

FORUM OFFICIALS COMMITTEE PRE-FORUM AND BUDGET & WORK PROGRAMME SESSION

STATEMENT BY FORUM SECRETARIAT SECRETARY GENERAL, GREG URWIN

Forum Secretariat, Suva, Fiji

3 - 4 OCTOBER 2006

Distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen. A very warm welcome to Suva, and of course to the Forum Secretariat. I hope you have been able to have some rest after your travel here.

2. It has been – it certainly feels that it has been – a very busy year. It has been the first year of implementation of the Pacific Plan following its adoption by Leaders in Port Moresby in October 2005. We have seen the holding of a range of Summit and high level meetings with the region's main partners and the development of new, potentially more effective consultative relationships with them. The trade agenda has gathered pace. Important new work has been done on the regional architecture. Internally, our new structure has been bedded down, and is now being fine tuned.

3. I would like to say something about our specific activities since our last meeting here in Suva in October 2005. I will not but try to cover everything that the Secretariat has done during the past 12 months, but I hope that as you read some of the documents made available to you, you will get a comprehensive picture.

4. First, the Pacific Plan. Significant progress has been made in its implementation during the past 12 months. The role of the Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC) in providing political oversight and guidance on its implementation and the reporting of the Plan to Leaders, Members and stakeholders has been critical. At its meeting yesterday, PPAC agreed on key achievements and challenges of Pacific Plan implementation and recommended future directions which now form the basis of the annual report to Leaders. Many of these issues will be of relevance to this Committee.

5. Among them is the importance of improving national implementation of regional initiatives – a challenge which, if not overcome, will undermine the push for strengthened regionalism and integration in the Pacific. Regional processes and institutions exist wholly and solely for the benefit of members, and we continue to encourage members, as strongly as we can, to integrate those processes into their national policy and planning mainstream. Indeed, the Pacific Plan and for that matter, almost any other regional endeavours will not work if this does not happen.

6. The Secretariat has been helping strengthen these national/regional connections through support for national planning processes and specific assistance to Smaller Island States. This activity will intensify during the next 12 months as these support measures are further developed, and hopefully extended. New resources now available to boost the Forum Secretariat's public outreach capacity will improve and promote understanding and awareness of the benefits of regionalism and the Pacific Plan.

7. Extending partnerships in the Pacific to support regional approaches is also an important element in strengthening regional cooperation and integration. Following the adoption last year by Leaders of a new constituent Agreement for the Forum and a policy on Associate

membership and observers as a mechanism to enhance the contacts between the Forum and non-sovereign Pacific Territories, applications have been received from New Caledonia, French Polynesia and American Samoa for Associate membership, and Wallis and Futuna for observer status. The Committee also has before it recommendations that the UN, Commonwealth and ADB be invited to become Forum observers. These applications and recommendations, if accepted, would open the door to greater participation by non-sovereign territories and key partners.

8. A stronger basis has also been developed for NGO involvement in implementing and monitoring the Pacific Plan and for their participation in Forum-related processes more generally. Some of the proposals connected with this are now before Members for their consideration. As well, we have developed specific consultative processes with key development partners and international organisations.

9. The Secretariat has played a major role in facilitating the Leaders' summits with Japan and France, in the preparations for the China-PIC Economic Development & Cooperation Forum, and in a range of high level meetings with the EU. This year has been a particularly heavy one in terms of Leaders' summits but it has been gratifying to receive positive feedback about the support provided by the Secretariat to these meetings. With increasing interest by major partners in standalone consultative 3 arrangements, this will be an area in which the Secretariat's work seems bound to expand.

10. All of our major partners are now, broadly speaking, committed to using the Plan as a framework to better align their programmes with national and regional priorities. The review of the Post-Forum Partners dialogue process, for your discussion today should, if endorsed, help us to further improve the quality of our engagement with a broader range of Pacific partners. These greater commitments from development partners to our region highlight the need to keeping working at improving coordination and implementation of their programmes, in keeping with agreements under the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the emerging Pacific Principles of Aid Effectiveness.

11. Increasing opportunities for Pacific Islanders to share their expertise within the region is another Pacific Plan priority on which the Secretariat has been focusing. Guidelines for a new Pacific Regional Volunteers Scheme, developed with SPC, are almost complete. And a new Forum Young Professionals Scheme, aimed at boosting regional policy skills, now complements an expanded Forum Fellowship Scheme to further develop regional capacity.

12. For their part, CROP agencies have developed a process to implement and review the list of Pacific Plan initiatives approved by Leaders, and to identify issues, gaps, organisational and resource synergies to assist PPAC in its work. This institutional collaboration supports the strengthened regional cooperation and integration aimed for by the Pacific Plan and it may be further developed if Leaders endorse the recommendations of the review of the Regional Institutional Framework. A member of the review team will be presenting this report to FOC for discussion.

13. I will now offer something on the specific activities of the Secretariat, as they relate to the four pillars of the Pacific Plan.

Security 14. Under the framework of the Biketawa Declaration, the Political and Security Programme assists the Secretary General in his Good Offices role which includes, as required, the provision of advice on political and security developments to member countries. A range of activities have also been initiated to build the Secretariat's and FIC capacity in conflict prevention and peace building. This has included exploration of a 4 sustainable

model for a crisis early warning system and development of a Track 2 capacity building strategy for the Secretariat and members. These activities are expected to be strengthened through further collaboration with the UNDP's Sub-regional Centre, which is also active in this area. USP will be launching a diplomacy programme in November. This programme, which will address the lack of training opportunities in this area for Forum Island Countries, was initiated and seed funded by the Secretariat.

15. Members have recognised the importance of establishing tenure and administration systems that avoid, prevent or minimise conflict over land, in a way that facilitates economic development and recognises and protects customary practice. In the context of the Biketawa Declaration and other existing mechanisms, the June meeting of the Forum Regional Security Committee was supportive of the consideration of options for responding, at a regional and/or national level, to conflict situations arising from land disputes. The FRSC endorsed the Secretariat implementing Phase I of a Land Management and Conflict Minimisation Project which will comprise desk and country case studies. This is a major initiative for the Secretariat; it has the potential to make a significant contribution, in the long term, to peace and stability in the region. There are also many potential pitfalls in such a project and we will be taking a steady, measured and long-term approach to it.

16. In respect of RAMSI, perhaps the most critical of all our current regional endeavours, the Secretariat has worked on the recommendations of the 2005 Forum Eminent Persons Group, a number of which are now underway. A Forum representative to Solomon Islands will soon be appointed. This should strengthen the Forum's engagement with key stakeholders in Solomon Islands. The Programme is also collaborating with UNDP on possible peace and development activities in Solomon Islands.

17. Forum election observer missions were conducted in Solomon Islands in March this year and Fiji in May. These election observations, both of which were conducted, I think, with considerable success, are a visible demonstration of the Forum's support for peaceful and democratic governance in member countries and were welcomed by the people and governments of both countries.

18. In 2003, Forum Leaders adopted key principles of good governance. The Forum Secretariat has assisted a small number of Forum 5 Island Countries in conducting national consultations and in adapting the regional model leadership code. In 2005-2006 the Secretariat has been working particularly with Nauru and its leadership legislation is now ready for enactment. Assistance is also being discussed with the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Kiribati, and will continue to be available to Forum Island Countries interested in adopting leadership codes.

19. The annual meeting of the Forum Regional Security Committee, which I've already mentioned, continues to be the major regional security forum, and benefits from strong support from key law and order agencies and other regional and international stakeholders. It is now seen as the key meeting for setting the regional security agenda. The holding of Session Two in retreat format has been a success, with members contributing freely and very usefully to discussion of issues formerly perceived as too sensitive. The confidence that members have developed in this process is greatly welcomed. With respect to law and border enforcement, there continues to be good cooperation in the fight against transnational crime, including counter terrorism, and the Secretariat has engaged actively with key law and border organisations. There were significant decisions by this year's FRSC facilitating the more effective collection of crime data and the strengthening of border security. There have also been significant regional responses achieved in respect of disaster management planning, peacekeeping, HIV/AIDS interventions and the establishment of a working group to

review customs legislation in the region. The Pacific Anti-Money Laundering Programme is now operational and the US Government has recently advised of a further USD 1.2 million in funding for the programme.

20. Pacific Island Countries share a number of similar challenges in the law and justice field. Despite many years of regional effort and development assistance, some of these remain difficult to overcome. The Pacific Islands Law Officers' Meeting (PILOM) is an annual meeting of senior government law officers from Pacific countries, most often Attorneys-General, Solicitors-General and senior Crown Counsel. PILOM members believe that PILOM could and should be more effective, and wish to pursue greater cooperation and engage more strongly in shaping the regional legal agenda. In support of this, the Secretariat has, at the request of PILOM, coordinated a review of the existing regional approach to law and justice and the role of Law Officers in it. The review will be considered at PILOM's meeting in November and on the basis of it we look forward to PILOM's strengthened participation and contribution to regional law and justice issues.

21. Legal drafting capacity remains a challenge for most small Forum Island Countries. After several years of providing consultants, the Secretariat has decided to take a longer-term approach. It has recently appointed two legal drafters whose priority will be to develop and implement a strategy for ensuring sustainable drafting capacity in Forum Island Countries.

Good Governance 22. With regard to good governance issues, the key priorities for immediate implementation in the Pacific Plan are: • Regional support to consolidate commitments to key institutions such as Audit and Ombudsman offices, Customs, Leadership Codes, Anti-Corruption Institutions and Departments of Attorneys General; including through judicial training and education; • Regional support for the Forum Principles of Good Leadership and Accountability; • Enhancement of governance mechanisms, including in resource management; and in the harmonization of traditional and modern values and structures; and • Where appropriate, ratification and implementation of international and regional human rights conventions etc and for meeting, reporting and other requirements.

23. The Asian Development Bank, cooperating with us and development partners, has begun working with Pacific Auditors General to progress the Pacific Regional Audit Initiative (PRAI). This work is intended to produce a robust design framework for the PRAI and is likely to attract ADB technical assistance.

24. The Secretariat has completed draft Terms of Reference to investigate the proposal for a regional ombudsman. This will now be discussed with partners including the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Pacific Sub Regional Centre (PSRC) and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Secretariat is liaising with partners in their ongoing work on anti-corruption institutions, work which includes AusAID and NZAID's judicial development programmes, and UNDP and Transparency International's work on anti-corruption institutions. The Secretariat is presently working with UNDP on the development of sub-regional anti-corruption plans, in the context of the United Nations' Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

25. On the Forum Principles of Good Leadership and Accountability, the Secretariat is working closely with UNDP, USP, Transparency International (Fiji) and the Government of Fiji to raise awareness of public ethics and accountability issues. On enhancing governance mechanisms, particularly the strengthening of traditional courts, the Secretariat has held consultations with various partners to identify work in this area. **The Secretariat is liaising closely with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Commonwealth**

Parliamentary Association, UNDP and the Pacific Centre for Public Integrity on Freedom of Information mechanisms for the region and is collaborating with UNDP on the outcomes of the Regional Workshop on the Right to Information held in August 2006 with UNDP, the Pacific Regional Rights Team (RRRT), the Pacific Centre for Public Integrity (PCPI) and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI).

26. With the help of USP, Pacific Governance Indicators have been developed and these will be useful benchmarks for the future. Other available international indicators such as the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC)'s Cost of Doing Business Survey shows how much work the region needs to do in this area. Such measures often attract controversy, but they are part of the context in which we operate and ultimately, we ignore them at our peril. In support of participatory democracy and consultative decision-making, the Secretariat, with UNIFEM and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is now following up on the recommendations of the Pacific Regional Workshop on Advancing Women's Representation in Parliament in collaboration with UNIFEM, SPC UNDP and the CPA.

27. Following the first Human Rights Mechanisms Workshop held in Nadi in 2005, the Secretariat has become more engaged, with key partners, in human rights issues. Research papers have been commissioned on national human rights institutions; the interface between custom and human rights; and the added value for States in ratifying international human rights treaties. This is a complicated area – and one in which the approaches taken by our members necessarily vary, and it is hoped that this research work will help them work through the issues.

28. I have already mentioned the Regional Institutional Framework Review, which will be before Leaders at their forthcoming meeting. This is a regional governance issue in itself, one, in my view, of fundamental importance.

29. In response to Leaders' requirements for a Regional Institutional Framework (RIF) that is better suited to the 'new' regionalism now developing, a group of eminent Pacific Islanders have consulted with all member governments of the Forum and of the Pacific Community and have completed their reports. The Forum Chair and Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea has noted the potential of the RIF "to shape the nature and quality of our regional cooperation into the future".

Economic Growth 30. The 10th Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) was held, successfully, in Solomon Islands in July to consider the region's economic growth experience over the past decade and key regional economic integration issues.

31. The 2006 Biennial FEMM Stocktake demonstrated that FICs have progressed in the implementation of the Forum Eight Principles of Accountability, with significant movement over the last two years. FEMM principles relating to financial and economic reforms appear to be embedding themselves in an encouraging way although Ministers did note that the least degree of implementation has occurred in progressing best practice principles for public enterprises. Member countries consistently highlighted a shortage of technical skills as the most common constraint on implementation of FEMM commitments in every area under review.

32. Ministers reiterated the potential benefits of labour mobility among Forum members, while recognising the fundamental importance of domestic policies in promoting sustainable growth. They requested that further examination be carried out of costs and benefits of temporary movement of labour under the various regional trade agreements.

33. In support of exploring regional initiatives under the Pacific Plan, Ministers agreed to: • Facilitate the implementation of the Pacific Plan, particularly in areas pertaining to economic governance; • Consider the development of regional support to audit services to improve integrity and financial scrutiny; • Undertake a pre-feasibility study for a regional customs service for reporting back to FEMM in 2007; 9 • Carry out a study to progress the upgrading of country and regional statistical information services systems and databases; and • Conduct a scoping study for the development and adoption of best practice models in respect of financial regulation, as well as a study to consider the establishment of an accountable and independent macro-economic and micro-economic technical assistance mechanism

34. On the trade, investment and private sector programmes, the Secretariat has been involved in a range of activities. These included substantial reviews of investment legislation; IPA Networking and Exchanges; and the holding of the annual Heads of Investment Promotion Agencies Meeting in Tonga in June. The Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO) now has its own Constitution and it is an Observer at the Forum Economic and Trade Ministers' Meetings. In June this year, PIPSO completed its Business and Work Plan and started on national surveys aimed at mobilising support for National Private Sector Organisations.

35. The importance of PSD will grow as the regional trade agreements and EPA are implemented. To support that, the Regional PSD Strategy adopted in 2004 focuses on key areas which include: - Human Resource Development
- Technology and Standards Development
- Creating an Enabling Environment and
- SME Development

36. Our Trade Commissioners have had a very active year and are available to you at this meeting. We will be asking them to speak briefly to you about the main aspects of their work programmes.

37. A major emphasis has been on the implementation of the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA). Eight Parties have met their notification requirements and two, the Cook Islands and Fiji are ready to commence trading. With the recruitment to the Secretariat of two trade experts responsible for PICTA matters, future effort will be focused on assisting all PICTA parties to be ready to trade, hopefully by the end of this year, after they have completed their domestic legislative requirements. This will be a major step forward in promoting regional trade and economic integration.

38. A Forum sub-committee of trade officials visited New Caledonia in August, for discussions on the French Territory's possible participation in PICTA. The territory is now considering the issues involved in this. Preliminary discussions have also been conducted with the Government of French Polynesia.

39. While considering the report on PACER, the Trade Ministers, at their meeting earlier this year, agreed that there is a need to move beyond the 1981 South Pacific Regional Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA). The Ministers are seeking a more comprehensive framework for trade and economic cooperation among Australia, New Zealand and the FICs, as provided for in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER), to foster economic growth, investment and employment in the region.

40. In this regard, the Trade Ministers approved terms of reference for a joint study to investigate the potential impacts of a move towards that comprehensive framework as well as a gap analysis of FIC needs in respect of capacity-building, trade promotion and structural reform. We are expecting to appoint a consultant or consultants by the middle of October to carry out the study and analysis with the results to be ready for consideration by Forum trade officials when they meet next year. In carrying out the study and analysis, each FIC will be visited and stakeholders consulted.

41. As an intermediate measure, and as directed by the Trade Ministers, the Secretariat facilitated informal discussions among Forum Members to review the SPARTECA Rules of Origin, with a view to improving market access for FIC products into Australia and New Zealand. Although the discussion duly took place, the participation rate by FICs was not high which, to my mind, raises questions about the extent to which this issue should continue to be pursued on a regional basis, particularly in view of some of the bilateral work done on it in recent months. That said a SPARTECA Rules of Origin Workshop was completed in August 2006, a useful starting point for the SPARTECA Rules of Origin review to be completed by the end of 2006.

42. The Regional Trade Facilitation (RTFP) Programme established under PACER is now operational. This will provide FICs with assistance in the coming months in respect of Customs, Quarantine and Standards and Conformance issues. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Oceania Customs Organisation are implementing the quarantine and customs components, while the Forum Secretariat is implementing the 11 standards and conformance component. Our partnership with WHO which works on food standards is being actively pursued. Following from FTMM decisions, an Informal RTFP Steering Committee has been established to monitor RTFP implementation. This committee is now operational.

43. It is possible that additional resources may be required for RTFP implementation, arising from the Standards & Conformance Studies carried out in 2005 (on Accreditation, Certification, Standards Bodies, Meteorology and a Legislative and Regulatory Framework) and from the impending results of a Customs Automation Study now underway. A review of the RTFP is scheduled for completion by December 2006 and this will provide some clarity as to the future direction of this programme.

44. As part of preparations for negotiation of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union, the Secretariat completed the 4th round of national EPA consultations since 2002. The Pacific ACP Trade Ministers endorsed the work of PACP trade officials and put together a timetable for future preparations and negotiations.

45. The preparatory activities and the negotiating process have been streamlined by Ministers – the major change being the establishment of a single Negotiating Group at the Senior Officials' level. This is working well, as demonstrated in the negotiations held in July this year. Those negotiations were positive in spirit and both the Pacific ACP and the EU sides have agreed to move forward by preparing joint papers on tourism, investment and fisheries. They are scheduled to look at important legal and technical issues at the next meeting later this month and to report to PACP Trade Ministers in November in Port Vila, at which time further direction will be sought. An intensive course in trade negotiation skills was held in July for representatives from the Secretariat, the Ministerial Regional Negotiating Team and Senior Trade Officials who will be involved in negotiations over the next two years.

46. The initial one year EU-funded project that established the Forum Representation to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva is, from April this year, supported by another EU-funded project – the Pacific Regional Economic Integration Project (PACREIP), until 2008.

The Geneva Office now has a permanent Representative, Mr Robert Sisilo from Solomon Islands. So far this Office has supported three senior trade officials from Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu as part of the capacity building component of the programme. The next attachments, from Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, will be posted this month. 12

47. Bearing in mind the small size of the Forum's Geneva Office, it has been necessary for the permanent representative to concentrate his effort on those issues of absolutely special importance to the FICs, particularly those falling under the general heading of the small Economies Work Programme (SEWP). Proposals relating to key areas of interest to the region have been submitted in the area of fisheries subsidies, agriculture, non-agricultural market access, implementation of the SPS, TRIPS and TBT Agreements through regional cooperation, accession to the WTO and Aid for Trade, to name a few.

48. To ease the burden on the Permanent Representative, the Secretariat, through funding made available through the Commonwealth Secretariat, has appointed a technical expert to the Geneva office commencing in July this year, for a 12-month period. We are also trying to secure funding for the appointment of two nationals from FIC-WTO Members for three years each. The three-year appointment of regional officials will be an on-going activity, a means of adding to the development of a growing pool of regional trade experts and will run concurrently with the six-monthly rotational programme I referred to earlier.

49. On regional aviation matters, I am happy to be able to report some positive developments particularly in the areas of aviation safety and security. The Pacific Aviation Safety Office, based in Port Vila, last month received the first instalment of its approved loan funds from the ADB. The loan package – a US\$1.5 million loan and a technical assistance grant of USD495,00.00 – will assist PASO in expanding its operations, including through the hiring of Inspectors. The loan, the first of its kind from the ADB to a regional organisation, is being guaranteed by Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Vanuatu.

50. With regard to the Pacific Islands Air Services Agreement (PIASA), we now have sufficient signatories of the Agreement but the required ratifications have been slow. For some countries, we understand ratification will be delayed until the outcomes of the PIASA Impact Study have been released. This study was requested by the Association of South Pacific Airlines, and is funded by Australia.

51. Information and Communication Technologies issues have remained at the forefront of the region's agenda for several reasons – countries are undertaking their own reforms in their telecommunications and ICT sectors – and at the regional level a Digital Strategy, as sought by 13 our Leaders, has been developed. In March of this year, Forum ICT Ministers met in Wellington to carry forward the strategy.

52. A key outcome of that meeting was the establishment of a Taskforce on Regional Approaches to ICTs to analyse the benefits to be gained from regional cooperation for both smaller island states and larger Pacific island countries; to investigate policy, regulatory, legislative, operational, platform, services, resourcing and capacity impediments and advantages in developing regional cooperative approaches; and investigate the potential of regional approaches in using ICTs for improved health and educational outcomes.

53. Another key outcome was our agreed Roadmap for implementing the Digital Strategy in the first year, focusing on targeted activities and outcomes such as comprehensive data collection on e-readiness, looking at infrastructure, services, platforms and user capacity and costs; assisting countries to develop or define their ICT policies with particular emphasis on increasing stakeholder engagement; working on encouraging and assisting countries to

provide at least email capacity to Government agencies and a basic web site, as a means of gaining experience in e-government; and assistance and support for regulatory and policy capacity development in-country.

54. On the issue of petroleum, the Secretariat has maintained an inhouse capacity to assist members with the regulation of multinational petroleum suppliers in the region. These services have been used extensively by the majority of the FICs. An example is the assistance provided to Fiji for its regulatory framework review and to the Federated States of Micronesia on a regulatory contract with a multinational supplier.

55. A mechanism for regional aggregation of demand and supply has been proposed for use by the Smaller island States, and a meeting of SIS Officials will follow straight after this meeting to process this. The work is undertaken as part of the bulk procurement initiative in the Pacific Plan.

56. The Forum Secretariat continues to administer all Pacific Regional Indicative Programme (PRIP) financed by the European Development Fund (EDF). The current portfolio of Projects consists of 20 projects valued at over EURO 70 million. The performance of the regional programme in terms of commitment and disbursement has been good, with the programme virtually fully committed. There are small balances available as a result of closures of some projects and these will be committed to new projects before the end of 2007.

57. The Mid-Term Review of the 9th EDF Pacific regional Programme was concluded in late 2005. I am pleased to confirm that, as previously announced, the Pacific region was allocated an additional EURO 10 million by the European Union as a result of its good performance. I must also add that the Pacific region was the only region of the ACP Group that received additional funds under the 9th EDF as a result of the mid-term review. This is a reflection of the efficient manner in which the regional programme has been managed.

58. Programming of the 10th EDF commenced in March 2006 following a meeting of all National Authorising Officers (NAOs). A total of EURO 76.2 million has been made available for the regional programme covering the period 2008 – 2012. A draft Regional Strategy Paper has been prepared focusing on the two focal sectors of Human Resource Development and Sustainable management of natural Resources. The RAO will continue to consult with the NAOs, CROP organisations and Non-State Actors in finalising the Regional Strategy Papers and in developing the programmes.

Sustainable Development 59. The Sustainable Development Programme has concentrated on advancing the key initiatives listed on the Pacific Plan.

60. With regard to Pacific Plan Initiative 5.1 on strengthening national sustainable development strategies, the Secretariat has been able to extend technical assistance to the Cook Islands to finalise its national sustainable development plan, which is expected to be submitted to Cabinet this year. The technical assistance provided to the Tuvalu Government helped it prepare for its donor roundtable, held in May 2006. Planning related and other support has been provided to Nauru under the PRAN, and the Secretariat was able to play a significant role in the repatriation of Tuvalu and Kiribati families from Nauru to their home countries. Such country specific technical assistance is expected to gain momentum in 2007 to help strengthen member countries' national sustainable development plans, or their equivalent, to put them in a stronger position when negotiating with development partners and to assist them in allocating their own resources in accordance with their national development goals. To increase aid effectiveness in this area, the Secretariat has also

facilitated the formation of a regional NSDS Partnership among CROP and UN agencies to provide more coordinated assistance to member countries.

61. The Secretariat has worked closely with SOPAC on the formation of a Pacific Plan Partnership on Disaster Risk Management and to operationalise the Regional Framework on disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management in our member countries.

62. As a member of the DRR&DM Partnership which includes SOPAC, World Bank and UNDP, the Secretariat has worked with Vanuatu's national Task Force to develop its national Action Plan and a supplementary Priority Action Agenda, which will be presented to the CRP Summit and the Council of Ministers in November. This National Action Plan, I understand, is a first not only for the Pacific but also for the world in systematically operationalising the Hyogo Framework and the regional framework on DRR&DM for Action at the national level. This is, of course, consistent with what our Leaders were seeking in the disaster-related sections of the Pacific Plan.

63. As required under the Pacific Plan Initiative 5.6, the Forum has been facilitating international financing for sustainable development, biodiversity and environmental protection and climate change, particularly under the Global Environment Facility. As you are all aware, globally, developing countries are undertaking a major shift in the way they access and implement GEF projects. This will have a far reaching impact on the way our member countries access funding under the new resource allocation Framework (RAF) of the GEF. Our countries will have to prioritise and programme projects over the next 4 years. This approach will require significant capacity at the national level and demands a lot of the national GEF Focal Points. Our regional organisations have been working hard to realign their current capacity and support within this new system to provide a partnership of support to member countries, to increase their capacity to access GEF resources nationally.

64. On gender issues, the Secretariat has enhanced collaboration with key development partners such as the SPC Pacific Women's Bureau, UNIFEM, UNDP, AusAID, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to accelerate implementation of regional gender commitments. This has involved regional preparation for the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in February/March; partnership for a regional CEDAW Roundtable, also in March; and ongoing gender analysis capacity building across CROP to advance the CROP-wide Gender Strategy.

65. In particular, 2006 has witnessed a shift towards joint programming with the SPC Pacific Women's Bureau under the ambit of 16 the Pacific Plan, particularly for improving the status and quality of gender indicators in the region in order to provide evidence-based arguments for increased investment in gender equality by governments.

66. Other initiatives to advance specific gender issues include, as I've already mentioned, the commissioning of research on gender barriers to parliamentary election, this soon to be published, convening of a Pacific Regional Workshop on Advancing Women's Representation in Parliaments in Rarotonga in April; and convening of a Regional Workshop on Gender, Peace and Security in Nadi in June, which aimed to build capacity for the operationalisation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (on Women, Peace and Security) and more gender-responsive security frameworks at regional and national levels.

67. In regard to other social issues, the Secretariat's work has strengthened over the last year. The fifth Education Ministers' Meeting was held a week ago in Nadi with a full attendance of members and many observers. The regional aspects of the Forum Basic Education Action Plan, first agreed upon by Education Ministers in 2001 are almost fully

implemented, this being undertaken in close collaboration with CROP and other partners such as UNESCO. Although the ministerial meeting process for Education Ministers was not initially intended to be annual, there is a clear wish for regular meetings to provide feedback on regional activities and to provide a forum for sharing information.

68. A new social policy area has recently been established with the appointment of a Disability Coordination Officer. This is a follow-up to various activities since Leaders mandated the Forum Secretariat to address the issue of disability at the 2003 Forum. One of the goals of this work programme is to assist members in the areas of policy and planning in disability, which has been identified as a weakness in some of our countries.

69. Within the context of the Pacific Plan, the Social Policy Adviser works with other areas of the Secretariat, for example in coordinating national workshops on the social impact of PICTA; in addressing the potential of the regional bulk purchase of pharmaceuticals and in exploring implications for intellectual property considerations in the accessing of drugs. We also work closely with SPC on a range of health related issues, some of which are being presented at this FOC.

70. Delegates, I have now taken up a lot of your time and I thank you, for your no doubt thinning patience. It is, I think, important that you are made aware of the range of work that has been done by the Secretariat to implement decisions of our Leaders. I would like to say that none of these achievements would have been possible without the support of you, the members, the development partners and other stakeholders. The Secretariat salutes you all for this. Nor would it have been possible without the dedication and skill of the Secretariat. There is inevitably a complex of views about an organisation such as this one, and criticism sometimes comes easy. Biased I may be, but I think there is much in it of which the region can be proud. My sincerest thanks to all who work in it and share the vision for a better regional future. The Secretariat will continue to do that which it is required to do – serve the region to the very best of its ability.

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