaders' agenda. This is largely the result of the pre-Forum FOC meeting being held too close to the Leaders' meeting, leaving insufficient time for Leaders to assimilate the documentation surrounding the many complex issues on the Forum agenda.

In our view the pre-Forum FOC meeting should be held earlier than it is at present, perhaps three weeks before the Leaders' meeting [Recommendation 23](#). This would mean separate trips by those officials who attend both the FOC and the Leaders' meeting. We acknowledge that this could be a burden on the funds of small states and an inconvenience for those having to travel long distances, but the likely benefits from Leaders having more time to consider better-produced paperwork would be considerable. The Leaders' meeting would also have a much smaller footprint, with fewer officials needing to return for it than currently stay on from the FOC.

One option would be to hold the pre-Forum FOC meeting at the Forum headquarters in Suva rather than in the Forum host country. However, we accept that many members place high value on hosting the officials' pre-Forum gathering. A compromise that may be acceptable is for the pre-Forum FOC meeting to be held in the Forum host country in cases where this is urged by the incoming chair. Otherwise, the meeting should be held at the Forum headquarters in Suva [Recommendation 24](#).

There would be advantages in holding the budget-setting FOC at an earlier date following the Forum Leaders' meeting. This would allow officials to move quickly to allocate funding according to priorities set by Leaders [Recommendation 25](#).

**Recommendations - The Forum Officials' Committee (FOC). We recommend that Forum leaders:**

23. Set a date for the main FOC meeting that is about three weeks before the Leaders' gathering rather than just a few days before as at present.

24. Keep in mind the option of holding the main FOC meeting in Suva, unless the incoming Chair urges that it be held in the Forum host country.

25. Bring forward the budget-setting FOC meeting so that resources can be better aligned with tasks set by Leaders.

## **The Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)**

The CROP is the umbrella body linking nine Pacific regional organisations with the Forum. It is chaired by the Forum Secretary General.

We consider it a strength of the region that it includes a wide range of regional organisations with different roles and structures. CROP agencies reflect the diversity and rich history of the Pacific. We see no practical value in replacing these agencies with one “super organisation,” as some have suggested.

However, much needs to be done to enhance the formal relationships between the Forum Secretariat and the different CROP agencies to ensure that they can play their respective roles without duplication or omission, and with a sense of common purpose.

An obvious starting point for overcoming misperceptions about roles and responsibilities is to clarify the fundamental relationships involved. It may be that this could be achieved in part by redrafting the current very brief CROP charter and we ask that the Secretary General consider this possibility [Recommendation 26](#).

We recognise that the CROP agencies have different membership, different mandates and differing governance structures. This poses particular challenges for agency co-ordination, but the greater regional coverage provided across all the agencies provides opportunities for linking the region more fully.

It needs to be clearly spelled out that neither the Secretary General nor the Secretariat is in a position to instruct CROP member agencies. They are partners working together in the interests of Pacific regional development and the Secretary General has the vital role of coordinating action to prevent duplications, overlaps and omissions.

Arguments have been raised for rotational chairing of the CROP, but in our view the Secretary General has the most direct connection with Forum Leaders and should continue to do the job.

### **Recommendation - The Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

26. Task the Secretary General, in consultation with CROP heads, with ascertaining whether a redrafting of the CROP Charter would help to define more clearly the relationships between CROP agencies, the Forum Secretariat and the Secretary General. The aim of any change would be to ensure that the most effective use is made of the scarce resources of the region.

## **The Forum Secretariat**

Most Forum members place a high value on the Forum Secretariat. They see it as a highly professional body with many capable staff who are personally dedicated to the development of the Pacific region.

Nevertheless there are concerns that the Secretariat is simply too stretched to adequately manage its expanding responsibilities and workload. The Secretariat has been asked to service a vast number of Ministerial and other meetings. It has been drawn into a range of project

implementation and technical assistance functions that are not part of its core roles of policy advice, coordination and assistance with implementing Leaders' decisions. There have been criticisms that it is struggling to produce concise, high-quality policy papers on time.

The Forum also has a vital role in coordinating members' efforts to improve aid effectiveness by taking a lead on efforts to harmonise donor funding.

A careful refocusing of priorities onto core roles, within the key areas of Forum interest outlined earlier, would assist the Secretariat to manage its workload. Nevertheless, acceptance by Leaders of the proposed Pacific Plan would undoubtedly involve greater demands on Secretariat resources. As proposed in [Recommendation 14](#), Leaders may like to consider the question of increased funding for the Secretariat, particularly given the likely resource implications of the Pacific Plan. We believe that particular attention should be given to the growing governance support role of the Secretariat. This includes work such as support for the administrative capacities of small states, assistance with meeting treaty commitments and on trade issues, and specialist policy advice generally.

We recommend that a second Deputy Secretary be appointed soon to provide a significant extra resource in helping to manage the growing Secretariat workload. The existence of another senior manager would also help to free up the Secretary General for high-level regional interaction and diplomacy [Recommendation 27](#).

The management of changing demands may require formal restatement of the Forum's role. The existing Agreement establishing the Forum Secretariat, which has been signed but not ratified by all Forum members, is out of date and does not recognise the current nature of Secretariat work. It should be revised, with due attention given to the necessary balance between membership expectation and capacity. We ask Leaders to charge a working group of members, supported by legal advice, with drafting a new Agreement to be presented for the consideration of Leaders at the 2005 Forum [Recommendation 28](#).

This high-level work could be supported by the production of a refreshed corporate plan, identifying and drawing on international best practice. Such a plan could include investigation of the current budget, performance management and corporate planning systems within the Secretariat, and the introduction of improvements where necessary [Recommendation 29](#).

The vital role of the Secretariat with regard to support for Small Island States must be confirmed. These vulnerable members often have insufficient resources of their own with which to manage the international demands required by treaties, conventions, agreements and bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Furthermore, they frequently have difficulty formulating, digesting and implementing Forum policy in the timeframes required. The Secretariat should "mainstream" into all its work the interests and needs of Small Island States so that they are not marginalised in the regional decision-making process [Recommendation 30](#).

In our view it is essential that the Secretariat does not duplicate or compete with the functions of other regional organisations. In particular it should not overlap the aid delivery and general technical support functions of the SPC and the other CROP agencies. In this respect the role of the Secretariat and the Secretary General should be to facilitate coordination and harmonisation between the range of agencies and partners involved in regional development.

We reiterate the recommendations made earlier in this Review regarding the need for assessments of [Pacific information technology](#) and [Forum communications capabilities](#). The Secretariat should have the communications capabilities – both technical and strategic – to provide timely information to all members and project key Forum messages to the wider world, including the international news media.

In terms of staffing, it is important that the Secretariat attract – and be seen to attract – the “best and brightest” from throughout the Pacific. While recruitment must always be on the basis of ability, the regional nature of the Forum makes it highly desirable that Secretariat staff collectively reflect the diversity of membership.

It is equally important that those recruited by the Secretariat give their skills to the region for a limited time only before returning to serve their home countries. The “cult of the regional career official” is to be discouraged. In our view, two three-year terms of service for executive/professional staff should be a maximum, irrespective of the jobs an individual may hold within the Secretariat during that time [Recommendation 31](#). This would require a consequential amendment to staff regulations. It may be necessary to offer the Secretary General a transition period in which to apply this provision to current staff. Similar terms might be considered for other CROP agencies.

### **Recommendations - The Forum Secretariat - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

**27.** Authorise the early appointment of a second Deputy Secretary General to improve the capacity of the Secretariat and enable the Secretary General to take up a more proactive regional role in support of the Chair.

**28.** Appoint a working group of Forum members to draft a new Agreement that updates and clearly sets down the role, functions and responsibilities of the Secretariat. In particular, the document should emphasise that the primary roles of the Secretariat are policy advice, coordination and assistance in implementing Leaders’ decisions, rather than the project implementation and technical assistance functions that it has acquired over the years.

**29.** Task the Secretary General with developing a corporate plan that identifies the resources and structure necessary to carry out the functions of the Secretariat, as well as ensuring that the Secretariat has effective budget, performance management and corporate planning systems.

**30.** Task the Secretary General with ensuring that the considerable needs of Small Island members are mainstreamed into all levels of Secretariat work.

**31.** Enforce the provision that Secretariat executive/professional staff be hired for no more than two three-year terms of employment at the Secretariat, so that people with skills developed at the Secretariat can use these skills in the service of their home countries. It may be necessary to offer the Secretary General a transition period in which to apply this provision to current staff.

### **The Secretary General**

The regional role of the Forum Secretary General is substantial and the incumbent is a key determinant of the success or failure of both the Secretariat and the wider Forum process.

In our consultations for this Review we encountered a general belief that the role of the Secretary General should be less constrained. A proactive stance by the Secretary General would be particularly valuable at times of crisis in harnessing regional resolve and galvanising a prompt Forum response [Recommendation 32](#). This report has already suggested that the skills of the Secretary General could also be used to negotiate more focused and briefer agendas for the annual Leaders’ meetings. In carrying out these tasks, the Secretary General would always need to act in close coordination with the Forum Chair and within limits set by Leaders.

If the Secretary General is to take a more wide-ranging role, the capacity of the Secretariat will need to be increased to cover any management shortfall and new workload. As already

proposed, the appointment of a second Deputy Secretary General would help in this regard. The Secretary General needs to have full personal confidence in Secretariat senior staff, so should play a central role in any appointment.

It may also be necessary to increase the level of administrative support in the Secretary General's own office, though not in the sense of creating a "super office" within the Secretariat.

In our view, it is very important that the Secretary General be able to assure Leaders that the management and audit processes of the Secretariat are robust and will stand up to close scrutiny.

### **Recommendation - The Secretary General - We recommend that Forum Leaders:**

**32.** Encourage the Secretary General to take a proactive role in setting Forum agendas and coordinating responses by members to regional events, particularly crises. Such action would need to be taken in close consultation with the Chair and within limits set by Leaders.

## **Conclusion**

The Pacific Islands Forum has a proud tradition as the region's pre-eminent political organisation. It is a cohesive regional force and an effective means of projecting the region's concerns to the wider world.

However there are clear signs that the Forum needs re-interpreting and updating to meeting changing needs, and a growing array of global and regional challenges. In our view Forum meetings and the Secretariat have become overloaded with a wide range of work that, in some cases, limits success and distracts attention from key responsibilities.

The Forum must ensure that it engages with Pacific people on a more comprehensive basis than at present and is truly relevant to their lives. And, in our view, it ought to more clearly define and focus on its core roles.

We have approached this Review at two levels: the strategic and the practical. The latter must follow the former and we have structured the report accordingly. We have started by offering a high level Vision to inspire action and thought. We have then proposed a Pacific Plan as an overarching strategy for the region, as well as suggestions about key areas of Forum focus and activity. Finally we have put forward what we hope are straightforward, "do-able" recommendations for the enhancement of Forum processes and the Secretariat.

Although we have talked to a great many people, we are very conscious that the subject of this Review, like the region itself, is both large and complex. It defies easy assessment. In forming our conclusions we have attempted to walk a line between being, on the one hand, far-sighted and dynamic, and on the other, reasonable, realistic and practical.

We are very aware that we have but scratched the surface of the task of readying the Pacific Islands Forum for the 21st Century and we urge Leaders to use this Review as a springboard to further thought and study.

We offer this Review to Forum Leaders with great respect for the institution we have been considering and trust that our recommendations will be received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered.

## **Appendices**

## 1. Review personnel

### (a) Eminent Persons' Group members

- **Chair: Sir Julius Chan** (Papua New Guinea). Sir Julius is a former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.
- **Bob Cotton** (Australia). Until mid-2003 Mr Cotton was Australia's High Commissioner to New Zealand. He has recently acted as a special envoy to Papua New Guinea.
- **Dr Langi Kavaliku** (Tonga). Dr Kavaliku is pro-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific and a former Deputy Prime Minister of Tonga.
- **Teburoro Tito** (Kiribati). Mr Tito is a former President of Kiribati and former Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.
- **Maiava Iulai Toma** (Samoa). Mr Toma is Samoa's current Ombudsman and was previously Samoa's Secretary to Government and Ambassador to the United Nations. He led the Forum Observer Group to the last general election in Solomon Islands.

### (b) Reflection Group members

- **Chair: Prime Minister Rt Hon Helen Clark.**
- Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, **Hon Phil Goff.**
- **Facilitator: Michael Powles:** Former New Zealand diplomat.
- **Emele Duituturaga:** CEO, Ministry for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation, Fiji.
- **Rae Julian** Executive Director, New Zealand Council for International Development.
- **Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, MP:** Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Development Assistance and Trade), New Zealand Parliament.
- **Richard Mann:** Manager, Planning Unit, Secretariat of the Pacific Community.
- **Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa:** Minister of Education, Samoa.
- **Resio Moses:** Senator, Federated States of Micronesia.
- **Dr S K Rao:** Former Director of Strategic Planning, Commonwealth Secretariat.
- **Dr Jimmie Rodgers.** Senior Deputy Director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.
- **Greg Urwin.** Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General.

### (c) Assistants to the EPG

- **H E John Goodman:** New Zealand High Commissioner, Kiribati. Assistant to Mr Cotton.
- **Richard Kay:** New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (on secondment to NZ Ministry of Defence). Assistant to Sir Julius Chan.
- **Jeremy Milne:** New Zealand Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Assistant to Maiava Toma.
- **John Mills:** New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Assistant to Mr Tito.
- **Don Stewart:** New Zealand Department of Conservation. Assistant to Dr Kavaliku.

### (d) Support for the EPG

- Project director: **Rene Wilson**, Director, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Project coordinator: **Paul Willis**, Deputy Director, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Review policy and briefing: **Jocelyn Woodley**, Senior Policy Officer, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Policy and logistics: **Nicola Ngawati**, Policy Officer, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

- Logistics and budget: **Raewyn Watson**, Administrative Officer, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Travel programmes: **Shirley Munro-Holmes**, Administrative Officer, Pacific Division, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Writer: **Jonathan Schwass**
- Other support provided by New Zealand diplomatic missions.

## 2. People and organisations consulted for this Review

In preparing this Review, the Eminent Persons' Group consulted a large number of people throughout the Pacific. They included Leaders, Ministers, Dialogue partners, heads of mission, officials, international agency and NGO representatives, academics and other members of civil society.

Details are available from the [Pacific Division](#) of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

## 3. 2003 EPG Review Terms of Reference

### Background

At the 34th Pacific Islands Forum in Auckland in August 2003, Leaders agreed to undertake a review of the Forum and its Secretariat. The Forum Communiqué provides guidance on the scope and process for conducting the Review.

#### 1. Outcome

A refreshed mandate and vision for the Pacific Islands Forum and an improved capacity within the Forum that allows it to provide leadership to the region on regional cooperation and integration, and that closely reflects the aspirations and needs of the Forum membership.

#### 2. Objectives

- 2.1 To make recommendations on the mandate for the Forum in addressing key regional issues and international issues as they impact on the region.
- 2.2 To make recommendations on mechanisms and processes required to carry out the mandate outlined above.
- 2.3 To assess the effectiveness of the Forum Secretariat, and suggest institutional improvements and ways to improve alignment and consistency with the proposed mandate.

#### 3. Tasks

- 3.1 Review and draw on, as appropriate, the 1995 Report on the Review of the Forum Secretariat.
- 3.2 Analyse and highlight the key regional and international issues currently facing the Forum and likely to face Forum members over the next 5-10 years.
- 3.3 Consider and advise on how the Forum can better assist in addressing priority challenges, including through advancing regional cooperation and integration.
- 3.4 Consider and advise on how the Secretary General and the Secretariat can better assist in implementing the proposed mandate and vision of the Forum. In this regard:
  - a) Assess the mandate of the Secretary General including options for broadening and making more explicit the role;
  - b) Consider how the Secretariat's various roles, structures, processes and human and financial resources and options might be shaped and developed to serve better the proposed mandate;
  - c) Analyse the strengths and the weaknesses of the Secretariat in supporting and communicating with the Leaders in the region;
  - d) Review the current roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat against other agencies and make recommendations on how they can be made more effective and enhanced in support of the proposed Forum mandate. In this regard, assess the Charter of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific and invite the Council to contribute to the Review; and
  - e) Review the current key regional meetings architecture including linkages to priorities identified by Leaders and make recommendations on the role of these meetings and how

they are managed. In this regard, analyse the role of the Secretariat in providing support for the Leaders and Ministerial meetings.

3.5 Assess and make recommendations on how the Forum and the Secretariat can enhance their interaction with civil society in support of the proposed Forum mandate.

3.6 In reviewing the Secretariat, the review team should recognise the executive responsibility of the incoming Secretary General to examine the financial and structural implications of recommendations made by the EPG and endorsed by Leaders, and to present recommendations on the detailed structure and operations of the Forum Secretariat at the 2004 Forum in Niue.

#### **4. The Eminent Persons Group, resources and conduct of the Review**

Leaders agreed that the Review would be undertaken by an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) from the region, to be appointed following consultation by the Chair with Leaders. Leaders also agreed that the EPG would be supported by specialist advice.

Each EPG member will visit a group of Forum countries, and each will have an assistant provided by the Chair. A Reflection Group, consisting of the Chair, the current Secretary General, the Secretary General designate and other individuals with useful expertise, would expand the pool of ideas and would provide specialist advice to the Eminent Persons Group in the preparation of the final report. The Chair would also provide administrative and travel services. The costs of the Review would be met by NZAID and AusAID.

#### **5. Timeframe and Outputs**

The Draft Terms of Reference and selection of the EPG will take place in October 2003. The Review will be conducted in November 2003. Opportunity will be given to the EPG to discuss their findings with the reflection group in early December.

A draft report, including recommendations and draft mandate and vision statement, will be circulated to Leaders for comment and feedback in January 2004.

A final report will be presented to Leaders, following the completion of the work by the EPG, for consideration and action.

On approval of the new Forum mandate and vision and related recommendations from the EPG, the incoming Secretary General will develop a proposal on how best the Secretariat can implement Leaders' directions, including skills requirements and organisational structure, for submission to the 2004 Forum. This could, in part, be in the form of a new draft Corporate Plan developed by the Secretary General.

#### **6. Scope of Work**

**The Review will, as appropriate, consult with:**

- and visit Forum leaders and their designated representatives;
- the Forum Secretary General and Forum Secretariat staff;
- the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies;
- academic and research institutions;
- experienced and inspirational individuals from around the region;
- civil society representatives of the region;
- and consider the views of other major actors in the region, including in-region representatives of Forum Dialogue partners.

**Documents to be drawn on will include:**

- the current 1995 Vision Statement and Review of the Forum
- "Towards a more Relevant and Focused Forum Meeting: A discussion paper" from the 1999 Palau Forum
- the 2000 Agreement establishing the Forum Secretariat

- proposals made by member states including those relating to pooling of regional resources as highlighted in the 34th Pacific Islands Forum communiqué.

The Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum October 2003