Welcome by H.E Baron Divavesi Waqa, President of Nauru

Eknorowim om! The people of Nauru welcome all to the 49th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting.

Some know Nauru as the smallest island nation in the world, but we have never felt this way because we are a large ocean state and a member of a much bigger family, the Pacific Islands Forum. Together, we are one ‘blue continent’ covering more than 35 million square kilometres of oceanspace.

The theme for this year’s meeting is Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will. We believe it captures the spirit and aspiration of the Pacific Islands Forum’s Agenda.

The Agenda is underpinned by our desire to manage our own development in our own unique Pacific way.

Today, we face many challenges including the effects of climate change and disaster, rising inequality, depletion of natural resources, regional and global conflict, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, changing multilateral relations, and an increasingly complex and dangerous world.

There has never been a greater need for our ocean of islands to strengthen their resolve for the benefit of our people and our environment. The future of the Pacific must be determined by its people. I have no doubt that this Blue Pacific region contains enough strength and resolve in its people, our oceans, our resources, and our economies. The Agenda is underpinned by our desire to manage our own development in our own unique Pacific way.

A Strong Pacific is a Resilient Pacific

A strong Blue Pacific will be one that invests in building resilience. A single extreme event can undo decades of development progress, in the last five years some of the strongest tropical cyclones recorded in history have impacted our region. These have caused significant destruction, loss of life, and loss of livelihoods. Science predicts that we will see both rapid and slow onset hazards occurring more often into the future. We must therefore, reduce the risk of future damage and loss by building more resilient communities to reduce the effects of climate change and risks related to natural hazards.

Pacific Leaders have continually recognised the existential threat posed by the effects of climate change and disaster risk on our people and environment. As a result, climate change and disaster risk management is a standing agenda item at each meeting of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. The Forum is currently involved in initiatives designed to address some of the most pressing concerns for the region.

Developing Pacific Resilience

In 2016, the Pacific Leaders endorsed the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific. The Framework is a first for any region in the world. In it, the parties have an integrated approach to addressing climate change, disaster risk management, and low carbon development as key considerations for building resilient development. It recognises that collective action and regional approaches provide opportunities for Forum Members to benefit from reducing duplication, economies of scale, as well as shared capacity, information and experiences.

To bring the Framework to life, Forum Leaders established a Resilience Partnership. The main mechanism is a 15-member Taskforce made up of representatives from member governments, development partners, private sector and civil society. It met for the first time in May this year. A key outcome was to identify criteria for aligning the principles of the Framework with resilience initiatives already underway in the region.

Funding our work for a more resilient region is an ongoing issue. While research has shown that investment in preparedness can save significant funds in post-disaster relief and recovery. The Forum’s Economic Ministers and Foreign Ministers approved the proposal this year and it will be looked at by Forum Leaders during the Forum.

International Advocacy

There is also significant work being done internationally to ensure that the region’s priorities for global action to support the Paris Agreement on addressing climate change are heard. The upcoming 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) provides a strategic opportunity for a unified and amplified ‘Pacific Voice’ calling for ambitious action to achieve the measures called for in the Paris Agreement.

Why tuna fisheries are vital to our Blue Continent

The fish that thrive in our waters have a large part to play in building a strong Pacific. Shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and maintaining regional solidarity as one “Blue Pacific” will ensure this resource continues to make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of our people.

For decades, we have been successful in managing our fisheries and have surpassed other regions of the world in terms of sustainable practice. Regional cooperation on management of our tuna resources by Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) members, supported by fisheries science from the Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC), has ensured that our collective efforts in managing the four main tuna species — skipjack, bigeye, albacore, yellowfin — are paying off, with all currently

Welcome by Meg Taylor DBE, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Greetings from your Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Once again, our Pacific Leaders gather to discuss how we can continue to build a strong region together.

We do this guided by our Blue Pacific narrative which Samoa’s Prime Minister, Mr Hon Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi expressed so well at the recent Foreign Ministers meeting when he said, “I see the Blue Pacific as a powerful narrative to take us, drawing on our shared ocean identity, ocean geography, and ocean resources. It serves to empower us – reminding us of the value and potential of our region, encouraging us to think and act from a position of strength.”

Climate change represents the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and health of every one of our people. We are one of the nation states to be impacted the most by the effects of climate change and disaster, rising inequality, poverty, unemployment, and loss of livelihoods.

The Blue Pacific puts Pacific people at the centre of the region’s development aspirations. The Blue Pacific speaks to the collective potential of the region’s shared stewardship of more than 35 million square kilometres of Pacific Ocean. It encourages Forum Members to think and act from a position of strength for the benefit of all Pacific people, and their natural environment.

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The Facility will aim to build resilience for Forum Members, through uptake and implementation of disaster management tools and the impacts of climate change, to minimise future loss of lives, displacement of people, and extensive economic losses.

Most existing financial support for countries tends to focus on post-disaster relief and recovery. This Facility will seek to build resilience of governments, private sector and communities to mitigate immediate risks from climate change and disasters and reduce the recovery period. Global research has shown that investment in preparedness can save significant funds in post-disaster relief and recovery. The Forum’s Economic Ministers and Foreign Ministers approved the proposal this year and it will be looked at by Forum Leaders during the Forum.

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Realising the true potential of our fisheries

Over the last decade, Pacific countries have seen results from initiatives to increase the sustainable economic returns from our tuna fisheries. The last 3 years have seen growth in terms of volume and value of tuna caught in the region. We are on track to reach the targeted 9000 new jobs by 2020. Our export value has risen from USD 532 million in 2015 to USD 775 million in 2016 with the target set for USD 800 million by 2020.

There is no doubt that significant potential still remains within our tuna fisheries. It is important to recognise that the sustainability of our tuna stocks depends upon the success of work on reducing overall ocean management and conservation, climate change, regional security and securing our maritime boundaries.

To maintain momentum and realise the true potential of our fisheries will require a whole of region approach. This may be difficult at times but we must continue to work collectively, support one another and keep our focus on the greater good.

Regional security improvements, improved health and livelihoods for Pacific people must continue to be our priority.

Securing the Blue Pacific

Effective regional security underpins the vision outlined in the theme for this year’s Pacific Islands Forum: Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will. The security of our people and their environment is crucial for sustainable growth and development, and the way we organise ourselves to protect and nurture our Blue Continent must be something we decide for ourselves.

“Securing the wellbeing and potential of the Blue Pacific is at the centre of the Forum Agenda”, said Forum Chair and Prime Minister of Samoa, the Hon. Tuilaepa Malielegaoi at the opening of the Forum Leaders Meeting in Samoa last December.

“Protecting The Blue Pacific will require a collective security architecture that recognises, promotes and provides security in the broadest sense of the term. There is commitment to working together to ensure the security of our shared ocean geography, resources and ecosystems therein, from unsustainable exploitation and illegal activities, including illegal fishing and transnational crime.

This is a time of profound change; and this change is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Geo-strategic competition between major world powers has once again made our region a place of renewed interest and strategic importance. Climate change increasingly affects our people in a variety of ways including increased severe weather events, scarcity of food and water, and displaced communities. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are burgeoning and with them issues relating to cyber security and cyber enabled crime.

Within this context, at the Forum Leaders meeting in Apia last year, Leaders directed the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to engage in consultations to refresh our existing security arrangements to the meetings in Misima in 2017, security challenges, members of the Pacific Islands Forum have a long history of working together on security arrangements and initiatives. The Regional Security Declaration is an opportunity to build on the progress made and to ensure that the security of our people remains a focus of the Forum’s work.

Maritime Boundaries

A key strategic priority for the region outlined in the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape is to maintain and secure our maritime boundaries. Our region is blessed with many riches: our people, our cultures, our oceans, our lands, and our resources.

The Regional Security Declaration is an opportunity to build on the existing maritime boundaries that the Forum has put in place. While the Biketawa Plus work is focussed on contemporary and future security challenges, members of the Pacific Islands Forum have a long history of working together on security arrangements and initiatives.

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) provides a strong example. Informed by the values of our own Pacific Way, and transcends borders. For these reasons, it is vital that we continue to work collaboratively and collectively to conserve and manage this most valuable of our resources.

Managing and Conservning Our Blue Pacific Oceanscape

Ninety-eight per cent of the area occupied by Pacific Island countries and territories is ocean. The Pacific Islands Forum has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to managing this vital resource. In fact, the United Nations Law of the Sea was a point of discussion during the historic first meeting of the Forum in 1971. Through the Forum, the Pacific region has a collaborative and integrated management system in place. The Pacific Islands Forum also declared “sustainable development, management and conservation of marine and coastal resources in the Pacific is at the centre of United Nations Law of the Sea”. The Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape catalyses regional action and engagement for conserving our ocean and island ecosystems. It strengthens the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy, particularly through stronger provisions in the areas of coordination, resourcing and implementation. It also aspires to protect, manage and sustain the cultural and natural integrity of the ocean for present and future generations of the broader global community. At its heart is a desire to build pride, leadership, learning and cooperation across the ocean environment.

Leadership in Ocean Management

Maritime boundaries provide just one example of the noteworthy and demonstrable achievements within our region that highlight innovation and exemplary leadership in ocean management.

The ocean is critical to the future prosperity and wellbeing of our people. It is our natural environment as well as the primary source of livelihoods, economic opportunities and geopolitical importance. The ocean is dynamic and transmigrates. For these reasons, it is vital that we continue to work collaboratively and collectively to conserve and manage this most valuable of our resources.

Third South Pacific Forum Seas, 1972

Another regional example is the approach adopted by local communities to manage and sustainably use their coastal and marine areas, over which they have traditional or more recently acquired tenure rights or ownership.

This is the mainstay of the work of Locally Managed Marine Area Network and national initiatives, such as those in Samoa and Tonga. The lessons from these experiences serve as valuable templates for the future sustainable use of ocean resources.

Facing Challenges Together

While the Forum’s achievements are many, it is clear that we face a number of challenges which are impeding our ability to fully realise the potential from our oceans.

On 26 August, 2018 the Prime Minister of Samoa, the Hon. Tuilaepa Malielegaoi addressed the 48th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting in Suva, Fiji. In his address, he highlighted a number of key issues facing the region, including the need to work together to address the impacts of climate change, poor security, and the rise of transnational crime.

He stressed the importance of the Forum’s work in addressing these challenges, and encouraged leaders to continue to work together for the benefit of all Pacific Islanders.

He concluded by thanking the leaders for their support and dedication to the work of the Forum, and expressed the hope that the region would continue to make progress in addressing these challenges.

The Prime Minister’s address was followed by the launch of the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape, which sets out the region’s priorities for managing and conserving marine and coastal resources. The Framework is a commitment to sustainable development, management and conservation of marine and coastal resources in the Pacific.

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This Framework is the result of years of work by the Forum and its partners, and it is a testament to the region’s commitment to addressing the challenges facing our oceans.

The Framework aims to achieve a number of key outcomes, including the protection of marine and coastal resources, the promotion of sustainable development, and the strengthening of regional governance.

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