

**Remarks With Prime Minister Mark Brown of the Cook Islands Prior to a Meeting With Pacific Islands Forum Leaders**

*September 25, 2023*

*President Biden.* Well, fellow leaders and friends, welcome. Welcome to the White House.

Following our historic summit last year, I was honored to host all of you at the Pacific Islands Forum in the White House today. And I know it's 2 more days of this. You're going to get to see more of our staff and our administration.

And I want to apologize again for not being able to join you in Papua New Guinea this past May; the place holds a special meaning to my family. I want to thank the Prime Minister for his incredible gift: a small piece of a A-20 aircraft that—during World War II, my mother's number-two brother, Ambrose Finnegan—number-three brother, I should say—my uncle, was in the Army Air Corps, and he flew many missions in that A-20 across the Pacific.

And in 1944, during one of those missions, his plane crashed off the coast of Papua New Guinea. And like so many soldiers who served freedom's cause during that time, my uncle's remains were never recovered—never found.

But his sacrifice was always remembered, including when General MacArthur, who sent my family a condolence letter, wrote, and I quote, "He died serving in a crusade from which a better world for all will come." A better world for all will come.

My friends, that's why our nations come together here today. That's why they came together in World War II and where we are today. And that is why we're going—because I'm—our objective is to build a better world. One of the great opportunities for security, prosperity, and dignity for all our people, no matter where they live—that starts by building stronger partnerships with each other.

And that's why the United States has delivered on the promises we made last year to, one, open new Embassies in Tonga and the Solomon Islands, establish a USAID mission in Fiji, and return the Peace Corps to Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu. And that's why we've signed a new economic agreement—and with Micronesia and Puala [Palau; White House correction]. Aiming to do the same for the Marshall Islands as well.

And that's why the United States is formally establishing diplomatic relations with the Cook Islands. And the real reason is, we're both from Baltimore. *[Laughter]* That's a long story, but we're—but all kidding aside, the Cook Islands and Niue.

Additionally, as the White House honors National Asian Americans and Native American Pacific Islanders Serving Institutions Week for the first time, I'm proud to announce that we are going to double the number of academic exchanges up of Pacific Island students, beginning this year. We're going to double it.

All of these steps are going to help build a strong foundation from which we can tackle the challenges that matter most to our people's lives.

And key among them is climate change. I want you to know: I hear you. The people of the United States and around the world hear you. We hear your warnings of a rising sea and what—they pose an existential threat to your nations. We hear your calls for reassurance that you never, never, never will lose your statehood or membership at the U.N. as a result of a climate crisis.

Today the United States is making it clear that this is our position as well. And alongside our Partners in the Blue Pacific, we're increasing our climate assistance, including more than \$20 million for new investments to prepare for climate and natural hazards.

The second point I'd like to make is economic development. Strong growth begins with a strong infrastructure. So today I'm pleased to announce we're working with Congress to invest \$40 billion [million; White House correction] in our Pacific Islands Infrastructure Initiative. We call it the PG—PI—anyway, it doesn't matter what we call it, but that's what it is. [Laughter] I was going to get back to acronyms, and I'm going to—I'm going to—withstand not doing that.

Including investments in digital connectivity through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. We're also working to launch a new microfinance facility in the Pacific to expand access to finances for small business. We realize how difficult that is and how important it is. And we have signed a new 10-year, \$600 million agreement to support the sustainable development of the Pacific Island fisheries, as I pledged to you last year.

Finally—finally—and finally, I want to talk about security. The United States is committed to ensuring an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, prosperous, and secure. We're committed to working with all the nations around this table to achieve that goal.

So, this year, we shall send the first U.S. Coast Guard vessel solely dedicated to collaborate and train with Pacific Island nations. And alongside our Quad partners, we intend to invest more than \$11 million in bringing cutting-edge maritime domain awareness technology to the region. All told, today, in the—in consultation with the Congress, we're launching a—\$200 million in new proposals.

Let me close with this. Like our forebearers during World War II, we know that a great deal of the history of our world will be written across the Pacific over the coming years. And like them, we owe it to the next generation to help write that story together—to do the hard work, the historic work—that General MacArthur said—and I quote him again—for "which a better world for all will come." That's the objective here.

So today let's recommit to that goal, and let's recommit to each other because, with the past as our proof, we're stronger and the world is safer when we stand together.

So thank you very much.

And I think I'm now turning this over to the Cook Islands? Or am I——

*Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken.* That's right.

*President Biden.* ——turning it to you? Mr. President——

*Prime Minister Brown.* Thank you, sir.

*President Biden.* Mr. Prime Minister, the floor is yours.

*Prime Minister Brown.* Thank you.

Thank you very much, President Biden. Honorable leaders, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen: *Kia orana* to you all.

As we, the leaders of the United States and the Pacific Islands Forum, gather today to recommit our resolve to partnerships for prosperity, we are reminded of historical milestones that should inspire us to reach meaningful outcomes today.

The United States is a country that's 247 years old. Our Pacific countries here celebrate 40, 50, and 60 years as independent nations from decolonization. Our own organization, the Pacific

Islands Forum, is 52 years old this year. And, as mentioned, today the Cook Islands and Niue celebrate milestones of formal diplomatic relations with the United States, respectively.

These milestones celebrate eras of change and demonstrate that with unshakable resolve and leadership, remarkable achievements are possible.

In our discussions today, let us be empowered by the needs and aspirations of the people of the Pacific and the United States. We have an opportunity here, as the Pacific Islands Forum and as the United States, to develop our partnerships for prosperity.

Excellencies, last year, the Pacific Island Forum leaders launched the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Our strategy sets out our long-term approach to working together as a region and as countries, communities, and people of the Pacific. It frames our regional cooperation and broader actions around seven key theme—thematic areas, which are designed and developed to support the achievements of our region. Our strategy also outlines how our international partners, including the United States, can partner with us to deliver partnerships for prosperity.

In a few weeks, I will host the 52d Pacific Island Forum leaders meeting, where we will endorse the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan: a plan by the Pacific and for the Pacific that will ensure the security and prosperity of all Pacific people to lead free, healthy, and productive lives; a plan that requires international partnerships to succeed and can serve as a cornerstone of our U.S.-Pacific framework for future cooperation.

We know this partnership is not only attainable, but also rests on three key pillars.

Firstly, the successful implementation of our 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan. At its core, our plan identifies key regional collective actions under each of the seven thematic areas that we believe will propel our development. For the Pacific, access to development and climate finance, which, in the Pacific context—context, is exactly the same thing, is the only way to achieve meaningful change at the grassroots level and at the national level. Let us remember that our people at home must feel connected to the decisions that we make here.

Mr. President, our strategy calls for more engaged and effective partner coordination. I strongly encourage the U.S., as a critical founding dialogue partner, to actively engage at the highest level in the upcoming Forum Dialogue Partners meeting in Rarotonga this year.

That engagement cannot be restricted to annual summits. It must be year-long efforts working to an agreed plan of action and supported by requisite resources to deliver transformative actions on the ground.

Secondly, the significance of global collaboration. Just last week, our nations actively engaged in the discussions at the 78th Session of the U.N. General Assembly. Mr. President, you wisely stated that "no nation can meet the challenges of today alone"—that the world must recognize the need for more diverse leadership and capability, particularly from regions that have not always been included.

Those narratives, Mr. President, were born in regions like ours. I therefore applaud the G-7 and ASEAN Chairs of Japan and Indonesia, respectively, for the opportunity afforded to me as the Pacific Islands Forum Chair to attend and speak at these important forums earlier this year.

My attendance to the G-7 and ASEAN leaders summit is partnerships for prosperity in action. It demonstrates a genuine commitment to not just talk, but to really hear our voices on the challenges we're confronted with—but more importantly, the solutions to those challenges and how and in what way international partners can support our region.

Our gathering today is our joint commitment to elevating our efforts as the Pacific Forum and the United States. It follows our first summit a year ago in this very building and our gathering in Papua New Guinea with Secretary Blinken.

I cannot emphasize enough the centrality of the forum for U.S. forward engagement with the Pacific. And I wish to commend you, Mr. President, for your foresight and the significant elevation of engagements over the last year.

And this brings me to the final pillar of security. This concept takes on various forms in the U.S., but for the Pacific, it represents the ability to provide our people with security: climate security and economic security.

As leaders, this requires international partnerships to deliver financing initiatives to address areas that we have long identified as being important to our countries. And I'm encouraged, Mr. President, with your opening comments in this regard.

This includes building infrastructure that will help build our resilience to climate change impacts, reestablishing transportation and connectivity links to help grow our economies, and forging partnerships that will allow business and investments to flow between our regions.

Mr. President, our development agenda is uniquely Pacific, and partnerships built on mutual understanding and mutual benefit that will deliver a Pacific that we can all be proud of. As we engage with you and your leaders—both in government, in the private sector, and in civil society—we do so with a clear understanding that our voice, our agency, and our values are respected.

Through this lens of inclusivity and respect, we seek to build a genuine partnership with the United States. Unlocking our full potential for development begins today.

Let our deliberation set our compass on the same path as we recommit ourselves to achieving a truly resilient and prosperous Blue Pacific.

With these remarks, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you, my fellow leaders, and offer our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for hosting this second summit of the U.S. and Pacific.

*Kia orana.* Thank you very much. God bless.

*Secretary Blinken.* Thank you very, very much, Prime Minister Brown. And thank you, Mr. President.

We'll now just hold for a moment to give our colleagues from the press a chance to depart. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister James Marape of Papua New Guinea.

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