



PACIFIC IMMIGRATION  
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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# NEWSLETTER

Our Members



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## PIDC Members Attend the 7th Border Management and Identity Conference in Bangkok



The 26 PIDC Member delegation from the Pacific attending this year's 7th BMIC in Bangkok, Thailand.

A record 26 member participants from the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC) family for the first time attended the 7th Border Management and Identity Conference (BMIC) in Bangkok, Thailand from 11-13 December 2024. Hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and APSCA, the conference is Asia's largest government meeting focused on border governance and identity management.

Akuila Ratu, PIDC's Head of Secretariat, was a speaker on Day 2, participating in Workshop 4, which centred on "Information Sharing and International Cooperation: Overcoming the Boundaries of Border Management Ecosystems." His presentation, titled Information Sharing Platforms in the Pacific: Needs, Challenges and Opportunities, highlighted the critical role of information sharing in enhancing border security and facilitating cross-border movements in the Pacific region. Akuila discussed the unique challenges Pacific Island nations face, including limited resources, and how regional cooperation can help overcome these obstacles.

Also contributing to the conference was Ms. Rasieli Rabukawaqa from Fiji Immigration, who presented on "A Roadmap for API/PNR Implementation at Sea." Her session provided valuable insights into the progress of Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems in maritime settings, underscoring the importance of international cooperation in the implementation of border control measures at sea.

The BMIC is an important platform for stakeholders to share new developments in border and identity management, and this year's conference attracted 74 speakers and 41 exhibitors, showcasing the latest technologies in the field. With a focus on fostering closer collaboration between government authorities, international organisations, and identity solution providers, the event highlighted the continued evolution of border security and management in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Our Vision:** Secure international movement of people for safe and prosperous Pacific Communities.

## From the Secretariat Desk

Warm Pacific greetings from the Secretariat desk in Apia. 2024 has breezed by quite quickly as we head towards December 31st in anticipation of the new year. While we conclude another busy and eventful year, we can take a sigh of relief knowing that we have journeyed together this year collectively sharing our efforts in protecting our blue Pacific continent.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all immigration officers and Directors across the region for everyone's unwavering commitment to protecting our shared Pacific Island borders and waters. The strengthening of our Intelligence network through our regional National Contact Points workshop hosted in Apia early this year laid the foundations of strong regional coordination from frontline officers across all ports of entry especially through our PIDC Network of focal points, whose vigilance have been critical in keeping our network coordinated in our shared efforts of protecting our borders.

2024 has been particularly eventful for our members, with Solomon Islands Immigration successfully hosting our Regular Annual Meeting in Honiara, reaffirming our director's commitment to strengthening member collaboration and commitment to sharing information and working together across the Pacific. The year finally culminating with the successful hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) here in Samoa, a testament to the region's ability to come together for meaningful dialogue and progress. Looking ahead to 2025, we anticipate another year of growth and opportunity, especially as we embark on reviewing our Strategic Plan and laying the groundwork for a new strategic direction. Together, we will continue to strengthen our collective efforts for a safer and more secure Pacific.

As we approach the end of another remarkable year, the PIDC Secretariat would like to extend our warmest Christmas wishes to you and your loved ones. This festive season, we reflect on the hard work, dedication, and collaboration that have helped us achieve so many milestones together.

Thanks to your steadfast commitment and passion, we've made significant strides in advancing our shared vision for the Pacific region. Let's take a moment to celebrate all that we've accomplished, knowing that each step forward brings us closer to creating a stronger, more connected community. We also take this time to pray for our colleagues and friends in Vanuatu and pray that our heavenly father will continue to guide and protect them during this difficult time.

May this Christmas bring you peace, joy, and well-deserved rest. We look forward to continuing our journey with you in the New Year, united in our mission to shape a brighter future for the Pacific.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!



Mr. Akuila Ratu  
**Head of Secretariat**





## PIDC Members Attend ICAO Security & Facilitation TRIP-ICBWG Meeting in Bangkok

PIDC's Head of Secretariat, Akuila Ratu, joined a delegation from PIDC member nations, including Samoa, Nauru, New Zealand, Tonga, PNG, Tuvalu, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, RMI, FSM, and Kiribati participating in the ICAO Security & Facilitation TRIP-ICBWG meeting in Bangkok, Thailand from 9-10 December 2024.

The Implementation Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG), established in 2008, supports the universal adoption of Machine-Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) and enhances global capabilities in identity management. With the development of the Traveller Identification Programme (TRIP), the ICBWG's mandate has expanded to provide advice on a range of areas, including travel documents, border control, and facilitation.

The meeting highlighted the importance of capacity building and collaboration in assisting States to comply with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) for secure travel and border management. A key focus was ensuring that no country is left behind in the global effort to strengthen the security, integrity, and efficiency of travel document systems. The ICBWG facilitates the development of tools and guidance for States to meet these standards and offers capacity-building initiatives, including seminars and training.

For PIDC, attending this meeting provided valuable insights into the evolving landscape of global travel security and identity management. It also reinforced the importance of regional cooperation to enhance border control and facilitate smoother travel across the Pacific. The PIDC Secretariat remains committed to supporting Pacific Island States in their efforts to meet international standards and contribute to global security initiatives.



Dion Chamberlain from NZ Department of Internal Affairs and the Chair of the ICAO Security & Facilitation TRIP-ICBWG Meeting  
(Photo Source: IOM)

## 7th Meeting of the Bali Process Technical Experts Group on Returns and Reintegration



Ms. Rasieli Rabukawaqa from Fiji Immigration sharing Fiji's experience on the topic "A Roadmap for API/PNR Implementation at Sea" during the 7th BMIC in Bangkok, Thailand. (Photo Source: IOM)

PIDC's Head of Secretariat, Akuila Ratu, together with delegates from Fiji, Samoa, PNG, Australia and New Zealand participated in the 7th Meeting of the Bali Process Technical Experts Group on Returns and Reintegration (TEG-RR) held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This important gathering brought together practitioners and experts from Bali Process Member States and organisations to enhance the effectiveness of return strategies, ensuring the safe and dignified return of migrants to their countries of origin.

The meeting focused on the Forward Work Plan (FWP) for 2024-2029, outlining key priorities and activities for the TEG-RR over the next five years. The successful implementation of the FWP aims to advance objectives aligned with the group's Terms of Reference while supporting the 2023 Adelaide Strategy for Cooperation.

Co-chaired by Australia and the Philippines, the TEG-RR brings together a network of experts from 16 states and three international organisations. The meeting underscored the importance of information and knowledge sharing at both technical and practitioner levels, with an emphasis on maximising resources and developing a holistic approach that considers all phases of the migration cycle.

As part of the event, Akuila Ratu also served as a panel speaker for Session 6: Regional Forums, which was facilitated by IOM Cambodia's Alix McIntosh. This session provided an opportunity to highlight regional challenges and solutions, further strengthening the collaboration between Pacific Island states and other stakeholders.



PIDC Member delegation from the Pacific

## Discussions on Border Management Systems in Australia



Solomon Islands and Australia Immigration Officials in Australia.  
(Photo Source: <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/discussions-on-border-management-systems-in-aust/>)

A delegation from Solomon Islands recently attended a significant discussion on border management systems in Canberra and Brisbane, Australia. The delegation from the Immigration Division of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration (MCILI) was led by Permanent Secretary, Mr Riley Mesepitu. The trip was held from 14 to 20 October 2024.

The focus of the meeting was the progress of the new Border Management System (BMS), funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Home Affairs. The delegation included BMS Project Leader for the Solomon Islands Immigration Division, Arnold Horesi, and Moses Maneiria, overseeing the legislative and policy aspects of the BMS Project. The team attended the first session with MERIT Technology, which showcased its high-quality work in the Pacific region, including Samoa and Papua New Guinea, receiving exceptional feedback.

Permanent Secretary Mesepitu acknowledged the substantial support from the Papua New Guinea Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority (PNG ICSA) in providing ongoing training for SIID officers on the new BMS system. It was announced during the Canberra meeting that PNG ICSA would send delegates to the Solomon Islands for ongoing change management training from 21 October 2024 to 23 October 2024. This training aims to build the capacity of SIID officers in managing and operating the new Border Management System.

The Deputy Chief Migration Officer for PNG ICSA, Mr. Clarence Parisau, confirmed that on 11 November, PNG ICSA delegates would visit the Solomon Islands to demonstrate the new BMS to the SIID team. The SIID delegates expressed their gratitude for being part of the consultation, as the project is expected to generate revenue for the Solomon Islands Government and enhance border security.

PS Mesepitu highlighted that the new BMS system would pave the way for a digitized visa regime, enabling online applications and payments. He recommended implementing the new visa regime as soon as practicable, depending on workforce availability.

The visit concluded on 18 October 2024 with the Permanent Secretary and SIID officers touring Brisbane Home Affairs. They received an in-depth overview of the BMS system from Home Affairs experts and visited Brisbane International Airport to observe real-time operations. Positive feedback from the consultation has encouraged the SIID team, who now look forward to installing the new BMS system in 2025.

(Source: <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/discussions-on-border-management-systems-in-aust/>)

## PIDC Donates New Uniforms to Fiji and Samoa Immigration



Fiji Immigration Officers in their new Polo Shirt Uniform.  
(Photo Source: Fiji Immigration)

In a gesture of support and solidarity, PIDC handed over sets of polo shirt uniforms to the Fiji and Samoa Immigration Offices. This will provide an alternative uniform for Immigration border management officers operating at their respective ports of entries. The donation of the polo shirt uniforms is part of PIDC's commitment to its members in enhancing border security and operational readiness.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Head of Samoa Immigration, Agafili Tomaimanō Shem Leo, expressed his gratitude to PIDC for their continued support. The CEO added that the uniform will certainly provide a unified and professional appearance for Immigration agencies, boosting morale of Samoa's Immigration frontline officers.



PIDC HOS presenting Samoa Immigration's new polo shirt uniform to CEO MPMC Agafili Tomaimanō Shem Leo.

The provision of uniforms to Fiji and Samoa Immigration represents a significant step in enhancing operational efficiency while fostering a sense of professionalism and unity to immigration officers in the Pacific. Beyond serving



as a practical tool to support daily duties, these uniforms symbolize the critical partnership between PIDC and Fiji Immigration. By equipping officers with standardized attire, PIDC is not only strengthening immigration teams operating at ports of entry but also visibly affirming PIDC's commitment to supporting the vital work of safeguarding borders and facilitating secure travel. This initiative accentuates our shared dedication to regional security and reinforces the importance of collaboration in achieving mutual goals.

These uniforms were provided through funding from Australia specifically for PIDC's advocacy and communication programme for 2023 – 2024. All funding support from PIDC's donor partners have continued to enable PIDC to respond to its member countries' priorities over the years.

## Australia Border Force Delivers Two Investigative Interviewing Courses to Solomon Island Customs, Immigration and Police



*Trained SI law enforcement agencies from Customs, Immigration and Police*

The Australia Border Force recently delivered a second round of investigative interview training to Solomon Islands Customs, Immigration, and Police agents. This training aims to enhance the capability of border enforcement agencies to conduct detailed and effective investigative interviews. In his opening remarks, Customs Comptroller Peter Hughes emphasised the critical role of strong border enforcement and investigative skills in safeguarding the Solomon Islands' community and economy.

Participants undertook five days of classroom and scenario-based training using the renowned PEACE model for investigative interviewing. The programme also focused on strengthening collaboration and networking among Solomon Islands Customs, Immigration, and Police forces. In his remarks, SI Immigration Director Chris Akosawa expressed gratitude to the Australian Border Force for its support. He highlighted the importance of cooperation, stating: "By working together, border enforcement agencies can efficiently share information and resources, conduct joint investigations, and enhance their overall effectiveness in combating threats to the Solomon Islands' border."

ABF Inspector Johan Eshuys on the other hand believed that "delivering these courses to international partners provides the perfect opportunity to learn from each other and support each other." Inspector Eshuys also reiterated that working together is crucial in our joint efforts to combat transnational crimes in the region.

(Source: Australia High Commission, Solomon Islands – Media Release, 1 November 2024)

## First Ever World Refugee Day Celebration in Fiji – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Fiji hosted its first World Refugee Day (WRD) event, organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration of Fiji, in partnership with UNHCR. Held in Suva, the event celebrated Fiji's hospitality towards refugees and the Government's significant progress to develop the country's asylum framework. The occasion featured speeches from key government officials, UNHCR, civil society and community leaders, highlighting the positive whole-of-society approach Fiji is taking to support refugees to rebuild their lives and contribute to Fiji's social and economic advancement. The day also served to acknowledge the critical efforts to develop and implement the first Joint Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Standard Operating Procedures between the Fiji Immigration Department (FID) and UNHCR, and advancements towards Fiji's first Refugee Policy.

Fiji's leadership and commitment to refugee protection in the Pacific sets a powerful example, demonstrating the necessity of working together. The Fiji model exemplifies good practice, by affording essential rights to asylum-seekers and refugees soon after arrival, enhancing their capacity for self-reliance, to give back to the country that has hosted and welcomed them, and ultimately empowering recognized refugees to meaningfully integrate into Fijian society. Alongside Fiji and other Pacific partners, UNHCR continues its efforts to support refugees to live in safety and dignity, realise their aspirations and human potential, and enrich the social, cultural and economic fabric of their new homes.

UNHCR continues working with Pacific countries, their immigration authorities and communities, on a range of important initiatives moving into 2025. UNHCR is supporting the Solomon Islands and its Immigration Division to develop a first-time Refugee Policy and RSD Standard Operating Procedure to strengthen its preparedness in the field of refugee protection. UNHCR is collaborating with several Pacific signatory and non-signatory States to the 1951 Refugee Convention to support with the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) processing of cases following recent asylum seeker arrivals. With Papua New Guinea's Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority (ICSA) and key government and other stakeholders, UNHCR is exploring opportunities to enhance access to protection and integration outcomes for refugees. This is in line with PNG's positive pledges to enhance refugee protection, committed to during the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF). In 2025, UNHCR looks forward to continuing its close partnership with communities, governments and officials across the Pacific. In the strong spirit of Pacific hospitality, Pacific States and UNHCR, together with other actors, can continue to uphold the human rights and dignity of forcibly displaced persons.

(Source: UNHCR)

## Pacific Region Embraces Integrated Border Management with MIDAS



Tonga MIDAS Handover Ceremony

The Pacific is advancing border management with the successful implementation of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This innovation enhances security while streamlining travel, creating a safer and more efficient border experience.

On October 26, 2024, Tonga became the 32nd country globally to implement MIDAS. The system launched at Fua'amotu International Airport, where trained officers seamlessly processed 817 passengers across six flights on its first day, utilizing advanced biometric tools and passport readers. Tonga's journey for MIDAS started with PIDC's support to develop the functional and technical assessment for Tonga in 2021 so this marked a milestone for Tonga and PIDC. At the presence of Tonga's Deputy Prime Minister, IOM and the Embassy of Japan officially handed over MIDAS to the Government of Tonga on October 30, 2024. IOM continues to support Tonga in expanding the system to three additional points of entry while addressing broader border management needs.

Following Tonga's success, Fiji launched its MIDAS pilot at Nausori International Airport on November 16, 2024. The Government of Fiji is currently piloting MIDAS at Nausori, operating for a one-year transition period. During this time, the Fiji Immigration Department will review its processes and prepare for full-scale deployment at Nadi International Airport and international seaports across the country. This effort builds on the recent rollout of a Visa Management System and aligns with Fiji's digital transformation goals.



Fiji user Training

A key feature of the MIDAS program in the Pacific is its strong focus on fostering intra-regional collaboration. Vanuatu implemented MIDAS in 2021 and has been successfully operating the system as an integral part of its border management processes. In preparation for the launch of MIDAS in Tonga, Vanuatu immigration officers co-delivered user trainings and assisted in the installation of MIDAS, alongside IOM's experts, sharing practical experiences and input with their Tongan counterparts.



Vanuatu Officer Training in Tonga

A delegation from the Fiji Immigration Department visited Vanuatu to see MIDAS in action, gaining valuable hands-on insights for their own implementation. Tonga's Immigration Director highlighted hopes for Tongan officers to share their expertise with other countries adopting MIDAS, reflecting the Pacific's strong commitment to mutual learning and capacity building.



Fiji's Study Visit to Vanuatu

IOM is driving long-term success in the Pacific by empowering governments to modernize border management with MIDAS. IOM provided hands-on training for installation and usage, developed clear standard operating procedures, and recommended maintenance plans to ensure MIDAS sustainability. This approach demonstrates IOM's commitment to assisting governments fully own and operate the system. Finally, the rollout of MIDAS highlights the region's leadership in innovation, collaboration, and capacity building, setting higher standards for effective border management.

(Source: IOM)



## Here is Australia's New Digital Incoming Passenger Card

Australia is finally catching up with the rest of the world in ditching its incoming passenger card for overseas visitors and returning residents, with the debut of a new digital alternative: the Australia Travel Declaration (ATD). The digital Australia Travel Declaration is now being piloted on selected Qantas flights from New Zealand to Brisbane, beginning with QF126 from Auckland to Brisbane, with plans to extend the trial to other Qantas NZ-Brisbane flights.

Additional Australian destinations and other international Qantas routes are set to join the program "in the coming months", says Qantas, which is trialling the fast-tracked arrival process as part of a joint initiative with the Australian Government.

The system generates a QR code that passengers present to Border Force officers upon arrival, replacing the need for a paper card. However, the Australia Travel Declaration will be an airline-agnostic platform, with a spokesperson for the Australian Border Force (ABF) confirming to Executive Traveller that eventually a Government-run "purpose-built website will be available" – and, we can only presume, an app – for completing the Australia Travel Declaration.

Passengers will have three days to fill out the digital ATD, with the in-app version available up to 72 hours before departure. Having the ATD initially built into the Qantas app has no doubt speed the 'time to market' for this trial, compared to the ABF building its own website from the outset, and could also open the way for other airlines to integrate the ATD into their own apps to provide travellers with a one-stop service.

Qantas Chief Customer and Digital Officer, Catriona Larritt, said the airline's partnership with the ATD would "make flying into Australia that little bit easier for millions of tourists and Australians each year."

"The paperless declaration means no more trying to find a pen and your flight details midway through your flight" in order to scribble down all your details on that orange incoming passenger card.

During these early stages of the Qantas ATD trial the digital declaration is available only to adult passengers on single bookings, but by mid-next year it's expected to accommodate bookings with children and groups. Those who prefer the existing paper card can still opt for it during the trial phase.

The Australia Travel Declaration is part of the Trans-Tasman Seamless Travel Group's efforts to facilitate seamless travel between Australia and New Zealand, with ABF Commissioner Michael Outram praising the ATD as a "key foundation for future streamlined and contactless travel."

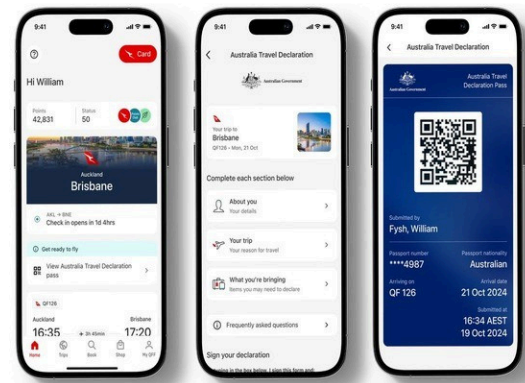
### Third time's the charm...

And as we argued only recently, replacing the paper incoming passenger card with a digital version is long overdue. This is

now the third time Australia has attempted to replace the paper-based incoming passenger card.

The Government's 'seamless traveller' initiative of 2016, which was behind the rollout of passport smartgates using facial ID, also included plans – which never eventuated – for a digital arrivals card to be trialled in early 2018. Global IT giant Accenture then spent \$60 million of taxpayer's money across a staggering three years to develop the Digital Passenger Declaration platform, including a smartphone app which went live in February 2022 as post-pandemic travel kicked in.

But the Digital Passenger Declaration was so appallingly bad in just about every measure – as any traveller of the time can attest – that it was axed after only five months, in July 2022. Perhaps those two strikes against it might explain the ABF's caution in 'beta-testing' the Australia Travel Declaration with a staged rollout across a series of tightly controlled markets, such as trans-Tasman travellers.



(Source - <https://www.executivetraveller.com/news/qantas-australian-digital-incoming-passenger-card>)

## Australia Immi App



On 24 September 2024, the Australian Department of Home Affairs introduced a new self-service capability for visa applicants to provide a facial image and passport details to support their visa application: the "Australian Immi App".

The Australian Immi App will streamline visa applicants' experiences by providing the option for them to use the app rather than attending an Australian Biometric Collection Centre (ABCC) for subsequent visa applications. It has the potential to decrease visa processing times as applicants will be able to provide their facial image immediately after lodgement rather than waiting for an appointment and travelling to a collection center.

It also reduces the costs associated with a visa application as there is no charge to use the app. The app provides the ability for applicants to scan the biographic page of their passport, read their passport e-chip (where available) and capture a facial image. After submitting their visa application, eligible applicants will receive correspondence outlining the option to use the app or attend an ABCC to provide their information.

To be eligible to use the app, applicants must have previously provided their biometrics at an ABCC and hold a valid passport. All children under five years of age are also eligible to submit their facial biometrics and passport details through the app, even those who have not previously attended an ABCC.

The app will initially be launched to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and third country nationals from New Zealand. After evaluation, usage will be expanded in early 2025 to all countries where biometrics are currently collected.

## Qantas Inaugurates Direct Flights to Palau from Brisbane



Reaching the northern Pacific from Australia received a major boost with Qantas now operating flights directly from Brisbane to Palau. The arrival of its inaugural direct flight to Roman Tmetuchl International Airport was marked by a water cannon salute.

Palau Visitors Authority Managing Director Kadoi Ruloked was at the airport to welcome the Quantas Airlines. This new service is expected to enhance Palau's connectivity with Australia and global markets. As a member of the Oneworld Alliance, Qantas will offer travellers seamless connections from around the world, including routes between the US West Coast, Australia, and Palau.

The new service is expected to boost trade, tourism, and cultural ties with Australia. For Pacific Island PIDC members, it will also strengthen migration connections with Palau Immigration, supporting travel to and from the country. Dubbed the "Palau Paradise Express," Qantas flights will depart Brisbane for Palau every Saturday, returning to Australia on Sunday mornings. Special economy round-trip fares start at just USD \$720.

(Source: Island Times, [Qantas Inaugurates Direct Flights to Palau from Brisbane](#) - Island Times, 10/12/2024)

# Blast from THE PAST

## PIDC Newsletter December 2006 Memories

In December 2006, the PIDC Newsletter captured these moments.



It also Published this Story in December 2008...

### Why do we need to strengthen the PIDC Immigration Intelligence Bulletin?

Since the first publication of the PIDC Immigration Intelligence Bulletin in 2004 the Secretariat has continued to build on strengthening the quality of intelligence reports that's provided to its membership. The PIDC Immigration Intelligence network is coordinated by the Secretariat Office based in Suva, Fiji. Today, the PIDC immigration intelligence network has become an important component of the PIDCs' strategy to enhance border security while facilitating legitimate travel through members' borders. It has been set in place to promote information sharing with all PIDC members and law enforcement partners in the region.

The increased sophistication of fraudulent activities, which range from small scale criminal operators to the trans-national crime syndicates, has seen a greater need to develop and strengthen the capacity and quality of intelligence network within the region. Increasing globalization has increased the complexity of migration in the region.

By sharing information to build better intelligence trends we can tackle fraudulent and illegal activities together. The PIDC-produced Immigration Intelligence Bulletin provides this valuable tool in the form of reliable information in real time. The Secretariat continues to work towards strengthening this intelligence network and encourages Members to continue supporting this valuable ally – The PIDC Immigration Intelligence Bulletin.



The PIDC Immigration Intelligence Bulletin provides important information in real time to frontline officers at the airport who are alerted to the arrival of unwanted visitors in a members country.



Intelligence Information within the PIDC network becomes crucial in removals or arrest of illegal immigrants moving between international jurisdictions as revealed in the 2007 Exercise Paradise in Samoa.



# 2024 in Pictures



Merry Christmas

Dear Members,

May this Christmas bring you peace, joy, and well-deserved rest. We look forward to continuing our journey with you in the New Year, united in our mission to shape a brighter future for the Pacific. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

Warmest regards,

- THE PIDC SECRETARIAT -

