

## THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM 2013

AH ANGELO\*

The 44th Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) was held in Majuro, Marshall Islands, in September 2013. This Forum was accompanied by considerably less fanfare than the 43rd Forum held in the Cook Islands the previous year. The significant initiatives and high profile international guests of the Cook Islands Forum were absent from Majuro.

Another reason for the Forum attracting less publicity was the establishment in August 2013 of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF).<sup>1</sup> That Forum, which was hosted by Fiji, attracted leaders from Timor Leste, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Nauru. Altogether it had a government, commercial and civil society audience of about 200 people. By and large, the countries of the Polynesian Leaders Group were not present at the PIDF meeting in Fiji. That meeting had as its concerns, in the words of Commodore Bainimarama:<sup>2</sup>

for sovereign governments, territories and dependencies, civil society groups and the business community, forming a grand coalition to protect our environment. To make sure that development is sustainable. To make sure that the common good comes before sectional interests, that we leave the Pacific to our children and grandchildren in a better state than when we inherited it.

Shortly before this Fijian initiative, the NZ government hosted a “Pacific Parliament” in April 2013 which was attended by more than 70 Pacific leaders from around twenty countries. The core objective of the gathering was to promote stronger political cooperation and cohesion between Pacific political leaders and New Zealand Parliamentarians.<sup>3</sup>

Concern regarding the environment was a point of similarity between the PIDF agenda and the events at the PIF in Majuro where the *Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership* was endorsed. This document is produced as Annex 1 to the Forum Communiqué that was issued by the PIF Secretariat at the end of the meeting. In that Declaration, the leaders of the PIF underlined:<sup>4</sup>

the need for urgent action at all levels to reduce greenhouse gas emissions commensurate with the science and to respond urgently and sufficiently to the social, economic and security impacts of climate change to ensure the survival and viability of all Pacific small island developing States, in particular low-lying atoll States, and other vulnerable countries and regions worldwide.

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1 Pacific Islands Development Forum <<http://pacificidf.org/>>.

2 Commodore Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji “Address to the Inaugural PIDF Meeting” (5 August 2013).

3 New Zealand Parliament “Pacific Parliamentary and Political Leaders Forum” (12 April 2013). <[www.parliament.nz/en-nz/features/00NZPHomeNews201304121/pacific-parliamentary-and-political-leaders-forum](http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/features/00NZPHomeNews201304121/pacific-parliamentary-and-political-leaders-forum)>.

4 Pacific Islands Forum, *Forum Communiqué*, Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands, 3-5 September 2013 at [4].

The leaders committed themselves to demonstrate climate leadership through action.

The Forum agenda included the standard list of Forum discussion topics: the Pacific Plan, regional infrastructure, fisheries, climate change, regional trade, gender initiatives, RAMSI and Fiji.

The review of the Pacific Plan was undertaken by Sir Mekere Morauta. His preliminary findings were presented to the Forum. The final report was to be submitted to the Forum Secretariat before November 2013. On climate change the main point was the endorsement of the Majuro Declaration.

Gender initiatives in the region had a substantial boost in 2012 with the funding contributions of Australia. The Forum noted progress made in the implementation of the Gender Equality Declaration and that the developments were all reported in the Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report.

Fiji is still firmly on the Forum's agenda. The leaders agreed to remain engaged with Fiji, repeated their offer of support for the country's return to parliamentary democracy and resolved to review Fiji's suspension from Forum meetings after free and fair elections are held.

Looking ahead, Cuba was admitted as a Post-Forum dialogue partner from 2014, while Spain's application was postponed. The members reaffirmed their support for New Zealand as a member of the UN Security Council.

The next Forum meeting will be hosted by the Republic of Palau in 2014.