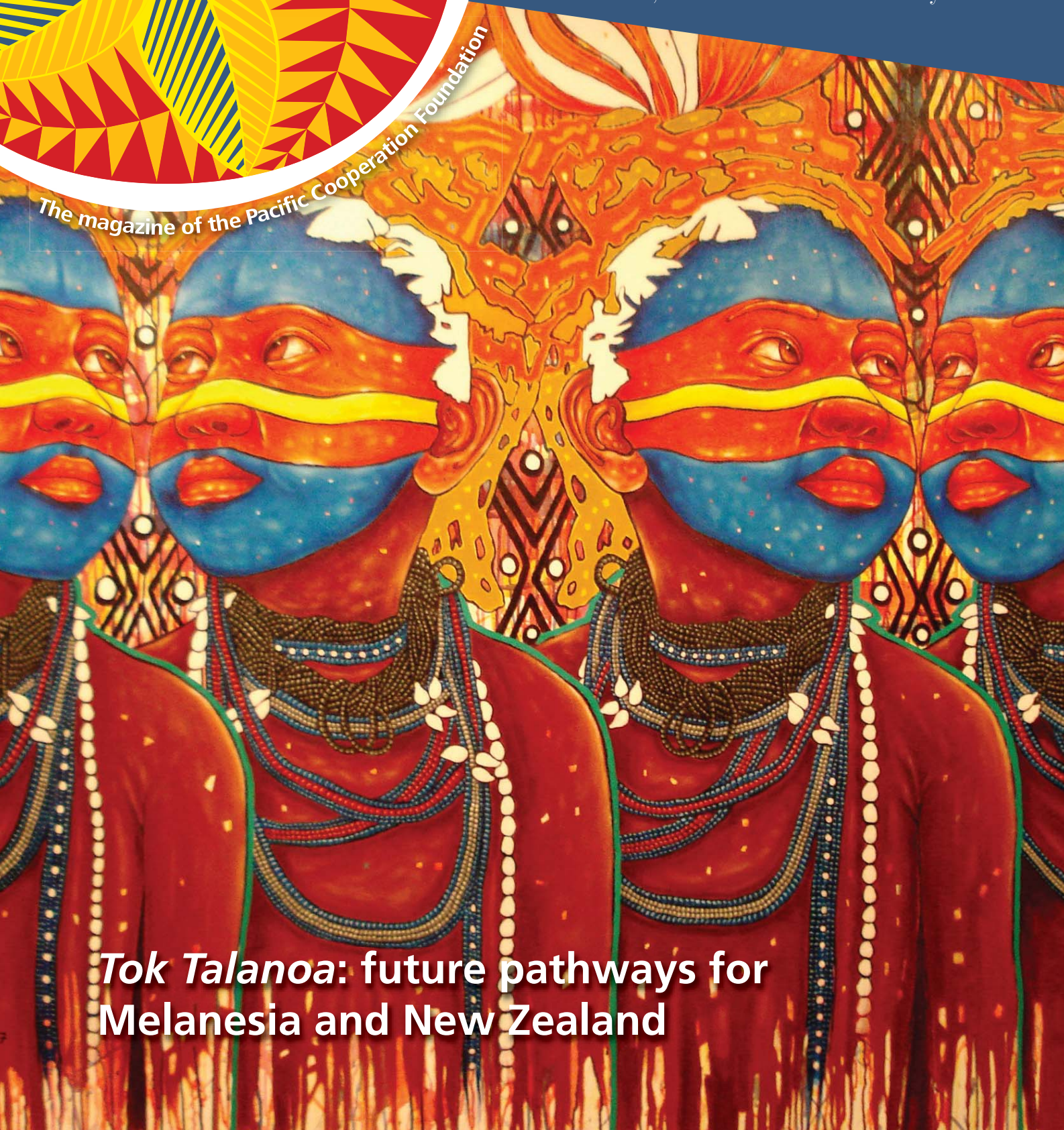




Pacific CONNECTION

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The magazine of the Pacific Cooperation Foundation



***Tok Talanoa: future pathways for
Melanesia and New Zealand***

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Editorial

Welcome to the last issue of *Pacific Connection* for 2008. In Issue 17 we foreshadowed our Melanesia Symposium *Tok Talanoa – Pathways to the Future for Melanesia and New Zealand*, which was held on 29–30 September. We were fortunate to attract key figures from Melanesia to address issues of concern to Melanesian peoples and discuss the state of New Zealand–Melanesia relationships.

The quality of the presentations was superb and combined with an exhibition of stunning artworks from Melanesia to make the event a huge success. Former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu set the tone for the symposium: he commended us for including talking and walking together in the symposium's title, but gently chastised us by asking, "Where is the reference to working together?". Many subsequent speakers returned to this question, and by the end we had a long list of possible follow-up proposals and issues – so many that we could probably work on these alone for the next six months and still not tackle them all! We have included in this *Pacific Connection* edited versions of the addresses by some of the key speakers. Eventually the proceedings of the symposium will be printed and distributed widely.

As always there is plenty happening around the region and here at the Pacific Cooperation Foundation (PCF). There are new governments in Vanuatu and New Zealand. Although minor by comparison, change is also afoot at the PCF. My five years is up – there will be a new chief executive in the new year and I will have moved on.

My time at the PCF has been filled with the challenges of establishing a new organisation. It has been frustrating at times, because we have wanted to do so much more. But it is satisfying to look back on a number of modest successes – not the least being *Pacific Connection*. I will ask for my name to be put on the mailing list! I wish the PCF board and staff all the very best as you go from strength to strength in the future.

Aku mihi nui ki a koutou.

Vince McBride, Chief Executive

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The Pacific Cooperation Foundation, a registered charitable trust, is an independent public/private partnership that acts as a catalyst to increase understanding and strengthen relationships between New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours.

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Tok Talanoa: future pathways for Melanesia–NZ

Tok Talanoa: Pathways to the Future for Melanesia and New Zealand was the first in a series of Pacific Cooperation Foundation (PCF) initiatives aimed at fostering better understanding between Melanesia and New Zealand. The purpose of the two-day symposium, held in Wellington 29–30 September, was to look at how New Zealand could improve its engagement with Melanesia, and to hear from Melanesian people about what they see as key issues affecting their region and how New Zealand might respond. Summaries of keynote speeches follow this page. For all the full speeches, see www.pcf.org.nz.

The Melanesia Symposium exceeded expectations and claimed a much-needed space for the gathering of ideas and viewpoints on future pathways for the New Zealand–Melanesia relationship, writes Pacific media consultant Lisa Williams-Lahari.

Up until fairly recently, the Pacific focus for New Zealand has been governed by its historical and ongoing links with Polynesia as well as the strongly Polynesian demographic of its Pacific population.

So strong has the Polynesian association been, that being 'PI' in New Zealand meant that Melanesians were unable to identify with 'Pacific' choices on many government forms, opting for the 'other' box instead. A glance at the current assortment of domestic policy initiatives, media-based programmes and 'culturally appropriate' resources available for Pacific peoples confirms this. A manifestation of the impact this has had over time amongst mainstream New Zealanders is the often seen, but clearly misinformed, use of the word 'Polynesians' to mean all Pacific Islanders. The occasional use of 'Talofa lava' to enthusiastically greet all people from the Pacific is another misplaced gesture of political correctness.

But could that stereotype, unique to this country, be in for a makeover? Is it timely to review and expand the policy framework that defines, but inherently limits, New Zealanders' awareness of things Pacific to only those ethnic groups that are considered statistically significant here? Those hoping to grow the economic pathways to engage Melanesia's resource-rich islands would certainly agree.

As well as the millions of dollars sent home via the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, economic indicators are broadening the renewed focus on Melanesia. For example, Melanesian countries represent half of New Zealand's trade with Pacific Islands Forum nations – rising from \$385 million in 1987 to \$600 million in 2008. In 2007, 91 percent of New Zealand imports from the region came from Melanesia. And the fiercest advocate from the Pacific nations charged with protecting the region's annual \$3 billion tuna fishing industry, other than New Zealand, is Papua New Guinea.

In fact, it is Papua New Guinea alone that has both the population and natural resources to make it an economic force to be reckoned with. Yet its own economic indicators, buried under a litany of challenges to growth, have shown that the pathways to success may be measured in gross domestic product (GDP), but every inch is paved with the impacts on the lives of people: security and governance, law and order, and an HIV-AIDS epidemic fuelled by gender inequality and critical levels of violence against women and girls.

While New Zealand's aid programme pathways are shaped by official policy and strategic directions, as well as partnerships with non-governmental organisations, new perspectives emerging from the sidelines of this first Melanesia symposium proved just as interesting as the scheduled presentations. Women, academics, the young and the creative were in abundance, all in support of a forum that reflected their view that the timing was right for Melanesia–New Zealand pathways to occur. But in which direction will the pathways go? Who will build and shape them? What needs to change? Where will these lead to? Who will benefit? And is New Zealand genuinely ready for mutually beneficial political and economic engagement with Melanesia?

Those questions, raised through a rich array of speakers and presenters at the symposium, are already doing their work. Talk of 'Melanesian pathways' is doing what the keynote speakers said it should: "growing legs and walking".

Bringing all the *toktok* of meaningful engagement full circle means New Zealand sorting out what its own internal Pacific identity is, even as it continues to engage at many different levels on what it is to be of this region. Granted, it is a region that also needs to embrace New Zealand as a Pacific sibling, not just a developed, benevolent relative.

External perceptions aside, it would be timely for New Zealand to adjust its immigration policies to better reflect the diversity of the region so that Kiwis can come to know Melanesia and the wider Pacific as well as Polynesia. Without this, New Zealand has little hope of ever being able to foster mutual awareness and understanding of Melanesia beyond escaping winter to holiday in Fiji or to visit New Caledonia as part of a French class trip.

As put at the symposium, Melanesia matters because of two things – its people and its potential. The symposium provided a level of recognition from New Zealand that the better Melanesia is at reaching its potential, the better-off its people will be. With Melanesians representing more than three out of four Pacific Islanders in the region, the pathways to the future are about getting it right not just for one sub-region, but for New Zealand and the rest of the Pacific as well.

Lisa Williams-Lahari is a Pacific media consultant and trainer with a background in development work linked to gender, governance and media. She attended the Melanesia Symposium as part of a media consultancy, sending information and photos to regional and local media.



Symposium speakers and guests, from left: PCF chair Neil Plimmer, former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister the Rt Hon Sir Rabble Namaliu, Solomon Islands honorary consul Doreen Kuper and New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade chief executive Simon Murdoch.

Not just talking and walking

The Rt Hon Sir Rabbie L Namaliu, GCL CSM KCMG, posed a rethink of the character of development cooperation among Melanesia countries and with other partners, through 'talking, walking and working together' to help grow a flourishing private sector.

Governments, banks, businesses and people around the world, he noted, were just beginning to grapple with the global consequences of the collapse of major banks and other financial institutions in the United States.

As such, "now is probably not a good time to come up with ambitious and costly new proposals for enhanced cooperation between New Zealand and independent countries in Melanesia, or for other, additional official expenditures". However, there was "certainly" scope for broadening, deepening and diversifying such cooperation.

Sir Rabbie said needs in the community, especially among youth, were high with hopes and ambitions "often even higher".

"As population continues to grow, so will the public demand for services, and infrastructure which will enable people to realise opportunities by helping themselves. Here, I believe, is both need and opportunity for us to rethink the character of development cooperation among independent countries in Melanesia and with other partners, including New Zealand."

The private sector, he said, had already taken significant initiatives. "These include investments by Papua New Guinean firms in other Melanesian countries, especially our close neighbour, Solomon Islands and Fiji."

Sectors in which Papua New Guinean firms were active in Solomon Islands included banking and financial services, building construction, agriculture and hotels. In Fiji, they included banking and financial services.

Some Papua New Guinean firms were currently investigating or actively developing prospects for investment in Vanuatu. Fijian firms were, in turn, active participants in the information technology, communications, retail and other sectors in Papua New Guinea.

"The potential for integrated development of tourism, combined with rising fuel costs and likely economies of scale, provide good reasons for looking at the need and opportunity for a sub-regional airline (again). This might be an area where New Zealand can assist."

Sir Rabbie said independent Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) countries already had a common visa policy and effective procedures in place, which facilitated travel within the MSG area.

"It would help to facilitate travel between Melanesia and other parts of the world if Australia,

New Zealand and MSG countries can agree to a common policy in regard to transit visas, at least. This would help to reduce, even eliminate, current sources of irritation, delay and cost for travellers in our part of the world."

New Zealand's experience as a destination, and in managing transit visas for people travelling to and from other Pacific countries, might be used as a basis for developing a mutually acceptable arrangement, he said.

Sir Rabbie saw other areas of possible cooperation among Melanesian countries as worthy of review. "Here, New Zealand experience and expertise might provide useful precedents and advice, including lessons learnt – both what might be worth following, and what is best avoided. This might usefully include New Zealand's own experience of the role that Māori land-owning groups can play in promoting development at the local level.

"When I reflect on the issues confronting local communities in Papua New Guinea and the challenges involved in ensuring that the revenues, mostly in the form of royalties they receive from mining, oil, forestry and other natural resource projects are properly managed and put to good use, it seems clear that there is much we can learn from the arrangements operating in New Zealand's Māori communities," he said.

"In all of these areas, NZAID [New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency] could help to identify relevant sources and provide support."

Sir Rabbie reminded the symposium that development cooperation was originally intended to be a joint effort to enable recipients to build capacity to be responsible for their own development.

"Development cooperation was not intended to focus exclusively – or even primarily – on the public sector, or to be open-ended (let alone for donors' contributions to keep increasing). It might, therefore, now be apt to review existing development cooperation arrangements, and explore options which will facilitate economic growth and participation by encouraging the private sector to play an increasing role at both ends of the process: delivery and use of the assistance provided.

"Partnerships between foreign and national businesses could help to stimulate development. There is, therefore, a strong case for foreign aid



Former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Sir Rabbie Namaliu, at the Melanesia Symposium.

donors and recipients working together to identify and develop appropriate, practical strategies.

"The aim should be to promote a flourishing private sector, which provides goods and services at competitive prices; opportunities for employment, contracting, sub-contracting and commercial trade; as well as examples on which others might draw."

New Zealand's experience might provide useful precedents – and lessons to be learnt (including practices to avoid), he said. An example might be New Zealand's experience with the recruitment, employment and return home of Pacific Islanders who worked in the agricultural and horticultural industries on a seasonal basis. The New Zealand experience was being widely cited as an example worth following now that the Australian Government had decided to establish a similar scheme, he said.

"Again, NZAID might assist, working directly with individual Melanesian countries and/or the MSG secretariat. In fact, I would very much like to see the necessary mechanisms put in place for Papua New Guineans to participate in the New Zealand scheme. I am sure that the productivity of young Papua New Guineans is, at least, comparable to that of people from anywhere else."

New Zealand, he said, continued to be relevant to Island countries' needs and beneficial to students in regard to scholarships and the development of academic, technical and other skills requiring high-level education and training.

Cooperative arrangements between educational and training institutions in Melanesia and New Zealand could help build capacity in areas of need.

New Zealand could also help to develop entrepreneurial and other business skills appropriate to a Melanesian environment – "so that more of our people can take advantage of opportunities by engaging in commercial activities through which they can help themselves".

"In this and other fields, it might also be apt for New Zealand and other foreign aid donors to consider strategies in which they provide scholarships and other support for educational institutions in one Melanesian country so they can provide places for students from others."

For example, both the University of Papua New Guinea and the Papua New Guinea University of Technology provided places for many students from Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and other Pacific Island countries (10 percent of university places are set aside for Pacific region students).

"The University of Papua New Guinea's decision to open a campus in Honiara is a modest move towards wider, direct engagement in a neighbouring country. The aim is not to compete with other regional institutions but to help meet needs."

Arrangements like these were of obvious benefit to other countries in the region, he said.

Papua New Guinea's University of Vudal, with which he was associated, could be a strong candidate for New Zealand or other foreign aid-funding of places for Solomon Islanders and Ni-Vanuatu, in particular, to study agriculture, fisheries and other natural resources, tourism, environmental sciences and management in a similar Melanesian context.

"Yumi mas toktok wantaim na wokabaut wantaim. Tasol yumi mas wok wantaim tu [Papua New Guinean Tok Pisin] ... We must talk together and walk together. But we must work together too." Sir Rabbie Namaliu, September 2008.

The Law School and associated facilities of the University of the South Pacific in Port Vila, Vanuatu, provided a useful example of such cooperation at work, he said.

Sir Rabbie said talking and walking together could be worthwhile activities in themselves, and government need not always be directly involved.

But the real test of many other exchanges and forms of cooperation, including the MSG, needed to be the practical results they produced. The challenges involved in addressing, mitigating and dealing with the effects of climate change provided, for instance, an obvious focus for cooperation among MSG countries and with New Zealand. This included both diplomatic and other forms of support.

"It is in areas like this that much of what I have said about talking, walking, and working together actually does come together." New Zealand could give substance to

official statements by supporting efforts to ensure that the independent countries of Melanesia developed the capacity to broaden, deepen and diversify cooperation among themselves and with others, in order to promote shared interests in the security, sustainable development and future prosperity of Melanesia.

A 'promising and bright' future

Sir Albert R Palmer Kt, CBE, Chief Justice of Solomon Islands, in his symposium keynote address looked to building on regional connections for the way ahead.

"No one Island nation can isolate itself or try to cut off the rest of the region and last long; more so for us in Melanesia," he said.

"I am reminded of the African proverb in which a person shuts himself in his hut and says that no one can see him. It is but an illusion of the mind, a deception which if unchecked will not only undermine the obvious, damage and hinder regional relations, as we have seen so often, but lead the nation and its people down the path of delusion and poverty. One of the first things that normally suffers or is compromised in such an environment is truth, then standards, the rule of law, human rights and it just goes down and down. This is what shutting off the region and isolating oneself will do.

"I hope our Melanesian brother and Pacific neighbour, the beautiful islands of Fiji, will not go down that path of isolationism under the stronghold of their current interim prime minister, in his 'noble quest' to rid Fiji of the so-called endemic corruption in government, but will re-engage with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) countries. The thing about corruption, if I may say so here, is that it is here to stay. No one country will ever rid its state institutions or citizens, of corruption for it is part of the fallen nature of man. When we misuse our privileges, misuse government time and money, the telephone etc, we may never be charged for corruption – but isn't that corruption, our consciences condemning us. No, re-engaging and

staying connected, and working and developing those goals and strengths that we have identified is the way forward for us."

The strength of the region, through the PIF communiqués and the Melanesian Spearhead Group was not so much what could be taken from it but what could be given, whether it was trade through the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement (PICTA) and the Pacific Islands Closer Economic Relations (PACER) paving the way for a free trade agreement amongst the Pacific Islands countries, or in agriculture, border security, national sovereignty or regional peace or sharing knowledge and expertise.

"Regional links and connections also act as checks and balances in terms of international conventions, obligations and human rights issues based on their vision statements, commitments to good governance, the rule of law, upholding democratic processes and institutions and so on."

Sir Albert said much research with the view to reform was currently being undertaken in the Pacific region on human rights, women and gender-based violence and juvenile issues, economic reform, strengthening machineries of government, fisheries and the environment.

"While we may not agree with everything, our regional connections enable us to share knowledge, expertise and experiences. For example, Solomon Islands is currently undertaking



Sir Albert Palmer, Solomon Islands Chief Justice.

a major consultation and review exercise on a new proposed Federal Constitution. Knowing what is happening in the region and how other countries are addressing their problems in terms of effective responsible and transparent government models, rural expansion and development, for example in Papua New Guinea, can provide very useful lessons and guidance."

Sir Albert said that the voyaging Melanesian canoes, "despite being tossed to and fro by the strong winds and currents of lawlessness, economic uncertainties, political and constitutional upheavals and natural disasters" had survived through regional links and long-standing vital connections with New Zealand and Australia.

"The powerful and positive change this has worked in Melanesia and other Pacific Islands has been the shift in our perceptions and mindset. When our leaders took over the reins of government at independence they had a vision and a plan for the island nations. Those who stayed the course chartered by their founding fathers have grown from strength to strength. Those who have veered off course have paid a heavy price.

"Solomon Islands was one of those countries and had to learn the hard way, that taking the law into your own hands does not pay, irrespective of how culturally sensitive and justified in custom one's grievances might be. Fiji still has not learned from the coup mentality; that irrespective of how corrupt a government might appear to be, not to use the power of the gun to overthrow it but to allow the normal processes and mechanisms provided in the democratic institutions and the rule of law to deal with those grievances.

"To that extent, regional organisations and countries, in my respectful view, play a crucial role in fostering trust and confidence in those democratic institutions, principles of good governance and the rule of law by giving recognition and support where these are due and requiring adherence and compliance to regional pacts and agreements.

"That change in mindset and attitudes is contributing to the emergence of a vital networking and a sense of belonging and community among regional countries. Just as in Melanesia, people are seeing themselves more and more as 'wantoks' (one people), so it is happening at the regional level.

"Our leaders are seeing themselves more and more as one people from the same region, and to use Sir Rabbie Namaliu's title to his keynote address, 'talking together, walking together and working together' more and more."

Sir Albert said that through dealing in a common inclusive manner, more often than not, doorways of communication and dialogue would be opened up. This was 'the Pacific Way', a term originated after the founding of the Forum in 1971 by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

"This was the idea of talking together, tok talanoa, to find a common goal, position or way out (we call

this consensus) and yet respecting one another as equals (respecting one another's sovereignty) and not interfering in the internal affairs of the country. In pidgin when someone says 'stori lelebet' (small story), it means that that person has something important to talk to you about and wants some time at your convenience to talk to you about it.

"So let us continue to encourage those 'small story' times whether in good times or bad times, but more so in difficult times, and thereby foster pathways to resolve difficult issues whether within the region or in member countries."

"No one Island nation can isolate itself or try to cut off the rest of the region and last long; more so for us in Melanesia." Sir Albert Palmer, September 2008.

In regional relations, Sir Albert considered it important to bear in mind the courtesies of linking with the right people, "in particular the leadership of a country, and not talking over their heads to subordinates".

"Whether we like that leader or not, our regional obligations require that we must deal with them in the first instance and not bypass them."

Regional connections and ties must be strengthened and consolidated, he said. "It is one thing to be a member of a regional organisation, it is another to be seen to be wanted, needed and appreciated. The fact of the matter is we need each other and cannot do without each other. On that premise, a deeper bonding in regionalism can only result over time and more meaningful outcomes and commitments realised. This change in the way we

relate to each other must be such that it makes it attractive to join but difficult to leave, so much so that wayward and rogue states will find it difficult to abdicate their countries' responsibilities and commitment to the region."

Melanesian states, he said, were still going through a "vital stage of maturing or growing up" in their political development. "In regional politics it is important this transition is understood. We can take a straight cut and dried stand or recognise that a vital stage of nationhood requires that these countries go through internal stresses and tensions, for only then will the 'diamond' be produced; anything less will be encased in glass which can be broken at the slightest pressure."

This transition stage should be seen as essential to building a better, stronger, tougher and more resilient national identity, and cohesive and responsible democratic institutions.

"Yes, there will be things done which cannot be condoned, but sometimes there are issues which can be better handled and a better response obtained by being more tactful, courteous and diplomatic. Being silent does not necessarily mean that the action has been condoned."

Sir Albert saw the future in the region and the way forward for Melanesia as "very promising and bright".

"With the sort of flexibility, understanding and sensitivity New Zealand continues to exhibit in its dealings with Melanesia and the Pacific, the pathways to our future for our voyaging canoes can only be brighter. Let us not stop with the tok talanoa sessions but put legs on them as well. In Solomon Islands there is a common phrase which we say, 'man tallem duim'. It simply means do not stop with the talking but put action to it."

Melanesia–NZ 'partnership for development'

Kaliopate Tavola, former Fiji Foreign Minister, advocated at the symposium for a Melanesia–New Zealand 'partnership for development' trade arrangement as an advance towards regional Pacific Islands Closer Economic Relations (PACER).

Tavola focused on economic development with special reference to trade, exploring a case for future Melanesia–New Zealand relations, while examining how the yet-to-be-concluded Pacific Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the new-look Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) would impact on these relations.

He explored how relations could be configured and applied during the PACER consultation phase that would lead to a 'PACER Plus' free trade agreement between the Pacific Forum Island countries and Australia and New Zealand. The end target, he said, was greater Pacific regionalism.

"We have had years of fairly successful regional

cooperation. The structures, endorsed by our leaders, are now in place to take cooperation to a higher level," he said, referring to the Pacific Plan, the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement (PICTA) and closer economic relations to bring about regional economic integration.

The success of regional economic integration amongst the Forum Island countries was "below par" in that the implementation of the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement had been severely constrained. "The degree of intended economic integration achieved is still in its infancy."

The situation was worsened because the EPA was being superimposed on top of a weak regional

integration base. A global situation where the multi-lateral trading system faced likely paralysis was an added incentive for the regional initiative. "It is critical therefore that the regional initiative should not lose momentum."

Tavola envisaged that any Melanesia–New Zealand relationship was best seen as a Melanesia–New Zealand Partnership for Development (MNZPD) rather than a bilateral or sub-regional trade agreement under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Such a 'partnership for development' was similar to the Pacific Partnership for Development (PPD) that Australia has signed initially with Papua

New Guinea and Samoa, and which encapsulated the aspirations contained in the Port Moresby Declaration of 2 March 2008.

"If by going down this road, we facilitate the attainment of our collective target of greater regionalism which, by admission, is the inevitable route to the incorporation of the Forum Island countries' economies into the global scheme of things, then being branded as a copycat is a small price to pay. Furthermore, if PPD represents 'a new era for cooperation between Australia and Pacific neighbours', then MNZPD, I suggest, is the 'crème de la crème' for it proposes to uplift its sight to the attainment of the goal of Pacific regionalism."

A Melanesia–New Zealand Partnership for Development could, for example, have multi-sectoral challenges to which all parties were committed and multi-annual commitments in terms of sectoral measurable targets, and specific individual and mutual obligations. Such a proposed partnership agreement was long overdue.

"There is a perception that there is a generalised trilateral division of labour when it comes to responsibilities for Official Development Assistance in the Pacific – Melanesia for Australia, Polynesia for New Zealand and Micronesia for the United States (with a few exceptions such as Kiribati and Nauru).

"The proposed MNZPD will dissipate this perception and will help to promote the view that we are one when it comes to integration of the Forum Island countries into the global economy through Pacific regionalism."

He said the proposed partnership agreement should aim to address what had been described as the 'bipolarity' in the Pacific in which the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) countries were characterised by conflicts in Solomon Islands, coups in Fiji, raskol gangs in Papua New Guinea and stagnation in Vanuatu.

The economic development and trade (including services) sections of the partnership agreement would be focused on situations in Melanesia that were post the existing or currently being negotiated trade arrangements, such as the MSG Trade Agreement and the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement, and at the same time come before a closer economic relations arrangement.

"The proposed MNZPD could take into account all these, make good their deficiencies, etc, with an eye for the bigger picture."

In terms of the MSG Trade Agreement, New Zealand did not qualify to be a signatory. "As a third party trading partner, however, it would be in its interest to ensure enhanced facilitation of trade under that agreement. With improved trade facilitation and considering the relative size of the Melanesia Spearhead Group market and the potential gains from trade, it would be expected that additional



Kaliopate Tavola, Fiji's former Foreign Minister.

New Zealand investors would feel inclined to move investment capital to the countries concerned. This investment flow can be suitably incentivised in accordance with World Trade Organization rules."

The overall scenario could be repeated when it came to considerations of the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement which, he believed, all MSG countries were implementing. "But again trade under this agreement needs to be better facilitated since there was delay in the ratification and the implementation of the agreement."

Tavola said the size of the market was larger than that represented by the MSG Trade Agreement.

"It can also be envisaged that the opportunities for investment in the export and import sectors have expanded. This becomes an exciting proposition when we take into account the proximity of major trading partners around the Pacific rim, especially China.

"In the recent China–Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum, China's Minister of Commerce, Chen Deming, was upbeat when discussing the trade statistics between China and the Pacific Island countries. He said that trade between the two parties increased 24.4 percent to \$1.53 billion from 2006 to 2007. By the end of 2008, this figure will reach \$2 billion, which will increase further to \$3 billion by 2010. He added that the list of duty free items has increased and will continue to do so.

Tavola said implementation of the Pacific Islands Trade Agreement had not allowed the degree of integration and the accumulation of practical trading experiences and expertise to get firmly established in the Forum countries as a whole.

However, the proposed MNZPD could address capacity building and advance implementation to ensure that the lessons learned would then facilitate the implementation of the EPA.

"The integration lessons and experience that are

going to derive from this process will be most valuable to regional economic integration as a whole."

He said the EPA was still unfolding, with Papua New Guinea and Fiji having signed an interim EPA, and both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu likely to follow suit.

If MNZPD was going to be the preferred pathway to the future for Melanesia and New Zealand, a new format for talks between the two parties would be required.

"However, given the added focus for the MNZPD to be also the pathway to greater regionalism, it would imply that whilst the dialogues or consultations that will be entered into may be driven primarily by bilateral and/or sub-regional considerations, they should be configured and directed with an eye for the bigger picture."

The dialogue would necessarily be multi-tiered and strictly independent of the consultations provided for under Article 6 of Pacific Islands Closer Economic Relations, the provisions governing consultations between Forum Island countries and Australia and New Zealand relating to free trade agreement negotiations.

"The independence of the two processes is critical," he said. "Article 6 consultations are strictly for PACER Plus and free trade agreement considerations."

The special dialogues on the MNZPD, on the other hand, could justifiably address the various considerations related to PACER Plus that would be part of Article 6 consultations.

Tavola said Melanesia could be seen to hold the key to PACER Plus and the pathway it would create to greater Pacific regionalism.

The proposed MNZPD could contribute to this process by way of:

- » ensuring that Article 6 consultations are conducted at the regional level and that the Pacific Free Trade Agreement be negotiated as a regional trade agreement
- » facilitating the role of the chief trade adviser for closer economic relations as a regional trade adviser with regional aspirations and goals
- » facilitating the role of the MSG and its secretariat should it acquire a lead role by default on behalf of the Forum Island countries.

"Tok Talanoa can certainly create its own pathways to the future for Melanesia–New Zealand relations. The MNZPD is one pathway that can be all inclusive, all embracing; and if configured in the way I have suggested to facilitating the all important Pacific regionalism and specifically regional economic integration, then this exercise of creating Tok Talanoa has not been in vain."

The challenges of conflict

Dr Alumita Durutalo, lecturer in politics and international affairs at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji, in her address at the symposium 'Security and Governance in Melanesia: As Critical Survival Issues', examined security issues in Melanesia, the most politically unstable region in the Pacific since the 1970s.

During the period 1987 to 2006, political conflicts involved four coups in Fiji (three military and one civilian), the Bougainville crisis spanning the period 1989 to 1998 and political conflict in Solomon Islands erupting in 2000.

Additionally, security took on a new international dimension after 9/11 when the United States intensified its security strategies, influencing the global communities on the need to strengthen security.

"In this context 'weak states' or 'failing states' in Melanesia are considered as possible breeding grounds for terrorists and would-be terrorists. However, for Melanesian states and people, the immediate concern about security is through the repercussions of political conflicts as negatively affecting the long-term socio-political and economic well being and relations of people."

Commentators, said Dr Durutalo, had noted that, apart from the loss of lives, political conflicts in Melanesia have caused social dislocation and high emigration rates, bankruptcy, corruption, intense inter and intra-ethnic hatred, high unemployment rates, high crime rates and poverty. Conflict also involved the continued militarisation of states and the use of coups to rectify other coups, as with Fiji.

She said that a dangerous precedent emerging was when legality and the rule of law become blurred or were compromised for the sake of political engineering, as currently seen in the case of Fiji.

The challenges confronting Melanesian citizens were multi-dimensional, complex and often

long-entrenched, with some conflicts:

- » directly linked to ongoing colonialism
- » the direct consequences of colonial rearrangements and reconstruction of Melanesian societies
- » linked to the unequal redistribution of resources in post-colonial periods
- » reflecting the highly militarised nature of some Melanesian societies
- » ethnic in nature (while others were both ethnic and class in nature).

"Additionally, some conflicts are deep-rooted and have evolved from traditional rivalries before colonisation and exacerbated through the process of colonisation."

Dr Durutalo said some conflicts had generated consequent problems leading to security threats such as human rights abuse and violence, high unemployment, dislocation and poverty and high crime rates.

"For example, the coups in the Solomons Islands and Fiji have facilitated further socio-economic problems. In Fiji, political conflicts have intensified violent behaviour by the security forces on individual citizens.

"It becomes a crisis when those who are entrusted with upholding the rule of law become law breakers. A basic human rights issue that can be highlighted here is, 'When the state becomes the criminal, who do citizens seek redress from?'"



Dr Alumita Durutalo

Security issues and challenges in Melanesia

Dr Durutalo said that in any society, overall security should include sustaining and safeguarding both human and natural resources. Continuing political instabilities were a threat to national and regional security.

Ongoing political crises since 1987 "had led Fiji down the path of militarism bordering on dictatorship at times". Fiji's refusal to attend the 39th Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Niue this year raised critical issues about its long-term commitments to accountability in governance, leadership transparency and commitment to regionalism. "This attitude by Fiji has threatened its membership status in regional organisations like the Pacific Islands Forum."

On the international scene, political instability could reduce a nation state's ability to make rational choices in terms of its foreign policy. Here Dr Durutalo instanced several Pacific Island nation governments being willing to "go with anybody" as long as it was lucrative, and the influence of China and Taiwan in the region.

While pragmatic real politics might be argued, "the point that should be emphasised here for

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Melanesia and Pacific Island nations is that limited choices through political instability do not only lead to irrational choices that create more indebtedness on Pacific Island states' tax payers, in the long-term they perpetuate a culture of dependency and moral bankruptcy".

Conflict resolution key to security and good governance

Dr Durutalo said good governance or the strengthening of socio-political and economic governance could only work if resolutions rightly addressed the conflicts. Ways of addressing security threats ranged from strengthening the economic systems to make these more inclusive of indigenous resource owners, restructuring political systems through the inclusion of some positive aspects of traditional governance systems, and introducing realistic and sustainable social policies.

Conflict resolution in Melanesia: lessons learnt

Dr Durutalo said active and direct engagements by New Zealand, Australia and other Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members saw the securing of peace in Bougainville. The signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, on 30 August 2001, had marked a long journey from violent conflict to peaceful conflict resolution.

Other regional conflict resolution strategies adopted by the PIF had shown positive results since their implementation, for example, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), arising out of the 2000 Biketawa Declaration. The same instrument was being used by PIF in the attempt to secure peace in Fiji.

Governance, security and the way forward

Dr Durutalo said that given the diverse nature of Melanesian societies and the complexities of the conflicts encountered so far, no "one-size fits all" resolution strategy was possible, and that Melanesian people could not solve political conflicts on their own. "They need the help of their regional neighbours, including Australia and New Zealand, in the process of conflict resolution and the application of good governance processes to maintain long-term peace and security in the region."

Some of the most urgent governance strategies that could contribute towards the maintenance of security and political stability in Melanesia included:

- » *The introduction of institutional and constitutional change that would modify political leadership systems.*

"Conflict resolution must involve all stakeholders. The non-inclusion of some groups or bias towards some stakeholders has exacerbated and prolonged conflicts in some parts of Melanesia, like Fiji. It is evident that since the military coups of 1987, there has never been any serious attempt at conflict resolution in Fiji, or if there were some, these were disrupted by continuing coups. Attempts made have had their weaknesses in one way or another, thus perpetuating further instability.

"It appears that since 1987, Fiji's political leaders have been proposing their own solutions to what they perceive as problems. These have come in the form of a biased 1990 Constitution, divisive policies and even vote buying. Perhaps, it is time that Fiji's leaders conduct a nationwide and inclusive consultation process with all communities from the grass roots up, to explore possible solutions to ongoing political problems.

"For example, national leaders such as prime ministers and presidents must not have more than two terms in office. Given the diverse nature of Melanesian societies, this will not only encourage competition for good leadership but also reduce the chances for conflicts if one person remains in power for so long."

- » *Economic policies must also be inclusive of indigenous resource owners.*

As seen in the case of Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Fiji, conflicts had emerged through the non-equitable sharing of remuneration from indigenous resources.

- » *The role of the military in Fiji's continuing conflicts needed serious consideration.*

Fiji's military had become a national security threat for citizens in its continuous involvement in political conflicts. "Perhaps the United Nations, which utilises Fiji's soldiers in peace keeping missions around the world, could offer solutions to the demilitarisation of Fiji's society."

- » *Adopting a more inclusive leadership system that will also include marginalised sectors of societies such as youth and women.*

The promotion of women in leadership in Melanesia and throughout the Pacific was a need in a region where the role of women in national leadership was one of the lowest in the world.

- » *Strengthening rural development in Melanesia.*

Providing agricultural economic policies to enable land owners to utilise their land for exports, and perhaps restructuring the cooperative movements in Melanesia to enable the inclusion of indigenous entrepreneurs in the business world.

"An in-depth understanding of causes of political conflicts in Fiji may ultimately determine ways forward. This may be an area that will require the assistance of regional and international communities."

In conclusion, Dr Durutalo said that maintaining security through good governance in Melanesia was a challenging task given the diverse nature of Melanesian societies and the ensuing complexities of political conflicts.

"In this context, maintaining security requires a multi-dimensional approach involving many stakeholders nationally, regionally and internationally. Perhaps, at the regional level intra-regional organisations like the Melanesian Spearhead Group could generate ongoing 'talanoa' on common issues of concern and map out strategies on the way forward. Additionally, the contributions of New Zealand, Australia, PIF members, other regional and international organisations and NGOs are crucial in enhancing good governance and security in Melanesia."



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'Fiji needs an elected parliament'

The Rt Rev'd Hon Sir Paul Reeves, the Commonwealth Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Fiji and former New Zealand Governor-General, set out at the symposium what he described as "a background to the present situation" in Fiji, noting the need for "patience, goodwill and understanding".

Sir Paul has been involved in the political and constitutional situation of Fiji since December 2007 and said he had always seen himself as someone hoping to help all stakeholders achieve their aims within a rejuvenated constitutional democracy in that country.

"It is at this moment a very fluid situation, and I feel somewhat constrained in what I can say. This statement is by more of a background to the present situation.

"We now have the text of the Commodore Bainimarama's speech of statement to the United Nations (UN) of the 26th of September and we also have the concluding statement of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which met in New York on the 27th September. CMAG expressed disappointment that the interim prime minister told the UN General Assembly that he would not be able to meet the March 2009 deadline for a general election and CMAG continued to urge the interim government to adhere to the original undertaking. On the other hand the interim government's decision to reengage with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) joint working group and the PIF Ministerial contact group was welcomed. We understand that the next visit of the ministerial working group to Fiji will probably be in November."*

Sir Paul chaired the commission that reviewed the 1990 constitution of Fiji and presented its report to Ratu Sir Kamesese Mara in September of 1996.

"People said to me you must have been a lawyer; I said no actually what I studied at university was English literature and theology and it was the theology which I needed actually in Fiji. But our recommendations in that report, broadly speaking, formed the basis of the 1997 Constitution.

"In various places, such as the wording of the preamble to the constitution, the chapter on national identity and shared goals that contained a compact among the peoples of the Fiji Islands, and in the chapter on the Bill of Rights, we tried to state the values that should underpin the goals that Fiji aims for and the way that Fijians of every ethnicity should behave towards each other. And we said that the unity of Fiji is a continuous process of discovery and nothing remains fixed forever;

the guiding principle must be the realisation by citizens that what is good for their neighbour ultimately is good for them too.

"We tried to search for the common good. Differences and diversities should be seen not as sources of division but rather of strength and inspiration. The commission emphasised that these values would sustain peoples in time of need and help them to adapt to rapidly changing situations. So as in 1996, equally in 2008, what is needed is patience, goodwill and understanding that these needs are still there."

The Reeves Commission, as it is now known, advocated an electoral system called the 'alternative vote', which it believed would encourage cooperation by offering incentives to both parties to cooperate across the racial barrier. Under the system, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If no candidate receives a majority of votes on the first count then the candidate who receives the smallest number of votes is eliminated and their first choice votes are transferred to the second choice candidate on each of those ballots. That process continues until one candidate has a majority and is the winner.

"We also recommended more open than communal seats, and we demonstrated how gradually the communal seats could go until everyone was voting from a common roll.

"But as so often happens these recommendations were turned upside down by the Parliament so now there are more communal than open seats: out of 71 seats, 25 are open and 46 are communal. There is also provision for power sharing in the Cabinet. In other words, if any party receives 10 percent of the seats in Parliament it is entitled to seek seats in the Cabinet.

"Of course I need to say that the Parliament is presently not sitting and is not part of the governance of Fiji. Now, many politicians at that time were unhappy at the commission's emphasis on national identity almost at the expense of communal affiliations and institutions. Since 1999 there has been a controversy between



Sir Paul Reeves, the Commonwealth Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Fiji, with Tia Barrett (left) and Donasiano Ruru (right).

two academics, Jonathan Fraenkel and Donald Horowitz. They've been engaged in discussion as to whether the Fijian electoral system has been a failure and not encouraged moderation.

"The interim government of Fiji believes that the electoral system must be changed and regards it as undemocratic because it does not provide for a free and fair election."

Sir Paul said that throughout Fiji's modern history there were those, on the one hand, who believed in and advocated for an integrated non-racial state based on individual rights and those who, on the other, pushed for a political order based on ethnic communities.

"And norms regarding indigenous peoples' rights have been invoked, but at the same time there have been strong tendencies towards political integration and broad based non-ethnic policies. Commodore Bainimarama wishes to resolve any ambiguity in favour of integration. I have not discussed this matter with the other political parties; they may be open to electoral reform but it might not be their top priority.

"The international community is not averse to electoral reform but is concentrated on the Commodore's earlier promise to hold an election under whatever system by March of 2009.

"The interim government established the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF) to produce an aspirational document of the future direction of Fiji, and, as the Commodore told the United Nations last week and I quote, 'to rebuild Fiji into a non-racial, culturally vibrant, well governed truly democratic nation'. The State of the Nation and Economy report and a Draft People's Charter have now been approved by the NCBBF and the consultation launched on the 25th August will continue for some time into October.

"There is also provision for political dialogue, which remains to be defined, but one would assume it would consist of a series of meetings. The Commonwealth model is a forum where all political parties would discuss matters of national and political importance; it would be a broad-based discussion that would include electoral reform. I would facilitate that but I would not necessarily chair it. The Commonwealth has the support of the Pacific Islands Forum, the United Nations, the European Union and the international community for this approach.

"The interim government's model is that the forums should involve all political parties but that they would discuss only one issue, namely electoral reform. So the issue and the matter has not yet been resolved."

Sir Paul said that presently there was a legal challenge to the constitutional position of the

president, his use of reserve powers, and his subsequent appointment of the interim prime minister.

"So returning to constitutionality – if there is such a word – will not be easy but the reality is that Fiji needs an elected parliament to deal with its issues. And, as I have indicated, the international community is insisting on a March 2009 date for an election and the interim government of Fiji has stated that this is not possible. The date is already two months beyond the deadline that the Commonwealth envisaged in what we call the Millbrook Plan of Action for the restoration of democratic government in cases such as Fiji. And so CMAG last week decided to meet again in early 2009 to review progress. It would then consider further measures.

"So the Commonwealth is well placed to help Fiji. It wants Fiji to return to constitutional democracy;

it wants Fiji to resume full membership in this family of nations we call the Commonwealth.

"As the personal representative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, I await the outcome of discussions held elsewhere. I am, as I said, constrained by what I can say, but I remain hopeful. I know that we are talking about Fiji's pathway to the future.

"Maybe a better image would be that of a river, a river which is connected to both its source and its destination and where there is a dynamic movement; there are rocks on the way but we are all committed to the journey."

* The Pacific Islands Forum secretariat issued a statement on 20 November saying the Working Group had held its thirty-third meeting in Suva that day, and had received a paper from Fiji on why it would not be able to hold elections by March 2009. Working Group members reaffirmed the readiness of Forum members to continue to assist Fiji prepare for elections by March 2009.

Spearhead steps up with permanent base

The establishment of a permanent secretariat should enable the Melanesian Spearhead Group to more effectively implement leaders' decisions, the group's first director-general, **Rima Ravusiro**, told *Pacific Connection*.

Speaking from the secretariat headquarters in Port Vila, Ravusiro said the previous system of 'roaming secretariats' rotated between the member countries meant that decisions were often not properly filed, recorded and acted on.

"There has been a gap in implementation. Having a permanent secretariat will help ensure the decisions highlighted by leaders are followed through," he said.

Established in 1993, the Spearhead initially comprised Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with Fiji joining in 1998. The secretariat was opened during this year's

bi-annual leaders' meeting in Port Vila, and Mr Ravusiro is now hard at work – alone – hiring the first 15–16 staff he needs to get up and running.

"I envisage about 30 staff being recruited over five years," he said. "Our budget is not approved, we have to go through formal processes, but we have enough to set up. Once our working groups make substantive decisions, that will impact on our size and budget."

Ravusiro is a former Papua New Guinea trade diplomat who has worked in both the Pacific Islands Forum and Commonwealth secretariats. He said that while Spearhead leaders wanted to collaborate more strongly, they also wanted to work cooperatively with the Forum.

"We will in no way undermine the existence of the Forum – it's just that the Melanesian Spearhead Group is a little bit more focused on issues of concern to our members," he said.

The current free trade agreement had led to "slowly increasing" trade between Spearhead members, he said.

"Given the challenges on the international trade front, it is useful to trade amongst ourselves while we pick up our expertise and capacity."

There was potential for expanded trade in areas such as natural resources and services. "Vanuatu's foreign exchange is very reliant on income from tourism, it's a big earner in Fiji, but tourism potential is untapped in Solomons, PNG and New Caledonia," he said.

While working groups were looking at trade-related subjects such as services, trade facilitation and shipping, the Spearhead was investigating other issues as well. One working group was focused on a Melanesian festival of arts and culture, while another was considering a sub-regional security force.

"A committee is looking at the security issue, especially in terms of responding to the needs of the membership in a manner that is a little more Melanesian-flavoured – with dialogue and maintenance of peace and harmony within the sub-region," he said.

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Urgent need to protect IP

Intellectual property (IP) specialist **Dr David Martin** has been visiting Pacific Island governments advising on what he sees as an urgent need to protect their IP. Pacific affairs columnist **Dev Nadkarni** spoke to him in Samoa at a conference of small, medium and micro enterprises held under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation.

Q How can the Pacific reclaim its stolen IP and help protect future violations by western nations?

A Following the bold leadership of Samoa, the Pacific Island nations need to be explicit with the global marketplace in their insistence that, if patents on pharmaceuticals and electronics and other product – and copyrights and trademarks on creative works and businesses – are going to enjoy WIPO's (World Intellectual Property Organization) proposed protection in the Pacific, signatories from outside the region must respect the current and previous rights that have been expropriated from the region without disclosure or adequate benefit sharing.

Over 3,000 cases of traditional knowledge, biodiversity, mineral and artistic expressions have been taken from the Pacific Islands without economic consideration flowing back to the Island countries. While IP laws in the region have been imposed by international advocates, little if any of the alleged benefits have come to the region.

We propose two immediate actions. We are willing to work with the Pacific Island countries to establish a registry and monitoring system that detects all existing expropriated material that has been patented outside the region and monitor those who are actively engaged in this behaviour for immigration or law enforcement observation. When appropriate, we are looking forward to actively working on the repatriation or invalidation of inappropriately misappropriated rights.

Second, we are proposing the creation of a new form of legal property – the Communal Innovation Trust – which serves to register and hold in perpetual trust all traditional knowledge, remedy, artistic expressions, etc. for their stewardship by the originating communities, which may include licensing, collateralising and other personal property uses of the same. These immediate actions can empower the region to lead the world in the ethical use and dissemination of local rights and knowledge.

Q Is it possible to put up a joint regional front on the IP issue – especially given the fractiousness in the Pacific leadership on several regional issues or should each nation paddle its own canoe?

A Given the common nature of issues confronting the Pacific Island leadership, I believe that many approaches can be done on a regional level.

That said, one need only to spend a few days in the Pacific to know that there are deeply held feelings on who has the best taro and where it originally was planted, or who has what unique artistic expressions. While there are common elements across the region, a fully integrated model will not honour the nuance at the community level so we believe that a unified framework with regional flexibility is the best approach.

Q The next gold rush is expected to be in Pacific waters. How should the Islands prevent themselves from being short changed as they have been in the past as regards their mineral and natural resources?

A Regrettably, some of the Island countries have already entered into agreements that have left little room for flexibility. It is our belief that mineral and resource exploitation must be done with four guiding principles that should be included in every contract with prospector enterprises.

First, prospectors must ensure that they operate under the same international conventions – such as on biodiversity and marine ecology irrespective of accession status within countries. A 'do no harm' ecological commitment must be in place to insure the protection of marine resources.

Second, prospectors must commit to ethical and proportional benefit sharing. This should ideally include minimum conditions for local employment, environmental monitoring, coastal resource and professional management. In addition, revenue sharing license agreements should be floating and pegged to international metals market prices rather than a fixed price. In other words, when the commodity prices go up, the benefit should rise.

Third, local customary land rights and customary uses must be honoured. A number of indigenous groups have sacred links to both the land and the sea, which have profound consequence to the preservation of their societies and values.

Finally, local governments should formalise a monitoring and communication relationship with the relevant international securities oversight bodies that regulate public equity markets. This is to insure investor visibility and transparency on business practices. In short, the international community and the Pacific Island countries must actively ensure that the lessons of the past 75 years are taken into account prior to engaging in much more difficult to monitor seabed activities.



David Martin

Q How will the global financial crisis affect aid in the Pacific region?

A The near term effect of the global financial crisis will impact Pacific nations adversely. As is already evident, export sales of high-end products (such as tuna in the Japanese auction market) will be affected as discretionary spending for high-end restaurants declines. This slow down will affect agriculture and fisheries immediately.

Remittances that account for a significant revenue base for many Pacific Island countries will be affected due to expanding unemployment and under-employment. Investment funds (both aid/donor as well as debt) are already constricting from the traditional sources of Europe, New Zealand, Australia and the US. Capital resource providers such as China will be increasingly strategic in their support of projects where either food security, natural resources, or energy are partnership options.

In the intermediate and long term, currencies and sovereign funds will be affected as pensions – highly dependent on municipal and sovereign bonds – will see significant loss of value through compression on bond repayment. This is a secondary effect that will constrain capital alternatives for aid or capital support.

Q How should the Pacific leadership cope in the short term and the longer term?

A Immediate government response needs to plan for a reduction in revenue (both export and remittance) and costs associated with some expats returning home. Immediate attention should be focused on local and regional opportunities for small and medium sized enterprise creation, on strategic market enterprises in alternative energy, diversified agriculture, ecologically sustainable aquaculture and sustainable health care.

China's presence in the region can be strategically used by providing a possible outlet for the

large estates of technology that China has purchased from the West under compulsory technology transfer programmes that have yet to be commercially deployed in China.

Domestic consumption – even when local production may be more costly – is important to preserve cash flow within the individual countries and within the region. Governments can take a lead by looking at ways in which preferential purchasing flows to local and regional producers, thereby supporting employment and domestic production – two critical variables to weather the current storm. Local governments can encourage legal frameworks for communal innovation trusts to preserve the value of, and support the selective

commercialisation of, indigenous knowledge expressions in medicine, agriculture, aquaculture, art and more.

Q Why are you so interested in the Pacific? How can you help and how do you hope to be compensated for your time and effort?

A My interest in the Pacific comes from my belief that the region holds the promise for innovating a new enterprise and governance model that integrates traditional values with a changing global market. The unsustainable consumption model of the West has led to an economic crisis. Rather than replicating this mistake, which has cost the environment and the social fabric of our countries so dearly, the Pacific can test and model

integrated approaches where traditional wisdom informs the decisions of the future.

Organic agriculture and aquaculture, oceanic and wind energy capture, organic sub-atomic and atomic manufacturing in shellfish and crustaceans, biofuels from algae and biomass, and countless other pioneering opportunities await manifestation here in the Pacific.

David E Martin is founding chief executive of intellectual property based financial risk management consultancy M-CAM. He has worked closely with the US Congress and numerous trade and financial regulatory agencies in the United States, Europe and Asia in advocating and deploying infrastructure to support growing reliance on proprietary rights in business transactions. He is a former assistant professor at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine.

Organics: key to export success?

Samoan Agriculture and Fisheries Ministry chief executive **Kirifi Pouono** and Women in Business Development executive director **Adimaimalaga (Adi) Tafuna'i** say that organics offer major export potential for Samoa and the Pacific region.

The pair, who visited New Zealand recently as recipients of the 2008 Prime Minister's Fellowship awards, have been closely involved in Samoa's small but promising moves towards developing organic agricultural exports.

Tafuna'i's group has been instrumental in establishing an organic coconut oil export business, supplying the United Kingdom-based Body Shop international retail chain with three tonnes of oil every two months since December last year.

Her group worked with small-scale growers to ensure that quality standards and production levels met the Body Shop's standards. With 10,000 hectares of land in Samoa now certified for organic production, Tafuna'i says the coconut oil success is only the beginning.

"We have a number of other products in the pipeline, like bananas, vanilla and cocoa," she said. "This visit is especially exciting, because we are getting to talk to Biosecurity New Zealand and others who can help us.

"It's a process that has come from the bottom up. Our growers can't afford the organic certification process – we have been fortunate to have the support of NZAID and Oxfam New Zealand to get certification," she says.

"The other advantage has been the support of our Prime Minister [Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi]. He has personally taken on organics and fair trade, because we see it is something that can really benefit small Island countries."

The Prime Minister's support had helped the Regional Organic Task Force develop the Pacific Organic Standard, launched in September at a Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) meeting in Samoa.

Tafuna'i said the development of the standard had been funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, with help from SPC and the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), which she described as "the United Nations of organics".

"The big job now is for the Organic Task Force to get the standard accepted world-wide," she said. "A lot of lobbying is being done."

Her group was working hard to establish organics in other Pacific countries, meeting groups from Fiji, Tonga and Kiribati soon after she returned to Samoa.

"We are working out in the region so they can get their organic certification processes under way, with a view to sharing the market in case, for example, a cyclone wipes one market out. It's all part of what the Pacific Plan hopes to do, making countries of the region work together," she said.

Pouono agreed that organics offered good export potential: "It started off at subsistence level, but



Adimaimalaga Tafuna'i (top) and Kirifi Pouono..

we can see from the number of people joining that the potential is there. There are conventional farmers supplying it as well."

He said the Prime Minister's Fellowship visit was a valuable opportunity to make progress on organics and other issues such as biosecurity compliance.

20 years in the Pacific for TVNZ

TVNZ is celebrating 20 years of service to the Pacific region, which began in October 1988 when Niue sought help to fix its broken-down TV system. Financed by an aid grant from New Zealand, TVNZ engineers prefabricated the elements of a small TV station, which they shipped and later installed to provide free-to-air television.

Soon after, the Cook Islands Government asked for help, with television in Rarotonga unwrapped with great ceremony on Christmas Day 1989. Next came Nauru in 1991, followed by Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. A pattern developed of providing technical help, staff training and programmes on S-VHS regularly air-freighted to the islands. Today technology has overtaken taped programmes, and TVNZ's role has diminished as locals take over, but 14 television stations continue to carry the TVNZ brand.

Climate change: action desperately needed

The recent Pacific Climate Change Roundtable held in Apia, Samoa, agreed that the Pacific was important in fighting the impact of climate change, writes Samoan journalist and founder of the *Pacific Current Affairs* news service, **Cherelle Jackson**.

Pacific Island countries hold no resentment towards the developed world for being the major contributors to climate change, even though the Islands have suffered, are suffering and will suffer the obvious and early consequences of changing weather patterns.

In fact, some smaller Pacific Islands will not only lose their lands – they also stand to lose their cultures and ways of life, wiping away the lifeblood of generations of ethnicities and peoples.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) says many Pacific Islands are extremely vulnerable to climate change, climate variability and sea level rise. They will be among the first to suffer the impacts of climate change and be forced to adapt, or to abandon and relocate from their environment.

SPREP says the impacts will be felt for many generations because of the small Island states' low adaptive capacity, high sensitivity to external shocks and high vulnerability to natural disasters.

Recent figures released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that the Pacific contributes only 0.03 percent of global emissions, yet the Islands are notably paying the price of mass emissions.

During the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (PCCR), in October, it was agreed that one Pacific voice would be more effective than individual voices.

The president and chief executive officer of Counterpart International, Lelei Tuisamoa LeLaulu,

said that, unless the Pacific was united with one voice, the region would continue to be ignored by developed countries.

"There is very positive thinking – everybody knows that we contribute the least to climate change emissions but we suffer the most from it. It is a fact that everybody knows and it is just the old Pacific way of seeing the positives of the situation and the need to go for it," he said.

"There is no feeling that the world owes us anything. We are here to say that we suffer the most from climate change emissions, but we want to do the most to adapt and mitigate against its effect.

"The whole point here is that communication is key, because for too long scientists and technical people have driven the debate. Their work is terribly important but we're at the stage now where we have to reach out to the people and their elected representatives to get them to understand, and to get them to speak with a Pacific voice.

"The reason why it is important to get the Pacific voices heard on the international stage, is that we're at the place now where international agreements on dealing with climate change are getting close," Lelei LeLaulu said.

PCCR participants were wary that climate change would have negative impacts on tourism, freshwater availability and quality, aquaculture, agriculture, human settlements, financial services and human health in the Pacific.

Low-lying coastal areas of all islands were especially vulnerable to sea level rise, as well as to changes in rainfall, storm frequency and intensity. Inundation, flooding, erosion and intrusion of sea water were among the likely impacts.

SPREP climate change adviser Espen Ronneberg said the catastrophes would result in economic and social costs beyond the capacity of most Pacific Island countries and threaten the very existence of small atoll countries.



Lelei Tuisamoa LeLaulu, president and chief executive officer of Counterpart International.

IPCC estimated that adaptations to climate change could cost billions of dollars that the Pacific did not have.

Ronneberg said that the PCCR meeting acted as an information sharing and coordinating mechanism for the region, so that best practices and lessons learned could be widely applied across the Pacific.

The concern was especially urgent because there was an economically feasible window of opportunity to halt climate change, yet actions by those most responsible for causing climate change had been uninspiring at best.

Ronneberg said a united front was required from Pacific leaders to address the issue.

Leaders meeting at this year's Pacific Islands Forum in Niue were determined to commit to the ongoing development and implementation of Pacific-tailored approaches to combating climate change.

The next international meeting on climate change will be held in December in Poland. Only then will the Pacific know who is and isn't serious about minimising the impacts of climate change.



Low-lying coastal areas of all islands are especially vulnerable to sea level rise.

Forum grapples with global crisis

By Duncan Wilson

Newly-appointed Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Tuiloma Neroni Slade says the secretariat's immediate concern is the effect of the global financial crisis on Island states.

"It's difficult to give one response or anticipation that would relate to the circumstances of our entire 16 member states," he said.

"Nonetheless, it's a global phenomenon that is not only of serious concern to the largest financial economic powerful countries. It is without question likely to have a fairly serious impact for many other economies."

Slade said the Forum secretariat, alongside the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank's regional offices, would assess the impact of the crisis on Island states.

"We need some diagnostic approach, we need to assess the impacts at the global level and the secretariat is now beginning to do this."

Slade said rising food and fuel costs and, "more seriously," an anticipated decline in tourism,

would particularly hurt Island economies.

He told the Forum's economic ministers meeting in October that current oil and food prices were the highest they had been for at least five years.

"This remains a significant concern for policy makers in our region, particularly given the reliance of Pacific Island countries on importations, and the consequent absorption of prices which have negative macroeconomic effects, as well as household level effects."

Slade also said the crisis presented "openings and opportunities" for new economic reform, and a renewed focus on trade and regional cooperation.

"We need, as a region, to take charge of a challenging situation to demonstrate the resilience forum states have shown in past crises. We need in particular to ... renew commitment to sound policies and structural reforms."

He said that if Island states shared their experiences in dealing with high food and fuel prices, and hastened the development of an agreement to bulk purchase fuel, the region would better cope



Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Tuiloma Neroni Slade. (Photo: www.iisd.ca)

with the global financial turmoil.

Slade said one positive development was a recent draft agreement for bulk purchasing of fuel.

The economic crisis set "a new clear direction" for the forum's Pacific Plan and leaders' goals, but did not compromise it.

"It is a vision that provides ambition for closer regional cooperation and the pursuit of the region's strategic goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security. There cannot be a more noble reach for our regional endeavour."

Focus on economy for broader social gains

By Duncan Wilson

New Zealand's new Minister of Pacific Island Affairs, Hon Georgina te Heuheu, says the National-led Government's "front and central" concern with the economy will bring specific gains for Pacific peoples in education, social services and employment.

"This has been our overriding objective, and I have seen that when a recession or stock market crash hits, Pacific Islanders and Māori are particularly vulnerable because of their over-representation in lower socio-economic groups and [in] education and health statistics," te Heuheu said.

"That's why one of our core components of economic growth was a focus on standards in education, because there is no doubt in my mind that the advances of the last 25 years for Pacific Islanders and Māori are tied to improvements in those areas."

Te Heuheu said she was impressed with the "strong team" at the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, but wanted to work with other ministries "to ensure that the outcomes we want for Pacific communities and families are properly supported throughout".



Georgina te Heuheu, Minister of Pacific Island Affairs.

She said National's policy of unbundling public sector contracts should improve outcomes for Pacific Island communities and organisations.

"We recognise that the best outcomes are those that are delivered closer to the source of those who need them. In respect of Pacific peoples, we want to empower communities and ensure they are properly resourced and structured, rather than simply weighted in Wellington."

Te Heuheu said she appreciated New Zealand-resident Pacific Islanders' concerns for those family members in the Islands who did not enjoy similar levels of job or welfare security.

She would review the high costs of sending remittances from New Zealand to the Pacific Islands, and explore the possibility of expanding the regional seasonal employer scheme.

"Every Pacific person in New Zealand has a family member living in the region who they are concerned about. These communities have identified remittances and the potential for employment in New Zealand as two very important issues," she said.

"In the last two decades we have seen Pacific Islanders and Māori become beautiful facets of New Zealand society, so it is particularly critical that we build on that. New Zealand's future workforce and population will be brown, and that is why the Prime Minister John Key is going to put a huge emphasis on education, health and economic and employment outcomes. I'm really positive about that."

Te Heuheu is also Minister for Courts, Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control and Associate Minister of Māori Affairs. She has been a list MP since 1996, and before that, a lawyer.

'Ramping up' NZ focus on Pacific Islands

New Zealand's new National Party-led coalition government is expected to be looking for greater engagement with Pacific Island nations, writes journalist **Duncan Wilson**.

Foreign Affairs Minister Hon Murray McCully says a National Party government will further ramp up the country's focus on the Pacific, especially in aid and trade.

In a wide-ranging pre-election interview, McCully said the party "saw the need for a much higher level of engagement with the Pacific nations".

"We believe that if you apply any kind of objective standard of measure to what we [New Zealand] have achieved, then it's just not good enough – however generous we've been, however hard we've worked in the Pacific. We've got to lift the intensity of our effort."

McCully said that New Zealand must address its massive trade imbalance with the Islands.

"The trade figures are not figures that should give us any pride whatsoever. And I think we have to ask ourselves some very difficult questions indeed about the focus of some of the aid and support delivered, whether we can do a lot better at providing infrastructure that is going to make it possible for smaller countries to trade more profitably with us, or looking carefully at some of the barriers to trade.

"If you don't provide a basis for a substantial improvement in self-sufficiency and don't provide a vehicle for an increase in trade back to New Zealand, then I think we're not working toward a long term, sustainable solution."

McCully also indicated that the National Party might ramp up the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, which enables Pacific Islanders to work in New Zealand in areas of labour shortages.

His comments followed the release of National's immigration policy, which proposed a temporary work visa of up to six months for any visitor with a guaranteed seasonal job offer. Any final decision on the RSE scheme would depend on the New Zealand economy.

"We have an open mind about it. We're very mindful of the fact that the intended beneficiaries,

the smaller Island nations that receive the remittances, that seems to be something that they're enthusiastic about, but it's also something that tends to relieve pressure in the labour market."

McCully also said that New Zealand would boost its aid to the Pacific and ensure better outcomes for taxpayer money.

His party had already committed to Pacific aid baselines for the next few years, but would further gear New Zealand's aid toward the region.



New Zealand's new Foreign Affairs Minister Hon Murray McCully.

"There should be more focus on the Pacific, compared to other parts of the world.

"If you look at the numbers at the moment, about 35 per cent of our ... bilateral aid [goes to the Pacific], and up to 50 per cent if you throw in funding of a regional focus. We think we need to lift the focus."

McCully said that Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Port Moresby declaration, which emphasised shared and measurable goals between Australia and Pacific Island governments, foreshadowed National's approach to aid delivery.

"The approach they've taken of expanding their aid commitment and at the same time cooperating on the establishment of some achievable goals and setting some reciprocal obligations on the part of the donees, is very much an approach that is in tune with our own thinking," he said.

McCully sat on the foreign affairs select committee that considered the Auditor-General's review of New Zealand aid. He said the whole committee shared a concern that donor funds – taxpayers' money, McCully emphasised – be properly administered and delivered.

"We need to be realistic about what we're achieving, whether we're committing enough resources, but also whether we're committing enough time and energy to it as well. There's always a risk in these areas that you can get comfortable doing again this year what you did last year, and not being ruthless enough in appraising your own performance to do better, and I think that's the focus we need to bring to it."

McCully's other foreign affairs priorities include closer coordination of trans-Tasman countries' foreign policy. He has been impressed with Rudd's "sense of urgency and enthusiasm" toward regional cooperation, and, as this issue of *Pacific Connections* went to press, McCully was due to meet his Australian counterpart Stephen Smith in Lima to discuss the Port Moresby declaration.

McCully said he would also work to further improve the United States–New Zealand relationship. He acknowledged that the National Party's Pacific focus departed from the party's "traditional inclination toward Canberra, Washington and London".

"What we've tried to do in the last couple of years is shift the focus not away from those places, because they're obviously very important to us, but I think we see a need for a much higher level of engagement with the much smaller Pacific nations."

Parts of this profile first appeared in the October issue of the Pacific political and business monthly *Islands Business* – www.islandsbusiness.com

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New MP ex-islands' ambassador

New Zealand's new Member of Parliament for Rotorua, **Todd McClay**, was, until recently, Niue and Cook Islands' ambassador to the European Union, writes **Ulamila Kurai Wragg**, managing editor of *Pacific Magazine*.

The new National Party MP, and son of former politician Roger McClay, was appointed ambassador by the Cook Islands Government in 2000 after it signed the Cotonou Agreement that paved the way to financial and technical assistance from the European Union (EU) and its Asia, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP). Later on, he was also endorsed by Niue. McClay is believed to be the youngest ambassador appointed to the EU.

Speaking on the Cook Islands, McClay said the country had benefited greatly from its relationship with the EU. However, he warned that only the Pacific Islands could determine the pulse of maintaining the relationship.

Niue's Premier Toke Talagi said McClay contributed greatly to his country by representing it at various negotiations around that part of the world apart from the EU participation and ACP meetings. He had also facilitated many international meetings for the country.

Talagi, who is also chair of the Pacific Islands Leader's Forum, said Niue was still benefitting from the many useful connections it inherited from McClay, and he had already exchanged a number of ideas with him since the New Zealand election.

In recognition of his work for Cook Islands, McClay was made an honorary Cook Islands national in 2005 – an honour he plans to mention in his maiden speech to parliament.

The Cook Islands is still weighing up its options about finding a replacement for McClay in Brussels. Cook Islands Foreign Affairs Minister Wilkie Rasmussen said it would be ideal if the successor played several roles in the office,



Todd McClay, former Niue and Cook Islands ambassador to the EU.

including being responsible for International Maritime Organization discussions.

McClay lived in Brussels from 1992 until recently, and has worked as chief of staff to the President of the European Parliament and Leader of the British Conservatives in the European Parliament. He holds a Bachelor's degree in politics and is completing a Master of Law. He also owns a communications and lobbying company, and has been a property developer. He is of New Zealand and Irish descent.

NZ voters elect six Pacific Island MPs

The New Zealand election in November saw six Pacific Island Members of Parliament (MPs) elected in the 120 mixed member proportional (MMP) system. All but one of the Pacific Island MPs represent the Labour Party, which is now in opposition after leading coalition governments for the past nine years.

The following list is in alphabetical order.

Charles Chauvel, Labour, list MP. Of Tahitian, Scots and French descent, Chauvel had experience in law and commerce before entering parliament as a list MP in 2006. After gaining a law degree in New Zealand, he went on to become clerk to the Chief Justice, and recently was parliamentary secretary to the Attorney-General and served on Labour's caucus resource committee. He is Labour's spokesperson on climate change and energy.

Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, Labour, MP for Mana. First elected to parliament as a list MP in 1999, Laban was New Zealand's first Pacific Island woman MP. She has represented the Mana electorate since 2002 and was Minister of Pacific Island Affairs. In 1992 she received her Samoan chieftain title Luamanuvao for the district of Vaimauga, Upolu. Laban is known for her community involvement in Pacific women's groups, churches, family therapy and health. She is Labour's spokesperson on Pacific Island Affairs, and associate on health and economic development.

Peseta Sam Lotu-liga, National, MP for Maungakiekie. Samoan-born Lotu-liga was raised in South Auckland and is an Auckland City councillor. He has commerce and law degrees from the University of Auckland, and an MBA from the University of Cambridge. He has worked as a solicitor for Russell McVeagh, a financial analyst for Bankers Trust (London) and as an executive consultant for Macquarie Bank (Sydney). He is on the boards of primary health organisations, One Tree Hill College and youth programme *Great Potentials*. He has also represented New Zealand in

the Barbarians rugby team. Lotu-liga was bestowed the chieftain title Peseta for his village of Apia.

Dr Rajen Prasad, Labour, list MP. Born in Fiji, Prasad has been New Zealand's Race Relations Conciliator, Chief Families Commissioner and a member of the Residence Review Board. He spent his professional life in social policy and the social services, and was an associate professor at Massey University. Of Fijian-Indian descent, he is Labour's spokesperson on the voluntary and community sector, associate on ethnic affairs and for social development – family and CYF (child, youth and family services).

Carmel Sepuloni, Labour, list MP. Of Samoan, Tongan and Palagi ancestry, Sepuloni is New Zealand's first MP of Tongan descent and second Pacific woman MP. Just 31, Sepuloni has a postgraduate Diploma in Education from the University of Auckland and has started a Masters in Development Studies. She has taught in both New Zealand and Samoa. She was most recently University of Auckland Faculty of Arts equity manager (managing initiatives to support the academic achievement of Māori and Pacific students). Sepuloni is Labour's spokesperson on civil defence, and associate on tertiary education and social development.

Su'a William Sio, Labour, MP for Mangere. Sio became a list MP in April 2008, then won the Mangere seat from sitting MP Taito Phillip Field, who stood as an independent in the election. Sio has been a Manukau City councillor since 2001, and last year became deputy mayor – the first Pacific person to hold this position. He is Samoan, and holds the chieftain title of Su'a for the district of Lotofaga, Upolu. He is known for his strong family and religious values, and had strong influence in the trade union movement in Samoa. He is Labour spokesperson on Customs, associate spokesperson on Pacific Island affairs, and associate on local government.

Compiled by Esther Lauaki

Vanuatu election: looking for a change

Megan Whelan from *Radio New Zealand International* travelled to Port Vila in September to cover Vanuatu's elections. The election resulted in the Vanua'aku Party leading a coalition with the previously ruling National United Party.

The mood in Port Vila three days out from the election, was, like elsewhere, one of change. Young people were more engaged than ever, and every person I spoke to seemed to want new, fresh government.

Sitting in the candidates' nakamals (kava bars), listening to meetings, speeches and the odd hip hop performance, it was clear people wanted change. A record 343 candidates, from more than 25 parties, and including 80 independents and 12 women contested the election, reflecting that mood. Election advertising proclaimed change, an end to corruption, holding the 'old parties' to account. The economy, the rising cost of living, especially food and petrol, and education were the major issues.

The campaign closed three days before the election, on Saturday night. There were rallies all over town, the most well attended for independent candidate Ralph Regenvanu. His supporters wore T-shirts proclaiming "inaf, emi time blong chenis" or "enough, it's time for a change" and said they were fed up with the old, established parties and candidates.

But, talking to those established parties, they were offering stability and continuity, after a coalition government that proclaimed it had delivered economic growth and prosperity. Willie Jimmy, the Minister of Finance, said if people were that upset, he'd have already lost his job. Another minister, Maxime Carlot Korman, said the independent candidates were only in it for themselves. Another candidate said the election was about young versus old.

In the electoral office, they had been doing a bit of change of their own, updating the roll, and changing the registration rules to make it easier for people to vote and harder to duplicate votes. As a cast of



Voters in Vanuatu queue to have their say on election day. Photo: Megan Whelan.

hundreds piled into the office to apply for permission to cast a proxy vote, principal electoral officer Martin Tete said he was confident everything would go smoothly. There were 120 police officers on hand, in case there were any problems, and polling day was declared a public holiday. There was also a liquor ban. Ballot papers had been printed, like Post-It pads – with each candidate's name and photo – and casting was a matter of simply pulling one off and putting it in an envelope.

While the electoral office was sure polling would go smoothly, by 7am there were queues all round the block, with waits of some two hours. While those cleared during the day, there were also some reports of 'voting irregularities' which meant a number of people were turned away. But a rumour that a large number of people were left off the electoral roll resulted in a violent protest at the electoral office, where a group of about 50 men crowded into the office and assaulted an official.

As the unofficial results started to filter through, it was clear that some of that mood for change had been realised. Two of the country's longest serving politicians were ousted. Willie Jimmy, in Port Vila, and Barak Sope (a former prime minister), in Efate Rural, were both dumped. Jimmy said it was the "will of the people". Ralph Regenvanu won Port Vila by a landslide but was the only one of his bloc of independents to get a seat.

Except for those changes, the two main parties in the coalition government held their ground, although there are more than 15 new MPs. The leader of the Vanua'aku Party, which with 11 seats has the most MPs, Edward Natapei said the big parties didn't do their homework and he was expecting forming a government to be tough.

The Vanua'aku Party formed a bloc with its coalition partner of the previous government, the National United Party, which has eight MPs. The bloc claimed to have the support of a number of independents and smaller parties, giving it a majority of 29 MPs. But a rival bloc formed around the Vanuatu Republican Party, which had seven seats, also claimed the support of 29 MPs.

Natapei was able to form a government, but since then, there has already been a motion of no-confidence, which has seen a cabinet reshuffle, and more opposition MPs being offered cabinet posts, to secure the Vanua'aku/National United Party hold on power.

What remains to be seen now is if that government can stay together, and deliver the stability and policy promises it made.

The Vanua'aku Pati ('Our Land Party') won 11 out of 52 seats, becoming the largest party in parliament. It was founded in the early 1970s by Walter Lini, and was a key supporter of the previous National United Party government.



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Foundation CEO moves on

Monday 26 January 2009 marks the fifth anniversary of Pacific Cooperation Foundation chief executive **Vince McBride's** appointment. He writes about the organisation's achievements and how it is time to make way for new blood at the helm.

It is hard to credit that five years have gone by so quickly. In January 2004, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was only six months old, Voreqe Bainimarama's coup in Fiji and the burning of Nuku'alofa in Tonga were yet to take place, a New Zealand work scheme for Pacific Island peoples was but a dream, and the Pacific Plan had only just been born. How things change!

The PCF did not set out to address these big issues directly, though we certainly had input on New Zealand's response to a number of them. But much of our focus was, of necessity, on establishing and developing our own organisation.

Quite a bit has been achieved since our lowly start on 26 January 2004. When I started work, there was just me and Bev Chapman, who looked after the books and answered the phones, until May when Florence Aiono joined us as administration manager. In June, Tina McNicholas and David Vaeafe started as programme managers and we were a team of four until the appointment of Drew Glucina as sponsorship manager in October 2007. Then, in July this year, we added Pamela George as a half-time administration assistant. Subject to a staffing review next year, another staff member may be added to give us more 'delivery power'.

The PCF had been formally launched by the then Governor-General, Dame Silvia Cartwright, and we were delighted when the new Governor-General, Hon Anand Satyanand, agreed to be the PCF's patron. With a Pacific background himself, the Governor-General has taken a keen interest in the foundation's work, and last year he was kind enough to allow us to host a profile-raising function at Government House in Auckland.

With staff appointed so late in the 2003/04 financial year we could not spend our budget, and were forced to ask the Government if we could carry forward the unspent allocation to the next year. We have now moved to a situation of receiving an almost 50 percent funding increase in 2008/09 from \$900,000 to \$1,347,000. Spending this amount presents challenges for such a small organisation.

There have been a number of notable achievements over the past five years. Without doubt the most significant was the Pacific Labour Market Conference in June 2006, which responded to the Government's concerns about the potential for a proposed Pacific worker scheme to generate a new wave of overstayers and for workers to be exploited. The conference led to the establishment of the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme on 30 April 2007.

Engagement with the media has been a key activity from the outset, resulting in more in-depth stories on Pacific issues in our daily newspapers and on local and national radio stations. The PCF's sponsorship of the Pacific Island Issues category in the Qantas Media Awards has also encouraged more journalists to seek excellence in reporting on Pacific issues.

Our magazine, with its slightly quirky name *Pacific Connection*, has gone from strength to strength and now has more than 4,000 readers in 55 countries. This year, we are aiming to develop a web-based version of *Pacific Connection* alongside the hard copy, and to introduce several new features to our website to give it more appeal to the younger generation and to those for whom the electronic media is increasingly their main information source.

We were delighted to be able to secure some of the most respected leaders in the region to present the PCF Annual Pacific Address. They included Samoa's Prime Minister Hon Tuilaepa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi in 2005, former Papua New Guinea Chief Justice Sir Arnold Amet in 2006, Vanuatu's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon Sato Kilman in 2007, and Fiji's former Vice-President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi this year. All provided us with rich insights into current developments in the region.

Each year we have run a number of worthwhile seminars to educate New Zealanders and provide platforms for debate on issues of importance to New Zealand and the region. Topics have included elections and democracy in Fiji, the move from a strict monarchy to a democracy in Tonga, the work of RAMSI in Solomon Islands, and the role of the military but unarmed Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville.

We have made small but effective contributions to business development in the region through the establishment of two web-based tools – *Pacificbizonline.com* and *path2nz.com*. The former provides a platform where Pacific businesses can register details of the products and services they wish to market, for no charge. The latter is an A-Z guide for Pacific peoples wishing to export agricultural produce to New Zealand. This year, it will be made available in several Pacific languages.

During the five year period, there have been two parliamentary inquiries on Pacific issues – one into New Zealand's relations with Tonga, and the other into New Zealand's relations with all South Pacific countries. The PCF provided extensive written



PCF chief executive Vince McBride.

submissions to both, and the then chairs of the PCF Board of Trustees and the chief executive also appeared before the committees. In both cases, members of the committees went out of their way to express their thanks for the quality of the submissions from the PCF.

A recent successful event was a symposium titled *Tok Talanoa – Pathways to the Future for Melanesia and New Zealand*. This was addressed by a high powered line-up of key regional figures including: Fiji's former Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu, Solomon Islands Chief Justice Sir Albert Palmer, Fiji's former Foreign and Trade Minister Kaliopate Tavola (also the region's chief negotiator of the economic partnership agreements with the European Union), and our own Sir Paul Reeves, the Commonwealth Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Fiji. The symposium opened up many possibilities for engagement with Melanesia – the issue will be just how many of them can be pursued!

The PCF is too small to attempt to do too much purely on its own. We prefer to operate jointly with others with similar interests. We network with non-governmental and community organisations, universities, regional institutions, key individuals and government agencies across New Zealand and the region, including New Zealand high commissions. We would be significantly less effective without these agencies' support.

All good things must come to an end and it is time for me to move on, to make way for new blood at the helm and some fresh ideas and new directions for the PCF. My heartfelt thanks go to Florence, David, Tina, Drew and Pamela for all their support in these formative years. We can only guess at what lies around the corner for the Pacific, but I hope I have helped you all to prepare the PCF well to face the challenges ahead and that it will go from strength to strength in the quality of its engagement over the next five years.

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