



Press Release from the Office of the Prime Minister on the Micronesian members intent to withdraw from the Forum

The events of the special Forum Leaders retreat on 3 February has again raised the opportunity for all of us leaders to reflect on the status of our region and the relevance of our institutions towards the achievement of our vision for our region and peoples.

The Pacific Islands Forum remains the paramount regional political community in the Pacific since its inception in 1971. Samoa like all other Forum members is committed to work together to achieve common goals and address common challenges and opportunities based on the belief that more could be achieved together than alone. However intractable and insurmountable our problems may appear, there is always a way, the Pacific Way to reach a solution - unrushed and done in a considered manner with respect for the diversity of leaders' and members' viewpoints. In my view, situations for which no consensus is apparent can be wholesomely achieved in a face-to-face meeting.

We have over many years demonstrated how to recapture the collective potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, based on a shared geography, ocean identity, and resources and how we can organise ourselves as one collective if we are to address our increasingly common challenges and achievement of our objectives.

As Pacific leaders we have taken huge strides to present our region not as a collection of fragmented small islands, but rather as a united group of large ocean states. We are all attuned to how we can best leverage our solidarity, our strength and areas of opportunity, as one region and we have gained significant traction in this regard in the past and recently as is demonstrated through the support for the sub-regional representation of some of our regional organisations such as SPREP and SPC, and the UN Multi-Country Office in the North Pacific.

Samoa supports all efforts to maintain unity in the region and for all countries to consider where there may be lapses in the way our Forum operates on the basis of principles, procedures and arrangements. In this regard, I am committed to the review of the 2002 appointment procedures for the Secretary General to ensure there is a robust process in place that ensures equitable opportunity for all to serve the region at the highest level. As experience has now shown, we should no longer rely on 'past verbal understandings' as these can be prone to different interpretations. The unavoidable reality is that the Forum leadership changes from time to time. I would therefore suggest that the SG selection process in future should be unambiguous and clear. Most of us are members of the OACPS and the model of selection of the Secretary-General on the sub regional rotation could work for us. What must be guaranteed is that each subgroup must, when it is their turn, submit the best nomination.

Let us focus on what binds us together, not on what divides us. It is our sincere hope that the Leaders face-to-face meeting in Fiji will provide that window of opportunity God willing.

17 February 2021, Apia.
