

Latest Press Statement

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New Forum Chair calls for removal of barriers against democracy

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The Chair of the 41st Pacific Islands Forum and Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, Hon. Edward Natapei, MP, has called for the removal of barriers and elements in the region that deny democracy and good governance.

In his inaugural speech as the new Chair of the Forum, Prime Minister Natapei said: "The time has come for all of us to move forward to the next level of our regional cooperation where Pacific countries and territories can embrace regional integration and breakdown the barriers separating us.

"We need to be talking much more about how we can bring hope to the Pacific citizens who are struggling to find employment; who are without political freedom; who want to ensure that their children receive decent education; and who are prepared to confront the scourge of HIV/AIDS and other health epidemics."

The new Forum Chair added: "We need to break down those barriers and remove elements of our societies that deny democracy and good governance in order that we as a region can celebrate our common vision of a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance, its full observance of democratic values, and its defense of human rights taking into account the diversity of our respective cultures and traditions. The Biketawa Declaration, now in its 10th year, provides the guiding principles for good governance, democracy and respect for the rule of law and human rights."

"However, in respect of these values, it is of concern that a founding member of the Forum, the Republic of Fiji Islands, remains suspended because of its breaches of these fundamental principles.

"As Leaders of Pacific Islands nations, we have the duty and responsibility to remain engaged with Fiji so that democratic principles and practices could be restored in Fiji as soon as possible."

Under the Biketawa Declaration, the Forum has successfully restored law and order and rebuilt Solomon Islands through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and helped Nauru to overcome its financial difficulties under the Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru (PRAN) demonstrating that regionalism can work.

"We must be proud of those positive regional endeavours. We must remain united in pursuing our common quest for a Pacific region that is respected for the quality of its governance and capacity to deliver services to its people," Prime Minister Natapei said.

The new Forum Chair added: "We also need to remove barriers to our economies, to better promote the free flow of goods, services and investment throughout the region. Therefore, the development of regional trade arrangements such as PICTA and PACER-Plus are vehicles to achieve this."

Prime Minister Natapei said he wants a new regionalism that is characterized by "our citizens enjoying high standards of

health and education, long lives and many opportunities; where Pacific economic performance is constantly improving, driven by environmentally sustainable service industries.”

“It would be regionalism whereby coups, civil wars and the dangers of so-called ‘failed states’ are relegated to the past; whereby the Pacific is integrated in the wider region, and whereby we can have an influential voice in world affairs. This is within our reach and with the spirit of partnership we can achieve this.”

School children waving the flags of all the Forum member countries welcomed the Leaders to the official ceremony and traditional dancers representing all the provinces in Vanuatu entertained them. Vanuatu’s well-known female singer, Vannessa Quai also entertained the Forum Leaders.

The Forum Leaders held a plenary session after the official opening ceremony. They will go for their Retreat tomorrow at the Havannah Resort outside of the capital Port Vila. The Leaders will issue a communiqué containing their decisions at the end of the Retreat.

ENDS.