

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS for the 2nd SCW

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to begin by thanking you for your attendance and welcome you to the Second Meeting of the SOPAC Committee of the Whole. I am aware that our meeting is a little later than anticipated, nonetheless the fact that you are all here in spite of the delay augurs well for the achievement of the task mandated to us by the SOPAC Council and our Pacific Leaders for it shows commitment to the welfare of our Pacific States and people. I thank you for your taking ownership of the process.

It is also my privilege to welcome representatives from the United States of America and France as well as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat [PIFS] the Director General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Director of the Secretariat Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Honourable Members will recall that with your approval the Director of SOPAC invited these representatives to attend our Committee deliberations as what I would call "participant observers".

Honourable Representatives, the Committee agreed in its first meeting to invite you because it had no doubt that your attendance is critical to our reaching a rational and reasonable way forward in relation to the Forum Communiqué and the SOPAC Council in Tonga last year. While SOPAC Council rules does not allow you to vote, it is the expression of your views that are critical to our task and I hope you will feel free to be a constructive part of the process. Please accept our sincere appreciation for your agreeing to join us in our deliberation.

Colleagues, I would now like to clarify a few issues so that you would firstly understand what has happened in recent days and secondly in order to make me feel a bit more comfortable sitting in this chair.

In the true Pacific Way the Chair a few days ago and because he could not attend asked that the Vice Chair, our Minister from Tuvalu, be requested to Chair this meeting. The Vice Chair, again in the Pacific Way, because he could not attend, asked me as the Alternate to Chair this meeting. Unfortunately for you, again in the true Pacific Way, I had no choice but to agree.

All this, of course, for some odd reason follows most logically procedures laid down under Articles 6.8 and 6.9 of the SOPAC Agreement. It seems that those who drafted and approved the SOPAC Agreement were also fully *au fait* with the Pacific Way. And you are therefore – for better or for worse - asked to accept the Pacific Way and help me do my job to the satisfaction of all parties.

As obvious from the above annotated story, I had no chance to prepare my opening remarks but fortunately the Chair had prepared a paper as his opening remarks which I have been asked by him to distribute and hopefully, with your approval, for it to be an integral part of the records of this meeting. I will do more than this, as I endorse the sentiments expressed, I will use them for the remainder of my opening remarks.

OPENING REMARKS PREPARED BY THE CHAIR

Honourable Members, as you will recall, the outcome of our first meeting was to agree on our Terms of Reference as directed by the SOPAC Governing Council. In line with the Terms of Reference [TOR] and the spirit of our mandate from Council, we also agreed for the Director of SOPAC to:

- begin the trilateral consultation with the CEOs of SPC and SPREP;
- elaborate the rationalisation at a glance exercise;
- to prepare a scoping of the cost areas and indicative costs for Council; progress legal and contractual assessments of the implications to SOPAC of rationalisation and absorption.

I am informed that these tasks were carried out and although are all still in a “state of progress” I believe agreed minutes and reports on some of these activities are with you. Others are still underway and the Director of SOPAC will also make presentations on these and other matters. I am sure that the representatives of PIFS, Director General of SPC and Director of SPREP may also want to make presentations on relevant matters as we move through the agenda.

On behalf of the SCW, I would like to thank them for their willingness to participate in moving the process forward.

Before declaring this second meeting of the SOPAC Committee of the Whole open, I would like to once again remind Honourable Members that our task, through due process, is to ensure achieving institutional arrangements of excellence in quality and relevancy in an environment of limited resources, increasing demands and rising costs; in cultures of uncertainty and systems of equality but needs assurance to ensure equity between states, and between communities.

To achieve this, and in order to move forward based on what is in front of us today, in relation to the decisions by our Leaders and the SOPAC Council, I believe that we need to consider the need for firm business plans from SPC and SPREP in order for us to begin to define where we are going and begin the journey forward. Absorption of any of the functions of SOPAC by either SPC or SPREP, as indicated by our Leaders implies a rational and reasonable approach, indeed the right approach means a firm, realistic and a committed business plan. Our ownership of SOPAC demands that we be accountable to our present donor and support partners, and to our staff. The people whom we serve.

SOPAC Council as “Shareholders” must be concerned that whatever we as a Committee of Council agree to and recommend for Council’s consideration and approval will not only meet present needs and performance levels but that it will allow for and demonstrate:

- improved performance and delivery of services;
- improved timelines;
- improved relevancy to the needs of PICs and especially the SIS;
- that the present programme will be maintained and or improved and expanded when considered necessary;
- that these activities will be met with reasonable cost effectiveness;
- and that performances and services will be of the highest quality and relevancy possible.

In my humble opinion the right way is not a matter of “pick and choose” or a simple exercise of division of the spoils, nor a simple formula for achieving a single technical

regional institution, or mathematically reducing the number of regional institutions. The mandate and programmes of SOPAC are owned by ourselves, the Member Countries, and have been developed and pursued over a long period of time based on the needs of the island member states.

A multidisciplinary approach to provide integrated solutions for its Members has become the SOPAC conceptual framework in a Pacific facing rapid globalisation and where issues of improved welfare of people are both multifaceted and multidimensional. The need is for the enhancement of the capabilities of people to live free and worthwhile livelihoods – the Leaders Vision in 2004 – and that is through integrated solutions based on a multidisciplinary approach. For most Pacific Island Countries real resources for the future is human and ocean resource based. With climate change and other changing environments, integrated solutions and policies and strategies will increasingly become imperatives.

The rationalisation and absorption exercise to define the road map must I believe take this into account. As stated in the SOPAC Council 2007 the need is not for the appropriate and or reasonable choices but for the right choice for now and the near future. With time these right choices will also need review, from time to time.

For all the above reasons and more I consider the approach suggested above as the most appropriate pathway towards achieving the letter and the spirit of the decisions by the SOPAC Council and by our Leaders. Good governance, one of the four pillars endorsed by our Leaders demands that we are transparent and accountable, and it is our task to ensure that this transparency and accountability of our Council and of our Leaders is not only perceived to be, but is a fact *sui generis* in its institutional excellence, quality and relevancy of its senses and output.

Honourable Members, it was pleasing for me – and I am sure for all of you – to note the high degree of positive ambience through dialogue in pursuit of excellence towards achieving our goal during our first meeting.

I have made my comments this morning in the belief that the spirit of good faith will continue allowing us to progress towards a road map chartered on the right choice based on a Bayesian rather than Poppers philosophy. And we know that in one way or another the present but especially the future of every single Pacific soul will be affected by our decision. I guess I am old fashioned but I believe we work for and serve the people of our Member Countries within our global society.

It is only in this sense will this Council, the Leaders, and the people of the Pacific they represent, feel genuine ownership of the regional institutional arrangements we are here to determine.

Herein ends the comments of the SOPAC Chair

In closing I would like to make the following personal observation, that it is satisfying and pleasing to note that the CEOs and their Senior Programme Managers of the three biggest intergovernmental organisations have been able to sit down together and have meaningful dialogues. And even though the reason is for rationalisation and absorption the simple fact that they were able to meet for two days to pursue initial discussions on how best to serve the people of the Pacific is a landmark.

Moreover from what I have been informed these were conducted in an environment of commitment, cooperation and the need for coordination. At least we now know it can be done.

Perhaps if there were less silos-style in approach there would not have been any reason for us to meet, and CROP would have been a success – as recommended in 2004 by the Eminent Persons Group that reviewed the Forum.

Thank you colleagues.

**High Commissioner for Tuvalu
Alternate Vice Chair**