



**47th Pacific Islands Forum
Commonwealth Statement
By Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, Deodat Maharaj
9 September 2016
Pohnpei, FSM**

Your Excellency Peter M Christian, President of the Federated States of Micronesia and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum,

Heads of Governments and Heads of Delegations,

Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum,

Distinguished Participants

Firstly, the Commonwealth would like to congratulate the Government and people of the Federated States of Micronesia for so successfully hosting this 47th meeting of Pacific Islands Forum leaders. The arrangements have been excellent and your hospitality gracious.

We in the Commonwealth are delighted with the theme for this year's Forum, "Small and Far: Challenge for Growth." For the Commonwealth, with 31 out of our 53 members being small states, this theme has a particular resonance and represents the challenge faced by so many of our small states as they seek to transition from the "Survivability of today to the Sustainability of tomorrow".

Though small, and sometimes far, the Pacific has achieved impressive results on a global stage. The Commonwealth recognises and appreciates the important global leadership role played by Pacific leaders in successfully advocating for a Goal on Oceans, now known as Goal 14 in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. We recall the seminal role played in establishing the SAMOA Pathway, and the decisions made at the previous Pacific Islands Forum meeting in neighbouring Palau in August 2014, where the theme was "Oceans - Life and Future". The Commonwealth also recognises the critical role Pacific leaders played in achieving a clear and strong outcome at COP21. It just goes to show the progress that can be made when we all work together.

We wish to highlight a few key areas where the Commonwealth will continue to work with you and our development partners to advance Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the Pacific.

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development

The Commonwealth is committed to supporting its members in the Pacific to implement Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, where no one is left behind. To achieve this ambitious agenda, the special situation of small states has to be recognised and acted on. For us, **reducing vulnerability and building resilience is critical and a prerequisite for small states** achieving sustainable development. The Commonwealth will continue to advocate through our Open Ended Working Group on Small States for the recognition of vulnerability as a criterion for the access of concessional financing for vulnerable small states given the unique challenges they face. We will continue to work with the Pacific to

make this case and commit to working with all partners to achieve this objective. Consistent with our resilience profiling work in the region as we seek to help build resilience, we are undertaking a modelling exercise with partners looking at trends to 2050 and identifying possible policy options.

We are also working with the Government of Malta to establish a **Small States Centre of Excellence**. The Centre will be a focal point for sharing best practices and facilitating targeted capacity-building in areas that specific and vital to the interests of Small States.

The Commonwealth and the Pacific Islands Forum both recognise the linkages between strong democratic processes and institutions and strong economies and growth: the two are mutually reinforcing. This is why the Commonwealth works to support Pacific member countries to **build the capacity of election commissions, human rights commissions, the judiciary and other constitutional bodies** that are critical to any democracy. We are committed and will continue to work with all partners to help build strong and accountable institutions through our Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation.

The Commonwealth sees young people as assets and partners in advancing Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. We believe that young people have a proven capability to lead change, and are a vital and valuable investment for now and the future. Pacific leaders are indeed acutely aware of the need for us to engage young people in realising our shared future including how we address Climate Change.

This week, Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers met in Samoa where once more we as a Commonwealth family emphasised the highest priority that we attach to achieving gender equality. The Commonwealth firmly believes that national development and prosperity cannot be fully achieved unless women and girls are equal partners in driving human development. We look forward to working closely with all partners in address the scourge of domestic violence. We will continue to advocate on this issue so indeed no one is left behind.

Recognising the fast changing global economic landscape, we are supporting our Commonwealth member countries to help achieve potential in a few key areas. In the area of trade, we support the building of national capacities through the placement of long term experts through our **Hubs and Spokes Programme**. Under this programme we work in close collaboration with partners in placing technical experts at the regional level and in the Pacific. We are pleased to note that there is even one such Advisor here in the Federated States of Micronesia in this partnership we have with the EU, ACP and La Francophonie. We have also supported the Pacer Plus negotiations with Commonwealth long-term experts based in Vanuatu. The Commonwealth is committed to continuing this support including looking at how the Pacific can become greater linked to regional and global value chains. We will also work closely with the Pacific to support your efforts in managing public debt through our Commonwealth Debt Management System that is used across the Pacific and via the provision of ongoing advisory support.

[Ocean Governance](#)

On Ocean Governance, the Commonwealth supports member countries to achieve the full potential of these resources, through the provision of an **advisory service with coordinated legal, policy and technical advice on oceans boundaries, oceans**

governance and natural resources. This includes comprehensive reform and modernisation of national policies and laws for extractive industries, and leading work on offshore joint management and deep seabed mining development in the Pacific and throughout the Commonwealth. We will continue to work across the Pacific with partners on settling maritime boundaries and helping with blue economy and ocean governance policies.

Climate Change

On climate change, this is one of the defining global challenges of our time, and an existential threat to Pacific island countries. The Pacific has been at the forefront of combating climate change, and these issues remain at the heart of the Forum's work. The Commonwealth mandated by our Heads of Government is also acting on climate change.

This month, we will establish the **Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub** to help build the capacity of Commonwealth small and other climate vulnerable states to access climate finance. We are pleased that the Government of Australia has provided financial support for this initiative. We will within the next six months be placing advisors on the ground across climate vulnerable states in the Commonwealth paying particular attention to our Pacific member countries.

The Commonwealth would like to reiterate its commitment to working with all partners to help advance and implement Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in the Pacific. In doing so, we aim to support a resilient, innovative and inclusive development agenda where no one is left behind.