

79th Session of the Commission
Agenda 3 Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Small Islands
Developing States – Intervention by

The Honourable Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands - 16 May 2023

Agenda item 3: Asia Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2023: Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Seamless and Sustainable Connectivity examines how regional cooperation on seamless and sustainable connectivity can facilitate a long-term transformation towards a net-zero-carbon future.

The Note by the Secretariat ESCAP/79/5 summarises the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2023. The report analyses connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and highlights the role transport, energy and digital connectivity can play as a catalyser for development for countries in special situations given the current and future impacts of climate change and the sustainable development dividends gained from having a low-carbon and climate-resilient world. Pacific member States may wish to review the documents and share their perspectives on opportunities to strengthen connectivity.

- Kia Orana,
- Excellencies,
- Honorable Ministers
- Ladies and Gentlemen

- As Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, I am pleased to bring to your attention our 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. This strategy lays the foundation of our regional leaders' vision and will guide the development and prosperity of our region.

- Our 2050 vision recognizes the importance of creating accessible services and infrastructure to enable all Pacific peoples to participate and benefit from development outcomes. Technology and connectivity are key thematic areas of the 2050 strategy.

- As large ocean states and territories, we are the custodians of nearly 20 per cent of the earth's surface. Our islands are spread across a geographical area of around 30 million square

kilometers, which makes connectivity, both physical and digital, an essential need for us in the Pacific.

- We know that improved connectivity and communication can lower trade costs, improve efficiency, stimulate and push economic growth, and development. These have direct immediate impacts on our people's pockets, their ability to sustain their livelihood and families.
- Our leaders have understood that and remain guided by the needs of our people, especially the most vulnerable. Our leaders' ambition is to ensure that the Pacific region benefits from access to affordable, safe, and reliable connectivity infrastructure while ensuring culturally sensitive user protection and cyber security.
- Excellencies, we are committed to ensuring a well-connected region.
- This being said, we still have to face reality and the current challenges. For our small island communities, technology and infrastructure remain unaffordable, inaccessible, and difficult to maintain.
- The effective adoption and implementation of new and emerging sustainable digital technologies requires genuine partnerships, secure and timely financial investments and appropriate regulatory arrangements that respect the region's shared values.
- Our key physical connectivity infrastructure needs to apply to air, sea and land.
- We need roads, runways, ports and cables.

- These are expensive investments that need to be maintained and refurbished or reinforced after every climate-related disaster.
- These climate-related financial burdens place pressure on our already limited resources, especially as we emerge from the drastic impacts of the COVID19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, our region requires financial assistance via mechanisms that understand our special and unique circumstances of small administrations and limited capacity.
- We cannot afford to engage in mechanisms that will only set our region further back. Crucial industries such as shipping need to be supported towards a green transition, with practical and funded measures that will not cripple our connecting routes between our different island homes and to the world and place even further financial burdens on our people.
- This is our immediate concern, where connectivity equates to the survival of our most remote and vulnerable communities.
- On this note, I want to reiterate that I have advocated time and again that development financing, especially climate financing, should not be restricted or subject to national income status. It should consider the multiple vulnerabilities that we face as Pacific small island developing states.
- Going forward, we envision key strategic pathways that currently include governance, equity, education, risk reduction, and strengthened connectivity.
- We know we cannot implement the 2050 strategy and collective actions alone.

- We are using existing mechanisms like the regional SDG indicators and other Pacific relevant targets such as the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway as a starting point.
- These existing mechanisms already demonstrate the importance of disaggregated data for decision-making and the need for appropriate resourcing mechanisms.
- Excellencies, we cannot stress enough on the importance of regional cooperation for seamless and sustainable connectivity. As Pacific Island Leaders, we call upon our regional partners and those beyond to join our efforts and support our vision for our people.
- I thank you all. Meitaki Ma'ata