

**Pacific Islands Forum
with United Nations Missions**

Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.



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United Nations Water Conference 2023

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Pacific Islands Forum General Debate Statement

**Delivered by Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau, Fiji Minister for Public Works, Transport
and Meteorological Services on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum Chair**

Excellencies,

I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum with presence at the United Nations, namely Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Fiji. We acknowledge the guidance and support of the Cook Islands as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Our Forum members refer to our beautiful Pacific region as the Blue Pacific Continent – our cultures, economies and development aspirations are fundamentally intertwined with the water that sustains us.

Our first inhabitants were among the world’s great seafarers. Our maritime communities provide sustenance to our families, our islands and to the world. Our children grow up with an intimate relationship to our rivers and ocean. Water flows through our people’s lives and livelihoods. Where Pacific people reside – there is water.

Throughout our history this relationship has also borne risks, indeed we have always known that the waters that flow in and around us must be respected. Our

isolated communities are at risk of drought and flood, our coastal peoples face king tides, tsunamis and storm surges and we feel the impacts on our water sanitation and economies when extreme weather events strike.

These events are increasing, both in number and severity as climate change continues to disrupt our precious environment. Our Leaders have identified climate change as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and declared a climate emergency in our region.

Our governments are undertaking the urgent work of adaptation and indeed mitigation despite the negligible contribution to global emissions many of our small islands states make.

At this conference we again state plainly, the world must act now to secure the 1.5 degree target by drastically cutting carbon emissions and by greatly accelerating our path to a global economy that is not reliant on fossil fuels.

This week's IPCC AR6 synthesis report is unequivocal. Human-caused climate change is affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Widespread adverse impacts on vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to the crisis are being felt now. The science is clear and the impacts are part of our daily lived realities. The time to act was yesterday.

Excellencies,

The health of our peoples is being severely compromised by a lack of access to clean water. The Blue Pacific Continent has some of the lowest levels of access to safe water and sanitation of any region in the world. 43% of Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) peoples lack access to even basic drinking water facilities and 65% lack access to even basic sanitation facilities.

Over two million people in the Pacific Islands lack access to safe drinking water. The IPCC has projected that climate change is projected to cause a 50% reduction in water availability in some PICs by the year 2100.

While other regions face similar concerns, we are falling behind in our efforts to improve conditions in Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) as our population growth outstrips our ability to maintain and improve water sanitation. More must

be done to safeguard our water for the sake of our and our children's health, socio-economic development, food and energy security, environment and human rights.

While our governments and development partners are progressing water security across multiple fronts, we must innovate and redouble our efforts particularly in rural and remote areas and with a focus on our marginalised peoples. Like climate change, water security is a cross-cutting issue which requires a whole of society approach and meaningful cooperation among various sectors.

Our region has many initiatives in this regard, from the *Pacific Resilience Partnership*, which is developing a Regional Engagement Strategy on Water Security and Resilience, the *Pacific Water and Wastewater Association*, which supports intergovernmental coordination and capacity building, the *Pacific Meteorological Council* which provides technical analysis and support and the *Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility*, which supports information sharing and coordination of development partners.

The Pacific Community (SPC) 2023 Water Security Update has identified that these and the many other partnerships active in the region are providing much-needed support to Pacific Island Countries. According to the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, the water sector in the Pacific Islands requires an estimated \$1.2 billion in investment to meet the water-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Gaps remain in the synthesis and communication of critical learnings to leaders at all levels and in connecting this critical work to existing regional ambitions and reporting frameworks including the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific*, the *Boe Declaration* and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

At the 6th Pacific Water and Wastewater Minister's Forum held in Fiji in November 2022, ministers acknowledged the importance of the UN 2023 Water Conference in addressing our region's water and sanitation challenges. They agreed for the forum communique to be presented to this conference on behalf of members and we accordingly include this in our written statement submission.

Excellencies,

Despite our hard work, the Blue Pacific Continent as a whole continues lag behind the world in achieving the SDG6 targets. Half of the Pacific population lives without access to basic drinking water facilities, and more than two thirds live

without access to basic sanitation. We must do better. We must do more. We must change today to ensure our survival tomorrow.

While there has been progress in many countries, stark inequities across the region and within countries remain. Our COVID experience has heightened the urgency of improving WASH standards and we know that we face a future of ever more complex and interactive challenges as climate change further impacts our region.

We hope that this conference will allow us to listen, to share and to learn from others' experiences in tackling this most pressing issue and we stand ready to engage with and work alongside you all to secure a future of clean, sustainable and accessible water for all.

Excellencies,

Allow me to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

Let me reiterate that my country, Fiji, has similar water issues and challenges to other island states not only in the Pacific but other regions such as the Caribbean. Some of our key challenges include:

Our national coverage in terms of water is 82%. It is 98% in the urban areas and only 58% in the rural.

We have 158,000 water connections but only 33,273 waste treatment connections hence wastewater is a huge issue as far as the environment is concerned.

On non-revenue water, we experience 200 bursts per 100km whereas the global benchmark is 13 bursts per 100km for a system in good condition- indicating a seriously degraded system.

Climate change and our annual cycle of two to four cyclones seriously impacts supply and the well-being of our population every year, not to mention setbacks in any infrastructure developments. We also face an ageing and non-resilient infrastructure.

I must stress the need for us all to work together to address these challenges in all facets, including climate change and infrastructure financing for the sake of humanity.

Vinaka vakalevu - I thank you all for your contributions.

6TH PACIFIC WATER AND WASTEWATER MINISTERS' FORUM 2022

14–15 November 2022, Nadi, Fiji

Communique

1. The 6th Pacific Water and Wastewater Ministers' (PWWM) Forum was held in Denarau Island, Nadi, Fiji from 14–15 November 2022, and was attended by the Ministers from Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, as well as senior government representatives from American Samoa, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu.

2. Ministers and government representatives expressed their deep gratitude to the Honourable Minister Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources, the Government and people of Fiji for their warm welcome, generous hospitality, co-funding and excellent arrangements of transport, catering, meeting venue and countless other things that needed to be organised in order to make this meeting an outstanding success.

3. Ministers and government representatives further expressed their appreciation to the Honourable Minister Usamate for his capable leadership in chairing the PWWM Forum.

4. Ministers and government representatives expressed their appreciation to the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association (PWWA) for the excellent arrangements in preparing for and co-funding the PWWM Forum.

Presentations

5. Ministers and government representatives appreciated PWWA's presentation on the status of Pacific Utilities performance and results of the PWWA Benchmarking Annual Survey.

6. Ministers and government representatives further showed their appreciation to the Pacific Community (SPC) on their presentation on the status of the region in relation to water security and resilience, including progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6).

7. Ministers and government representatives recognised the important role of climate finance in addressing the intensifying climate-related risks affecting the water sector and appreciated presentations from the Green Climate Fund (GCF)

Secretariat and SPC on investment financing for resilience, water security and climate change.

8. Ministers and government representatives expressed their appreciation of the contributions of Pacific Young Water Professionals on the issue of resilience and reaffirmed their strong support to the Pacific Young Water Professionals programme, which has been of great benefit to their countries in building the capacity and capabilities of young Pacific leaders of the future.

Country Statements and Plenary Discussions

9. Ministers and government representatives noted that, while Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have much in common in terms of shared water security challenges and solutions, significant disparities persist between and within countries with respect to access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, and stressed the need for significantly increased and sustained support to address the needs of the region's large rural, remote and informal urban communities living outside of centralised water and sanitation services.

10. Ministers and government representatives noted the serious water security and resilience challenges currently facing the region, including threats to: groundwater resources (impacted by drought, over-abstraction, inappropriate land-use practices and salt-water intrusion); surface water (impacted by pollution, catchment degradation, mineral resource extraction and deforestation), and essential water and sanitation infrastructure (impacted by poor asset management, extreme climate events such as storms and inundation, and significantly increased material and transport costs).

11. Ministers and government representatives noted that Pacific people experience some of the world's highest exposures to the risks of disaster and climate change, including significant and repeating impacts on water security (including Typhoon Bopha in 2012 and Category 5 Tropical Cyclones Pam and Winston, 2015 and 2016 respectively), and noted the critical role of water utilities in disaster risk reduction, disaster response and climate change adaptation.

12. Ministers and government representatives expressed their concern that, in the time since the last PWWM Forum in 2019, Pacific water security challenges have been further exacerbated by the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural hazards such as Tropical Cyclones Harold, Yasa and Ana, the eruption

of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano and associated tsunami, and serious drought currently affecting the atoll nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu.

13. Ministers and government representatives noted that, despite demonstrations of self-reliance during the pandemic, the Pacific continues to face serious challenges in developing and retaining local technical expertise and human capacity to support the core functions of modern water utilities.

14. Ministers and government representatives noted the disproportionate impact of water and sanitation challenges on women and girls and other vulnerable groups and the important roles they play as both water managers and stakeholders, noted the progress made by utilities towards gender parity of technical and management staff, as well as the challenges remaining in achieving diversity in governance structures.

15. Ministers and government representatives noted that, while progress has been made in improving the monitoring and reporting of water, sanitation and hygiene, significant data gaps exist that constrain management responses, including with respect to safely managed facilities, and noted the critical role of water resources monitoring and assessment to inform the evidence-based sustainable management of the region's fragile and limited water resources.

16. Ministers and government representatives acknowledged that PWWA utilities are now fully capable of collecting data in a standard and systematic way, and urged the PWWA to continue its benchmarking efforts and for PWWA members to actively participate in data collection and training, and further acknowledged the important role of the benchmarking process in informing investment planning and strategy development, and urged a greater integration of water and sanitation data collection across the water sector and with national information management systems.

17. Ministers and government representatives confirmed the critical role that water utilities play in supporting the resilience of Pacific communities, including through support to the agreed goals of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security.

The Way Forward

18. Ministers and government representatives acknowledged that, while progress is being made by all countries, the region is collectively off track to meet SDG6

targets for universal access to safe water and sanitation, and accelerated efforts are needed at all levels to prioritise urgent action on sustainable financing, data and information, capacity development, innovation and governance.

19. Ministers and government representatives acknowledged the need for strengthened engagement in water security as a key component of Pacific resilience, and encouraged greater participation of the sector in dialogue for action supporting climate and disaster resilience at the local, national and regional levels.

20. Ministers and government representatives highlighted the urgency of scaling up national and regional investments to support the science, infrastructure and local capacity needed to establish and maintain locally appropriate and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene solutions resilient to the impacts of climate change and disaster. Acknowledging this urgent need and the accelerating impacts of climate change on the sector, Ministers and government representatives called on development partners to urgently support enhanced accessibility of the sector to existing and emerging funding mechanisms such as climate financing.

21. Ministers and government officials noted with concern the disproportionately large number of Pacific people living without access to safe sanitation and hygiene facilities (including significant populations in rural, remote and informal urban areas), including an estimated 1.8 million practicing open defecation, and called for urgent targeted and collaborative action by governments, development partners and civil society over the next five years (coinciding with the final five years of the UN Decade of Action on Water and Sanitation) to address this relatively neglected development issue with profound impacts on human health, livelihoods and resilience.

22. Ministers and government officials noted with concern the serious impact of untreated and partially-treated wastewater on Pacific receiving environments, with associated impacts on freshwater and marine ecosystems, human health and livelihoods, and urged increased and targeted support to countries to improve the monitoring, regulation, treatment, reuse and safe disposal of wastewater.

23. Ministers and government representatives recognised the General Assembly Resolution 73/226 to convene, in New York, from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (also known as the UN 2023 Water Conference).

24. Ministers and government representatives acknowledged the relevance of the UN 2023 Water Conference to addressing the region's serious water and sanitation challenges and agreed that a proposal be submitted to declare the 6th PWWM Forum as a Pacific pre-summit event for the Conference.

Vote of Thanks

25. Ministers and government representatives noted a vote of thanks to the Chairman of the PWWM forum.

26. Ministers and government representatives agreed that this communique be presented to the UN 2023 Water Conference on behalf of PWWM by participating Pacific Island Country representatives in consultation with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Signed at Denarau Island, Nadi, Fiji this 15th day of November 2022:

Hon Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services and Land and Mineral Services (Chairman), FIJI

Hon Sato Kilman, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, VANUATU

Hon Bradley Tovosia, Minister of Mines, Energy & Rural Electrification, SOLOMON ISLANDS

Hon Olo Fiti Afoa Vaai, Minister of Works, Transport & Infrastructure, SAMOA

Hon Crossley Tatui, Minister of Infrastructure and Finance, NIUE

Hon Albert Nicholas, Associate Minister for Infrastructure Cook Islands and Cook Islands Investment Corporation, COOK ISLANDS

Hon Raphael Tonpi, Vice Minister of State-Owned Enterprise, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Mr Faustino Yarofaisug, Assistant Secretary, Energy Division, Department of Resources and Development, FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

Mr Sione Akau'ola, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Public Enterprises, TONGA

Mr Mitateti Mote, Government Representative and Chairman of Public Utilities Board, KIRIBATI

Mr Wallon Young Fong, Cabinet Member and Chief Executive Officer, American Samoa Power Authority, AMERICAN SAMOA

Mr Pisi Seleganiu, Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Infrastructure, TUVALU

Mr Abraham Aremwa, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Nauru Utilities Corporation, NAURU