

LEADERS SEGMENT
High-Level Opening of the 79th Session of the Commission
“Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for Sustainable Development”
Opening Statement by
The Honourable Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands

15 May 2023/ 10:34 am- 10:41 am.

Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
The Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive
Secretary of ESCAP,
Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen...

Kia Orana and warm Pacific greetings. As Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, it is my great privilege to address the Commission on behalf of the Blue Pacific.

Before I proceed further, I would like to acknowledge the presence of Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and former Prime Minister of the Cook Islands.

Excellencies, today we have come together to dialogue on progress we are making to accelerate climate action in our respective regions. *The Blue Pacific* has been grappling with catastrophic human-induced climate events for far too long, so as we seek to make an assessment today, the first step should always be to take a long, hard look at the state of wellbeing of our most vulnerable.

While our story may not be new or unique, it is the **most critical security challenge** we face. In the spirit of recycling, let me follow many others to say this again – that despite having one of the **smallest carbon footprints**, inconsequential in fact, we are among the first to suffer catastrophic impacts of climate change due to our severe vulnerabilities. In this regard, the theme study of the Commission is central to our considerations.

And in my experience, these moments of reflection almost always culminate in the same way: **the key to accelerating greater ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate climate change**

impacts and promote sustainable development lies in finance – wealth, and for many of us here today, **access** to finance remains a critical barrier to our pursuits to accelerate climate action.

In 2015, the world agreed on a plan to ensure the survival of our planet and its people through the **Paris Agreement**. *For the Blue Pacific*, Paris represented a monumental leap forward in our fight for climate justice. But, regrettably, the follow-through has been slow and disappointing.

Colleagues, the path to limit global warming to **1.5 degrees is escaping our hold**. The need to build **resilience** into our strategies and responsive structures is beyond critical, so I ask the group – *How do we respond together today to keep this goal alive?* I put this to the Commission.

As we continue to **adapt to new realities**, we are faced with the **daunting task of financing our adaptation efforts** with limited resources and inadequate fiscal infrastructures. We are drowning in more ways than one – to borrow the words of the Honourable Prime Minister from Barbados, *“poor countries paying the price of wealthier nations.”*

For the Blue Pacific, our response is anchored in our **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent** – our roadmap for Pacific Action that builds on our collective aim to achieve carbon neutrality in the Pacific by 2050.

The 2050 Strategy is a collective vision that is deeply rooted in the Pacific context, and serves as our roadmap for Pacific Action, supporting delivery of action-orientated solutions, particularly in the context of accelerated climate action.

As the Cook Islands prepares to host the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in November, our region, in close partnership with organizations like UNESCAP, prepares to **finalise a clear, comprehensive and coordinated implementation plan** that will operationalize the Pacific’s pinnacle strategic plan for sustainable

development. This not only requires new approaches and innovative solutions but also speaks directly to our objectives over the next few days – to **promote, partner, and prosper** together.

As Chair, I note the **strong alignment** between our two organizations, ESCAP and the Pacific Island Forum. We share the same values and visions for our people and for the planet to promote prosperity and resilience for all in the Pacific. This relationship should continue to grow and to effectively deliver the results of our **joint commitment**. Under the Cook Islands Chairmanship, we are committed to move together from **promise to action**.

As Pacific Island Forum Leaders, we firmly believe in the power of the 2050 Strategy to not only accelerate climate action within our region, but also see it as a **model for inspiring climate action worldwide**. Our **Pacific solutions** should aim to have a **global impact**.

The recent commitment to mobilize arrangements to establish a **Loss and Damage Fund** is one such priority action, and I want to acknowledge the wisdom and foresight of our friends from Vanuatu, who proposed the original Loss and Damage funding mechanism in 1991. I further recognize Vanuatu's leadership in the recent groundbreaking success to secure an advisory opinion from the ICJ on the obligations of states to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change – **Pacific solutions, global impact!**

But these actions must continue to receive the support they require to succeed. *For the Blue Pacific*, partnerships based on a mutual understanding, a deep respect for sovereignty and a deep appreciation of our roles and responsibilities to this global challenge is what we seek to secure over the coming months as we continue our preparations to implement our **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**.

And with those remarks, Colleagues, I urge the wider region to join the Pacific in being stronger and more ambitious when addressing the climate crisis we face. Our region must **urgently shift into high gear**.

We must achieve a major breakthrough in Climate Finance.

We must see transformation in our Multilateral Development Funds and Institutions.

We must address the overwhelming financing gap that continues to erode the legitimacy of the Paris Agreement.

The People of the Pacific cannot afford to wait for change any longer. We look towards our fellow Asian leaders to **join** us in this journey to ensure that we **prosper** together and leave no one behind.

I thank you all.

Kia Orana e Kia Manuia.