



## Pacific Immigration Development Community

HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS: 25 – 27 JUNE 2023

### 2024 REGULAR ANNUAL MEETING

#### **COMMUNIQUE OF THE 26<sup>TH</sup> PACIFIC IMMIGRATION DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY REGULAR ANNUAL MEETING**

The Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) held its 26th Regular Annual Meeting from 25 – 27 June 2024 in Honiara, Solomon Islands. This was the first Regular Annual Meeting to be ever hosted in the Solomon Islands with the theme “Together we build the Blue Pacific for Economic Prosperity” reflecting the value placed on collaboration, collective unity and cooperation. Where members and the Pacific family in general are able to work together to collectively support national and regional initiatives that facilitate and sustain economic benefits while strengthening security across our Blue Pacific continent.

2. Hosted by the Solomon Islands (Chair), 17 Member countries and territories were represented including American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. Also participating in the conference were key Declaration of Partnership organisations Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) and the Pacific Transnational Crimes Network (PTCN) along with partner organisations and observers such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the France Pacific Liaison Office based in Australia.

#### **Conference Opening Remarks**

3. The Conference was opened by the Solomon Islands Minister for Immigration, the Hon. Mr Harry Kuma MP Minister for Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration who reiterated the pivotal regional role PIDC plays in protecting our region through its coordination efforts in drawing together multilateral cooperation and unity across the Pacific. The Hon. Minister acknowledged PIDC’s proactiveness in ensuring that regional and national security issues were addressed through law reform, policy developments, modernisation programmes including membership cooperation. The Hon Mr Harry Kuma MP emphasised that the 26<sup>th</sup> PIDC Regular Annual Meeting theme significantly appreciated the value of collaboration and collective cooperation. Its significance to all conference participants was underpinned by the Blue Pacific representing our respective islands homes and source of income and livelihood resonating well with the objectives of the 2050 Strategy on the Blue Pacific Continent.

4. As outgoing Chair, Director of Immigration for Vanuatu Mr Jeffrey Markson thanked the PIDC Members and Secretariat for the support provided during Vanuatu’s tenure as the PIDC Chair. Mr Markson identified three key thematic areas that PIDC successfully initiated and implemented during this financial reporting period including the: (a) review of key PIDC foundation governance documents; (b) development of a

Masters in Border Security course with the University of the South Pacific specifically customised to Pacific immigration officers and law enforcement officials; and (c) strengthening of immigration border management systems and immigration legislations and policies. Mr Markson further stressed Vanuatu's steadfast commitment to its leadership role as Vice Chair of PIDC and in recalling the past 12 months noted that PIDC Members collaborative approach continues to be a shining light on regional cooperation.

5. Mr Markson concluded by noting that PIDC initiatives and collective collaboration on regional issues exemplifies our commitment to regional solutions that are collectively approved and shared by members in our efforts to protect our shared blue Pacific borders.

#### **Statement by the Incoming Chair**

6. The incoming Chair, Solomon Islands Acting Director Immigration (A/DI) Mr. Chris Akosawa in his opening statement assured members of Solomon Islands Immigrations support to strengthening the organisations profile as the preeminent regional immigration body in the region. Under his leadership, the Incoming Chair intended to lead PIDC in addressing immigration issues directly impacting the Pacific as the region navigates through an evolving and challenging migration operational landscape common across the Pacific. Solomon Islands would work to further strengthen PIDC's regional coordination role in the Pacific and more importantly strengthen the positive impact the organisation has throughout the PIDC Membership.

7. In concluding, the A/DI also thanked current and former Heads of immigration agencies across the Pacific for their commitment to PIDC in collectively raising PIDC's profile as the preeminent regional immigration forum in the Pacific and for those that have left PIDC for leaving behind a lasting legacy of their contributions and support to the PIDC family and for becoming advocates of PIDC in other national, regional and international forums.

#### **Board Report**

8. Members were briefed on the significant work undertaken by the PIDC Board under Vanuatu's leadership working through a busy schedule and implementing more than ninety five percent of PIDC's approved activities for the 2023-24 reporting period and acknowledged in appreciation the collaborative work and achievements of the Board and the Secretariat in regards to the implementation of the Work Plan and oversight of Secretariat activities.

#### **Secretariat Report**

9. Members welcomed the significant work undertaken by the Secretariat to implement the Work Plan activities that included: (a) Support provided to Tonga, Niue, Palau and the Solomon Islands Legislative review programme; (b) Support provided to members in the development of their BMS Business Cases like Palau and Tuvalu; (c) Support provided to Solomon Islands Border Management System development and modernisation and leadership programme; (d) Support provided to

the launching of Fiji Immigration and Vanuatu Immigrations newly upgraded websites; (e) Development of members strategic plans to guide their long-term development plans; (f) Solomon Islands Immigration Department – PNG Immigration & Citizenship Services Authority signing MOU on border security cooperation and successful hosting of the Pacific Games 2023 in Honiara, Solomon Islands; (g) Strengthening of PIDC’s information sharing and intelligence network through regional capacity building workshop for all Profiling Group and National Contact persons and the creation of the PIDC Maritime Contact Group network; and (h) PIDC continuing support for Member States undertaking Post Graduate Diploma studies at USP and the signing of an MOU with USP to develop its post graduate programme to become a fully-fledged Masters in Border Security programme – a first for the region and the Pacific. Members commended the Secretariat staff for the hard work undertaken through the year after having been briefed on some of the challenges around delivering some the activities.

10. Members noted the sound financial position the organisation was in with multi-year funding agreements secured with its principal donors and were briefed on continued commitment regarding the current efforts to finalise a new multi-year funding agreement with Principal Donor New Zealand with the expiration of the last funding agreement on 30 June 2024. Members further noted the successful completion of the external audit for the financial year ended 30 June 2023 under the leadership and guidance of the Chair and Board and the unqualified opinion expressed by the External Auditor.

#### **Membership Contribution Fund and Subscription Review Report**

11. Members welcomed the payment of membership subscriptions into the Membership Contribution Fund with all outstanding payments from previous years cleared for the first time. Members were acknowledged for their ongoing support to PIDC reflected through their consistent annual contributions to the Membership Contribution Fund.

12. PIDC members also considered the recommendations provided in the Membership Subscription Review Report and endorsed the formula for membership contribution increases, consequently approving an increase in members’ total contribution in 2025, with the agreement that this contribution would be reviewed annually by members. It was noted that any additional payments separate from members annual subscription would be made via a voluntary contribution fund rather than altering their member subscription tier status.

#### **PIDC Annual Work Plan and Budget 2024/ 2025**

13. Members endorsed the Annual Work Plan and Budget for 2024/2025 with some key work programme cost drivers being: a) the continued delivery of national in-country technical assistance support with up to 15 projects planned to support Members; b) the continued delivery of immigration strengthening activities and modernisation programmes including: (i) legislation and policy support; (ii) Strategic Plan & Business Continuity Plan support; (iii) Border Management and Website development support programme; (iii) Development of the PIDC-USP Masters in

Border Security Course programme and (iv) strengthening of the PIDC Information Sharing network.

### **Member Country Reports**

14. Members shared an immense amount of information regarding their national achievements, challenges and priorities in common thematic immigration areas. Members shared national immigration reforms related to legislation, border management systems, operating procedures, information sharing and operational risk management approaches. Members discussed the ongoing PIDC support for national technical support projects to strengthen domestic immigration policy, legislation, Standard Operating Procedures, strategic planning, and development of websites and border management systems business cases. Of significant interest was members respective technology development journeys and their respective challenges. Members noted the emerging migration trends and common cross border issues impacting the Pacific, recognising that the Pacific was no longer isolated to the transnational issues of people smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking and other transnational crime types.

### **PIDC-IOM Online Reporting and Information Sharing Platform**

15. PIDC members welcomed the development of a regional immigration information reporting platform jointly developed by PIDC and IOM. This online platform aims to facilitate enhanced information sharing and reporting among member countries on non-sensitive data. Members were invited to voluntarily join the regional reporting and information sharing online portal during its pilot testing phase, with the objective of sharing their experiences and lessons learned by December 2024. This initiative is expected to improve cooperation on regional immigration specific information sharing and reporting.

### **Meeting Thematic Discussions**

#### **(a) Strengthening our Borders through Partnerships: The Solomon Islands Experience**

16. PIDC members noted the commendable efforts and approaches demonstrated by the Solomon Islands Immigration department in strengthening its border management through partnerships with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia. This tripartite arrangement has proven to be quite effective and could serve as a model for similar collaborations across the Pacific. The successful partnership highlights the potential benefits of regional cooperation in enhancing border security and management, in addition to providing a model framework for other Pacific nations to follow in their efforts to protect their respective borders.

#### **(b) Changing Travel in the Pacific: Balancing Security and Facilitation**

17. Members recognised the range of evolving operational issues emerging as a result of the changing travel landscape in the Pacific noting the need for regional solutions to address the challenges of changing travel patterns and requirements in the Pacific. Members also discussed the evolving operational needs and technological

developments in the border security operational landscape noting the need to undertake an intensive scrutiny process of reviewing and understanding the details to any proposed technology-based solutions particularly for immigration agencies intending to adopt immigration-based technology solutions. Members recognised that technology will not completely solve emerging irregular migration challenges and that risk management-based solutions should be strengthened to mitigate irregular migration risks in the Pacific.

**(c) Countering Serious Organised Crime: People Smuggling, Human Trafficking and Drugs**

18. Countering serious organized crime especially people smuggling, human trafficking and drug trafficking, necessitates a collaborative regional approach. Members agreed that collective efforts and joint regional activities involving immigration and partner law enforcement agencies are essential to address these emerging issues effectively. Members reemphasized the importance of information sharing and the need to exchange data on persons of interest relating to smuggling and trafficking of both humans and illicit drugs. Additionally, it was acknowledged that working with partner agencies was essential to monitoring the movement of people and illicit products across the Pacific.

**(d) Building Organisational Capacity, Expertise and Knowledge: Sustaining Operations for the Future**

19. A key member panel discussion including Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, PNG, Samoa and the Solomon Islands engaged in discussions relating to organisational development with a specific focus on strengthening and sustaining operations without compromising service quality and accountability. Building organizational capacity, expertise, and knowledge to sustain operations for the future continues to be a key focus for PIDC members. Panelist and members discussed the challenges of managing operations and expectations despite losing highly skilled and experienced workers through migration, retirements and better job offers both domestically and internationally. Members shared their respective experiences in managing these emerging operational challenges and agreed that PIDC was well placed to coordinate potential trilateral or multilateral arrangements to facilitate upskilling opportunities for immigration staff in the region. Consequently, members also welcomed Australia's offer to explore joint capacity-building programs via bilateral or multilateral arrangements.

**(e) Development of the PIDC-USP Masters in Border Security Course**

20. The University of the South Pacific (USP) presented the modality of the Master in Border Security Course highlighting the extensive preliminary work that has been undertaken to develop the only Pacific based and customised Border Security Masters programme. The University of the South Pacific (USP), as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PIDC, agreed to develop a Master's Degree Programme in Border Security. This programme aims to meet the tertiary training needs of immigration officers and partner law enforcement officers engaged in protecting the borders of Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Building on the initial 2019 PIDC-USP MOU on the existing USP Postgraduate Diploma in Border Security, the Masters

programme builds on this existing course. Members welcomed the development of the Master's in Border Security Programme for immigration members in the Pacific noting the intention to launch the programme by the 2025 academic year.

#### **Forum Fisheries Agency Site Visit**


21. PIDC Members also had the opportunity to undertake a site visit of the Forum Fisheries Agency's (FFA) globally recognised Fishing Vessel Surveillance Monitoring Centre in Honiara and received an overview presentation from FFA on their operations and mandate in the region providing detailed insight into FFA operations. Members recognised and acknowledged the value FFA provides to law enforcement agencies under the Partnership Agreement between PIDC, OCO, PICP and FFA and a better appreciation of the expertise and resources members can access through their respective fisheries agencies at the national level.

#### **Observer Organisations**

22. Members throughout the conference continued to welcome the support of participating partner organisations and Observers. Presentations were provided by all participating organisations to support discussions including the Oceania Customs Organisation, Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre, International Organisation for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the French Pacific Liaison representative based out of Australia.

#### **2024-25 PIDC Board Election**

23. Members welcomed the election of the new PIDC Board Members for 2024-25 including: Solomon Islands (Chair), Tonga (Incoming Vice Chair), Vanuatu (Outgoing Vice-Chair), Cook Islands (Small Island States), Fiji (Melanesia), American Samoa (Polynesia), Kiribati (Micronesia), Australia and New Zealand (Principal Donors) and Samoa (Host Country).



**Mr Chris Akosawa**

**PIDC Chair & Acting Director Solomon Islands Immigration**