



## **Opening Remarks**

**The Honourable Fiame Naomi Mataafa  
Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade**

**MFAT Special Event  
for H.E Mr Henry Puna, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum  
5.00pm to 7.00pm, Thursday, 8 June 2023, Taumeasina Island Resort.**

Honourable Members of Cabinet,  
Your Excellency, Mr Henry Puna, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum,  
Parliamentary Members of Australia,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and people of Samoa, I wish to extend a warm welcome to Samoa to His Excellency, Henry Puna, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum and his senior officials. While this is your Excellency's first visit to Samoa as the Secretary General of our Pacific Islands Forum, this is not your first visit to our shores. I hope you and your Team have had a good visit and fruitful discussions with some of our senior officials.

Honourable Ministers and Excellencies,

Before I invite the Secretary General to share with us his reflections on Pacific regionalism and the work of the Pacific Islands Forum, allow me to share with you some of my own perspectives on Pacific regionalism. This is an important topic for continued discussions and consideration, particularly at an important juncture in our region's history and development.

Samoa shares very close relations and cultural ties with all Pacific Island countries. The depths of our relations at the bilateral and regional levels have endured the test of time, particularly as the region becomes an increasingly contested space.

As a region, we face numerous shared challenges that are exacerbated by the continuing impacts of climate change and more recently, COVID-19. Sustainable economic development remains elusive for the large part across Blue Pacific region, and dependence on development assistance remains high.

More than ever, there is increased interest and jostling for attention in our Blue Pacific region thus creating a very crowded and complex geopolitical landscape for all of us and our regional architecture.

Of our regional architecture, nine (9) Pacific regional organisations that are members of the Council of Regional Organisation of the Pacific (CROP) have their own governance and funding arrangements. Members of these organisations range from Pacific Island countries to metropolitan countries and donor partners. We also have specialised regional agencies that respond to our specific interests, like regional security, police and law enforcement amongst others.

We need to be fully aware of the intricacies of our regional architecture as they often enable competing geopolitics, international relations and funding arrangements which influence how we organise ourselves in the region. The same also informs our interactions with one another bilaterally, and as a region. They also influence how we package our development aspirations in the many frameworks of cooperation with our development partners.

Our Blue Pacific region has never ceased to provide us with opportunities to strengthen regionalism - to act collectively and to formulate and carry out effective joint responses to address the challenges we face.

But for regionalism to work, Forum Leaders must provide inspired and committed leadership in our foreign policy. It is not good form to speak often about the centrality of the Forum, its values and principles but lack the conviction to act together. The 2050 Strategy encapsulates how we can best work together to achieve our shared vision and aspirations, through a people-centred lens and a Pacific in control of its regional agenda to improve the lives of our Pacific peoples.

In the conduct of Samoa's relations and work, we endeavour to deal fairly and openly with all our partners remaining strong advocate of the Forum unity and centrality, as well as promote an inclusive approach and respect for each other's sovereignty, regardless of size or economic status.

We enjoy deep and long-standing relations with some partners more than others, but we will remain a credible and consistent partner in all our relations. In return, we expect genuine, durable and quality partnerships, premised on understanding, friendship, and mutual benefit. Samoa will continue to advocate strongly for a re-energised and robust Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Forum processes through which all development partners work with, at the regional level, even with the preference to deliver bilaterally.

We have not shied away from expressing our concerns around the many 'fit for purpose' strategies that have been developed to guide how partners should engage with our Forum members and Blue Pacific region. Our region's priorities – political, social, economic, and developmental are determined by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders through open and robust discussions *whilst* cognisant of our own national agendas and interests.

Samoa strongly believes in being part of a Blue Pacific continent that is free from military competition, and a Pacific that remains free from unrest and war that affects many other parts of the globe.

Secretary General,

I am conscious that we are now entering the last 12 months of your tenure. I wish to extend my Government and I's deep appreciation for your leadership of the work of our Organisation, and your advice to us as Leaders on the plethora of regional priority issues and concerns faced by our countries. In particular, thank you for your continued support and assistance accorded by your good Offices to our Government, which have continued to build excellent relations and work that exist between your staff and our Officials.

Fa'afetai.