



## Pacific Immigration Development Community

Port Vila, Vanuatu: 20 – 22 June 2024

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### COMMUNIQUÉ

The 25<sup>th</sup> Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) Regular Annual Meeting was convened in Port Vila, Vanuatu, on 20 – 22 June 2023. The theme of the conference was “Labour Mobility and Migration to Stimulate Economic Growth”. Sixty delegates from 17 Pacific Island countries attended including Vanuatu (Chair), Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, New Caledonia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.

The Regular Annual Meeting also welcomed representatives of Observer organisations from the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Pacific Islands Fusion Centre (PFC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the Biometrics Institute.

Apologies were received from American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Niue and Tokelau.

### OPENING

The Conference was opened by the Honourable Hon. Rick Tchamako,, Minister for Internal Affairs who extended a warm welcome to delegates and official observers.

Minister for Internal Affairs – The Hon. Rick Tchamako, spoke to the 2023 conference theme “labour mobility stimulating economic growth”. He outlined how the conference drew together Heads and representatives of immigration agencies and partner organisations across the Pacific to advance members national objectives of supporting labour mobility in the region through the development of effective and efficient border management processes and systems to facilitating bona fide labour mobility travel schemes without compromising Immigration agencies core responsibility of monitoring and managing cross border issues emerging in the Pacific today.

He noted with pleasure the theme of labour mobility marking it as an important broadening of focus for the PIDC. He spoke about how Pacific countries could best position migration to achieve government objectives to support national development and economic growth. He highlighted Vanuatu’s investment in managing its labour mobility schemes as the highest provider of workers in the Pacific and the benefits it was bringing nationally.

He highlighted the opportunity this annual forum presented to bring together highly experienced immigration officials to collectively steer the PIDC network as collective partners that can work together to support government labour mobility development objectives without compromising immigrations core responsibilities of protecting our shared borders in the Pacific.

#### **STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair, Mr Jeffrey Markson, extended his sincere appreciation and thanks to the outgoing Chair from PNG, Mr Stanis Hulahau for his leadership of the PIDC, including the progress made towards a number of important regional initiatives, since the last Annual Conference in Fiji in August 2022.

Mr Markson described how honoured he was to be Chair of the PIDC and his ongoing commitment to continue the momentum built by Mr Hulahau during his tenure to strengthen member capacity and raise standards across the PIDC membership. He spoke about his commitment to positioning the Secretariat and the Board to be supportive and responsive to the needs of all member countries.

He spoke about the key role immigration agencies played in national development and economic growth through facilitating the movement of local workers through Pacific labour schemes in addition to managing the entry of foreign workers into the Pacific. He saw PIDC as the pre-eminent regional forum for immigration agencies, critical to effective cooperation and best practice exchange and support as Pacific countries look to improve the effectiveness of their agencies.

Mr Markson set out his aim as Chair of PIDC over the coming year to ensure the PIDC is an organisation which adds value to and supports all PIDC members.

#### **ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE 25<sup>TH</sup> PACIFIC IMMIGRATION DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY**

##### **APPOINTMENT OF NEW PIDC HEAD OF SECRETARIAT**

Members welcomed the appointment of Mr Akuila Ratu, a Fijian national as the new PIDC Head of Secretariat. Mr Ratu brings with him knowledge and experience from working with PIDC members for over 15 years. Mr Ratu has vast experience working with immigration agencies across the Pacific and has worked in various roles in coordinating capacity and modernisation programmes across the Pacific. Members have full confidence in Mr Ratu's experience and expertise and look forward to his leadership in helping guide PIDC achieve its strategic objectives.

## **SECRETARIAT'S REPORT**

Highlights of the Secretariat's work in 2022-23 include the (1) successful coordination of three Board meetings - 1 virtual meeting and two face to face meetings in PNG and Vanuatu, (2) approval of the PIDC External Auditors report for the 2021/22 Financial Year; (3) successful hosting of two annual conferences in this financial year – 2022 Regular Annual Meeting after three years of virtual meetings in August 2022 and the 2023 Regular Annual Meeting in June 2023; (4) completion of legislative review national consultations in Palau, Solomon Islands and Niue; (5) successful delivery of three regional workshops and training including (i) PIDC's National Contact Point and Operational Profiling Group regional workshop; (ii) BMS in the Pacific regional workshop with PNGICA; and (iii) PIDC leadership and Management training for emerging leaders across the PIDC Membership; (6) Engagement of the PIDC Information Sharing Working Group Committee in developing strategies to strengthening the PIDC intelligence network across the region; (7) Increased engagement and sharing of information amongst members through the PIDC intelligence network; (8) successful coordination of regional training programmes with partner organisations including the (i) Transnational organised crime course with the Australia Pacific Security College and (ii) Table Top Exercise across Tonga, PNG, Palau and Samoa with the APSC, OCO and PICP; (9) successful implementation of the PIDC COVID-19 communication package support for Members assisting members in the reopening of their international borders; and (10) website Development Support programme being rolled out to members.

## **PIDC MEMBER COUNTRY REPORTS**

Country reports were presented by Australia, Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Members agreed there were commonalities on immigration issues challenging members in the Pacific and the need to continue to work closely together to monitor and protect their borders was crucial for the region. Members agreed to address issues raised during the discussion through the PIDC Boards detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities emerging from the country reports that can be supported and incorporated in PIDC's annual work programme.

## **PIDC FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The Head of Secretariat presented an updated financial report for 2022-23 showing expenditures, variances, an update report on the PIDC Members Subscription fund and the 2021-22 Audit Report. Members welcomed the detail and clarity to the financial report. Members agreed that the new financial reporting process under the new PIDC Financial Regulations promoted transparency and accountability within the organisation. The indicative budget for 2023-24 was also considered and endorsed by PIDC Members.

## **PIDC FUNDING**

Members recognised the support Australia and New Zealand have provided for PIDC including Samoa's ongoing commitment as host to the PIDC Secretariat in Apia and thanked them for their continued commitment to the organisation.

### **PIDC COVID-19 SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

The PIDC COVID-19 Support Programme funded by Australia was established in a PIDC Special General Meeting in July 2020 when COVID-19 began its global spread. It focused on three main areas including providing Members with (i) Communication Packages to help adapt to the new virtual communication reality, (ii) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) specifically for Immigration Officers as a backup stock; and (iii) policy development support integrating COVID-19 safe measures. Consequently, the three-year programme at its completion in June 2023 has to date engaged and supported 15 PIDC Members across these areas of support including, American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Members expressed gratitude and appreciation to the support provided through the COVID-19 support programme as it enabled member agencies to seamlessly transition to its new COVID-19 and Post COVID-19 operational landscape.

### **TRENDS AND EMERGING LABOUR MOBILITY ISSUES FOR IMMIGRATION AGENCIES**

Members recognised the increasing numbers of Pacific Island workers participating in labour mobility schemes across the Pacific and the economic opportunities and benefits it was bringing to island communities especially in rural areas. Members discussed emerging movement trends relating to labour mobility including challenges of monitoring disengaged workers seeking repatriation and readmission of workers or returnees to respective home countries across the Pacific. Members noted the increasing opportunities provided through the Pacific labour mobility schemes and the vulnerabilities and challenges members were exposed too in regards to the increasing loss of skilled workers to various labour mobility schemes. Discussions centred on the need for centralised data base systems at the national level to support coordinated labour mobility compliance efforts.

### **REGIONAL COORDINATION TO BORDER MANAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC**

Members recognised how regional forums provided the platform to harness regional consultations and collaborative efforts. Members noted the progress in the development of a draft Pacific Regional Climate Mobility Framework and Pacific Regional Labour Mobility Framework through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat governance approval process noting the responsibilities and obligations of immigration agencies in these regional mobility frameworks.

## **STRENGTHENING PIDC'S INTELLIGENCE NETWORK**

Conference delegates participated in a workshop session discussing issues related to the strengthening of the PIDC Intelligence network. Delegates shared experiences from around the region regarding best practices and standards that enhanced information sharing and coordination amongst border control agencies and partner law enforcement agencies sharing real time information. Members agreed that strengthening trust amongst immigration agencies across the membership through continuous consultations and strengthening of relationships was crucial to an effective PIDC immigration intelligence network.

## **OBSERVERS**

Presentations were provided by representatives from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Pacific Fusion Centre, PACER Plus Implementation Unit, the International Organization for Migration, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the Biometrics Institute.

## **ELECTION OF NEW PIDC BOARD MEMBERS**

The new Board elected for the 2023/24 year comprised – Vanuatu as Chair, PNG (Outgoing Vice Chair), Solomon Islands (Incoming Vice Chair), Palau (Micronesia), Fiji (Melanesia), Tuvalu (Small Island States), Tonga (Polynesia), Samoa (Host Country) Australia and New Zealand (Donors).

## **CLOSING**

Delegates acknowledged with appreciation Vanuatu Immigrations commitment to hosting this year's annual Conference and expressed their gratitude to the Government of Vanuatu Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Director Immigration, Mr Jeffrey Markson, and his staff for organising and hosting a successful Conference.

Organisations that hosted dinner functions, namely the Vanuatu Immigration Department, the Australian Home Affairs and Immigration New Zealand were gratefully acknowledged.

The Conference welcomed the invitation by the Solomon Islands to host the 26th Pacific Immigration Development Community's Regular Annual Meeting in Honiara in 2024 with Tonga committing to hosting the consecutive 2025 Regular Annual Meeting in Nukualofa.

**Port Vila, Vanuatu**  
23 JUNE 2023