

Joint Statement—U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Statement on Reaffirming U.S.-Pacific Partnership
September 25, 2023

We—the governments of Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the United States of America—meet on the occasion of the second U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Summit, held at the White House in Washington, D.C. from 25–26 September 2023.

We reaffirm our support for the Declaration on U.S.-Pacific Partnership issued in Washington on September 29, 2022, which outlined our shared vision for a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, where individuals can reach their potential, the environment can thrive, and democracy can flourish.

We commit to working together in genuine partnership, rooted in mutual respect, consistent with the principles of the UN charter, and in the spirit of transparency and accountability.

Political Leadership and Regionalism

1. We recognise and reaffirm the importance of strong and enduring political will and leadership in progressing regional priorities, in respect of Pacific cultures, values and traditions. We commit to partnering to support and nurture generations of leadership grounded in the Pacific Way with a commitment to gender equality and social inclusion.

2. We welcome the United States' renewed commitment to the Pacific Islands region and to strengthening both bilateral and regional cooperation in support of Pacific Islands' development aspirations and to enable a stable, secure, inclusive, and prosperous regional environment. We commit to working together to support the successful delivery and implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy).

3. We acknowledge the unique political relationship between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau, a cornerstone of U.S.-Pacific cooperation, and we underscore the paramount importance of the timely and successful completion of negotiations of, and the relevant domestic processes regarding agreements relating to, the Compacts of Free Association between the United States and these three Pacific Island States and their subsequent implementation. The United States plans to work expeditiously to meet the needs of the Republic of the Marshall Islands through ongoing Compact negotiations.

4. We reiterate the importance of upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, as well as shared values enshrined in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Rarotonga Treaty), and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We reaffirm our commitment to the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime and its central role in maintaining international peace and security, including in the Pacific. States Parties to the Rarotonga Treaty reaffirmed their commitment to the maintenance of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and encouraged the United States to ratify the Treaty's protocols, as soon as possible.

5. We reaffirm the importance of the rules-based international order and the UN Charter, and condemn all wars of aggression, including Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and underscore the

need to reach, as soon as possible, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, in line with the UN Charter and relevant UN resolutions.

6. We acknowledge the legacy of World War II and the nuclear legacy of the Cold War. We, too, acknowledge and welcome the United States' commitment to addressing legacy issues from World War II, including working with allies and partners to address the safe removal of unexploded ordinances. We, too, acknowledge the United States' commitment to addressing the Republic of the Marshall Islands' ongoing environmental, public health concerns, and other welfare concerns.

Partnership and Cooperation

7. Recognising the importance of building and maintaining this partnership, we commit to holding the next U.S.-Pacific Islands Forum Summit in 2025 and intend to hold biennial political engagements thereafter. We intend to enhance U.S.-Pacific Partnership through regularised Ministerial and Senior Officials engagements, including the PIF Leaders Dialogue with Forum Dialogue Partners. We intend to strengthen our bilateral and regional cooperation on a range of shared priority issues impacting the Blue Pacific region, especially on the need for urgent and ambitious action to address climate change and disaster risk.

8. We acknowledge and respect the Pacific Islands Forum as the apex of the Pacific regional architecture and the driver of regional priority setting and resource allocation, and fully support the Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement. We intend to continue working through and in support of Pacific regional institutions and mechanisms, including the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific to advance the shared objectives outlined in the 2050 Strategy and the 2050 Strategy Implementation Plan. We acknowledge the United States' commitment to support Pacific priorities working with other partners.

9. We recognise the importance of enduring partnerships and cooperation and welcome further opportunities to strengthen reciprocal diplomatic representation, and noted the Leaders decision in 2023 to consider the establishment and operationalisation of a permanent Pacific Islands Forum Special Envoy Office in the United States of America, to manage coordination with the United Nations as well as Washington.

10. Recognising the value of public-private partnerships, we look forward to opportunities to convene the Pacific with U.S. businesses with the primary purpose of building investment partnerships, fostering innovation and technology, clean energy transformation, and entrepreneurship, and propelling progress in critical sectors.

Climate Change and Disasters

11. We recognise that climate change is the single greatest existential threat facing the Blue Pacific, and we acknowledge the climate crisis that threatens the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of its people and ecosystems, recognising that Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have declared that the Pacific region is in a state of climate emergency.

12. We are redoubling efforts to promote and accelerate greater global ambition on climate action to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and in this regard, emphasize the importance of both meaningful mitigation action, particularly from major emitters, and international financial support for meaningful mitigation action.

13. We commend the Pacific region for the development of the Pacific designed, led and owned regional financing initiative through the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF). We welcome the United States' announcement to support the establishment of the PRF with initial funding of \$2 million.

14. We underscore the importance of continued efforts to mobilise and simplify the process for timely access to finance to support Pacific Island countries' climate priorities, including through steps to operationalise the PRF.

15. We acknowledge the importance of further developing vulnerability measures, and considering such metrics in relevant international processes, including the potential use of a multidimensional vulnerability index, as criteria to access concessional finance. International institutions may consider incorporating the MVI into their assessment processes, where appropriate.

16. We stress the importance of continuing to strengthen disaster preparedness and response capacities in the Pacific to save lives and livelihoods when threatened by climate change and disaster risks. We recognise ongoing efforts to develop a Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism and welcome the support for the Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing capacities, to improve coordination and the efficiency of regional and national disaster response efforts.

17. We support the robust implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative and its ambition to ensure that all Pacific people are protected from hazardous weather, water, and climate events through life-saving multi-hazard early warning systems, sharing lessons learned and supporting the Weather Ready Pacific Decadal Programme of Investment.

18. We will prioritize strengthening climate resilience in order to safeguard the wellbeing of populations, ecosystems, and economies against climate risk and continue to promote regional stability. We look to enhance climate adaptation by supporting the fresh water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors, strengthening food systems, expand agricultural, forestry, and infrastructure resilience through increasing climate-smart programming, better designs, and construction, combatting invasive species, and fostering regional collaboration to enhance climate resilience in the Blue Pacific region.

19. Consistent with the mandate from the 27th UN Climate Change Conference, we are committed to operationalizing loss and damage funding arrangements and in this context establishing a fund for responding to loss and damage whose mandate includes a focus on addressing loss and damage. We are working together to design an effective fund that assists developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, including the Pacific Islands, respond to loss and damage in a way that supports country ownership and national solutions and programs that can respond flexibly to the evolving impacts of climate change.

Ocean and Fisheries

20. We support the sustainable, inclusive, and equitable management and development of fisheries and other coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, which are essential to Pacific economies and food security.

21. We strive to enhance cooperation to understand, protect, safeguard, and conserve the health and sustainability of the Pacific Ocean and its resources, upon which our nations depend. We endeavor to sustainably manage our ocean resources, including fisheries, to optimize the benefits for the Pacific peoples.

22. We commit to securing the limits of the Blue Pacific Continent to promote the stability, security, certainty, and predictability of maritime entitlements irrespective of the impacts of climate change-related sea-level rise. Bearing in mind the Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise, the United States will work with Pacific Island States and other countries toward the goal of lawfully

establishing and maintaining baselines and outer limits of maritime zones and will not challenge such baselines and outer limits irrespective of the impacts of climate change-related sea-level rise.

23. We recognize the rights and entitlements of all States under the international law of the sea as reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and underscore the importance of compliance with international law, highlighting those obligations relating to protecting and preserving the marine environment.

24. We acknowledge the current work of the International Law Commission Study Group on sea-level rise in relation to international law, on issues relating to statehood and the protection of persons affected by sea-level rise. We are committed to working with each other and others on issues related to climate change-related sea-level rise and statehood.

25. We commit to working together to ensure the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction secures the ratifications needed to enter into force as soon as possible.

Trade and Investment

26. Through regular engagement under the U.S. Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Dialogue, we plan to continue to work together to promote new trade and investment opportunities and deepen trade ties, with a view toward creating durable trade relationships that advance sustainable and inclusive growth, including through discussions on enhanced access to finance for small and medium enterprises, improved business-enabling environments, correspondent banking access, and trade capacity.

27. We look forward to the prospect of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies entering into force by the 13th Ministerial Conference, and to its full implementation. To this end, we intend to work towards our respective acceptance of the Agreement, as necessary, and to accelerate progress toward the conclusion of negotiations to achieve a comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies, including through disciplines on certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing country members and least developed country Members should be an integral part of these negotiations.

28. We recognise that the Pacific Islands value the benefits offered by the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program and support the U.S. Congress' efforts to reauthorize the GSP.

29. We recognise the Pacific region's efforts to secure aid for trade to achieve its development aspirations and will work towards supporting components of the implementation of the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy 2020–2025.

30. We plan to invest in safe and secure communications and access to information, through appropriate technology infrastructure and cybersecurity arrangements to enable business, education, and digital connectivity for Pacific peoples.

31. We welcome the progress made towards completing negotiations related to the Annexes of the Treaty on Fisheries between the Governments of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America ("South Pacific Tuna Treaty") and the conclusion of negotiations on its related Economic Assistance Agreement, which has long served as a cornerstone for U.S-Pacific cooperation.

Peace & Security

32. We reaffirm our commitment to the Boe Declaration and working to address human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cybersecurity.

33. We intend to work together on key law enforcement and justice sector challenges through new capacity building and operational efforts to promote the rule of law; strengthen border security and maritime law enforcement, including to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and tackle money laundering, cyber and financial crime, transnational organized crime, and the trafficking of humans, narcotics, and wildlife. We support strengthening institutional capacity to deter and disrupt all forms of corruption and support efforts by Pacific Islands Forum members to uphold and implement the commitments of the Teieniwa Vision and its implementation plan.

34. We seek to strengthen longstanding cooperation on combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing through new capacity building and technological initiatives, to supplement our existing bilateral agreements and regional arrangements in collaboration with the Forum Fisheries Agency.

35. We seek to strengthen national and regional good governance and democratic institutions across the Pacific, including through support for accountability, transparency, anti-corruption, civil society, human rights, and an independent and free media environment.

36. We are concerned that the climate crisis may exacerbate threats to international peace and security and worsen risks of current and future conflict and fragility. In this context, we urge the UN Secretary-General to consider appointing a Special Representative for Climate and Security.

People-Centered Development

37. We commit to promoting inclusive, sustainable, and equitable development, including for women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, and members of marginalized racial, ethnic and Indigenous communities, so that no one is left behind.

38. We reaffirm a commitment to gender equality and social inclusion including the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, recognising that no country can thrive if most vulnerable communities and marginalised groups are left behind.

39. We intend to promote regional health and health security, including through new Global Health Security partnerships, and build capacity to combat communicable and noncommunicable diseases, mindful of a One Health approach, so Pacific peoples can live long and healthy lives.

40. We intend to expand our longstanding people-to-people ties through increased training, capacity building and exchange programs, scholarships, diaspora outreach, sports diplomacy, cultural exchange promotion, such as the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture in 2024 hosted by Hawai'i and implementing new initiatives such as Sister City Partnerships. We intend to promote youth volunteer service across the region including through the return of the Peace Corps to the Pacific.

41. Above all, we reaffirm our commitment to translating our shared vision into common actions to ensure the continued growth, dynamism, resilience, inclusivity and stability of the people of the Blue Pacific Continent.

42. This statement is made in respect of the competences of the signatories and of the respective governments.

September 25, 2023

Special Envoy Ewen McDonald of Australia

Prime Minister Mark Brown of Cook Islands
President Wesley W. Simina of the Federated States of Micronesia
Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka of the Republic of Fiji
President Moetai Brotherson of French Polynesia
President Taneti Maamau of the Republic of Kiribati
President Russ Kun of the Republic of Nauru
President Louis Mapou of the Government of New Caledonia
Foreign Affairs Minister Nanaia Mahuta of New Zealand
Premier Dalton Tagelagi of Niue
President Surangel S. Whipps, Jr. of the Republic of Palau
Prime Minister James Marape of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea
President David Kabua of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa of the Independent State of Samoa
Permanent Secretary Collin Beck of Solomon Islands
Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku of the Kingdom of Tonga
Prime Minister Kausea Natano of Tuvalu
President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of the United States of America
Ambassador Odo Tevi of the Republic of Vanuatu

NOTE: The joint statement referred to Secretary-General António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres. An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Categories: Joint Statements : Pacific Islands Forum leaders.

Names: Beck, Collin; Brotherson, Moetai; Brown, Mark; Guterres, António Manuel de Oliveira; Hu'akavameiliku; Kabua, David; Kun, Russ; Maamau, Taneti; Mapou, Louis; Marape, James; Mata'afa, Fiamē Naomi; McDonald, Ewen; Natano, Kausea; Rabuka, Sitiveni; Simina, Wesley W.; Tagelagi, Dalton; Tevi, Odo; Whipps, Surangel S., Jr.

Subjects: Australia, Special Envoy for the Pacific and Regional Affairs; Climate change; Climate finance, international assistance for developing countries; Climate resilience, improvement efforts; Cook Islands, Prime Minister; Fiji, Prime Minister; Fishing regulations, strengthening efforts; French Polynesia, President; Gender equality; Kiribati, President; Marshall Islands, President; Marshall Islands, relations with U.S.; Micronesia, President; Micronesia, relations with U.S.; Natural disasters, climate change impacts; Nauru, President; New Caledonia, President; New Zealand, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Niue, Premier; Nuclear weapons, nonproliferation efforts; Pacific Islands Forum; Palau, President; Palau, relations with U.S.; Papua New Guinea, Prime Minister; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Samoa, Prime Minister; Solomon Islands, Ambassador to the U.S.; Tonga, Prime Minister; Tuvalu, Prime Minister; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; United Nations Secretary-General; Vanuatu, Ambassador to the U.S.

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