



## **SPECIAL MSG LEADERS SUMMIT**

13 July 2022

Grand Pacific Hotel

Suva, Fiji

## **MSG CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT**

In lieu of a formal MSG Leaders Communique, this MSG Chairman's Statement would constitute a record of the main issues raised by the MSG Leaders in their statements at the Special MSG Leaders' Summit convened on 13 July 2022 at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva, Fiji.

The Special MSG Leaders' Summit was convened, on the margins of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Summit in Suva, purposely to effect the long overdue formal handover of the MSG Chairmanship from Papua New Guinea to Vanuatu.

The Special Leaders' Summit was fully represented by the Membership's Officials and was Chaired by the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Hon. James Marape, MP.

The MSG Leaders in attendance were; Honourable James Marape, MP, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Honourable Bob Loughman Weibur, MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, MP, Prime Minister of Fiji, Honourable Manasseh Sogavare, MP, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and Mr Victor Tutugoro, Spokesperson of the FLNKS.

The Special Summit was arranged into two parts, a closed session and a custom ceremony which was an open session performed outside of the meeting room.

In the absence of a proper MSG Leaders Retreat, the closed session provided the opportunity for the MSG Leaders to express themselves freely on matters pertaining to policy directions or operations of the MSG Organisation, including providing directives to the MSG Secretariat.

As mentioned earlier, this Chairman's Statement attempts to capture, for record purposes, the main issues raised in the MSG Leaders interventions. The issues are mentioned in no order of priority.

The MSG Leaders:

#### **A: CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE MSG**

1. **Thanked** the outgoing Chairman, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Hon. James Marape, MP, for his leadership of the Group during one of the most difficult and challenging times of our history precipitated by COVID 19 pandemic.
2. **Offered assurances** of continued support to the incoming Chairman of the MSG, Honourable Bob Loughman Weibur, MP, Prime Minister of Vanuatu during his tenure.

#### **B: FIJI'S ROLE IN HOSTING OF THE SPECIAL SUMMIT**

3. **Expressed deep gratitude** to the Fiji Government and its officials for going out of their way to find a window, within the 51<sup>st</sup> PIF heavy schedule of meetings, to enable the Special MSG Leaders' Summit to be convened.
4. **Expressed** also appreciation for the courtesies and hospitality extended by the Government and people of Fiji to the visiting MSG Delegations.

#### **C: DIRECTOR GENERAL'S APPOINTMENT**

5. **Acknowledged and welcomed** the appointment of Mr Leonard Louma, OBE, as the new Director General of the MSG Secretariat and expressed support to working closely with him in the carriage of his responsibilities.
6. **Urged** the MSG Director General to actively engage in regular dialogues with Leaders to brief them on the operations of the Secretariat and seek guidance and directives from them.
7. **Reaffirmed the need** for him to reform the Secretariat and recalibrate its focus and operations to better serve the members as well as better implement decisions of the Leaders.

#### **D: FLNKS/NEW CALEDONIA**

8. **Reiterated** that the decolonization of New Caledonia is an unfinished business of the MSG, and acknowledged the need for more sustained and concerted efforts to be made at the international fora, especially at the UN, to assist the FLNKS with their aspirations for independence.
9. **Noted with anticipation** the FLNKS announcement that it would be seeking to submit the application of New Caledonia as an Associate Member of the MSG, and further acknowledged the plea by the FLNKS for other Members to lend support to this application when submitted.
10. **Noted**, in addition, the deep concerns raised by the FLNKS Spokesperson on the manner in which the recent 12 December 2021 Referendum for Independence was organized in New Caledonia in the midst of COVID 19 challenges. The Spokesman for the FLNKS asserted that the rushed manner in which the Referendum was conducted, against the wishes of the Kanaks (the affected non-self-governing peoples), and without the participation of the concerned colonized peoples, defeats the principles of fairness, good faith and good governance principles and thus renders the Referendum illegitimate.

11. **Noted further**, with empathy, the continued strong objections and non-recognition of the results of the third Referendum, expressed by FLNKS on behalf of the Kanaks (the affected non-self-governing peoples), as well as the wishes of the FLNKS to express these objections at the regional and international levels, including their intention to seek an advisory opinion at the ICJ in Hague on the propriety and legitimacy of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Referendum.
12. **Acknowledged** with sympathy the desire of the FLNKS and the pro-independence groups to have another exercise of self determination organized and supervised under the direct auspices of the United Nations, and the call for diplomatic efforts to be made to put pressure to bear on France, as the Administering Power, to create conditions to allow for the genuine exercise of self determination in a legitimate manner and in line with the objectives of the UN resolutions on decolonisation.

## **E: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT**

13. **Reaffirmed** that Climate Change continues to be an existential threat to Melanesian people's livelihood, security and wellbeing and called for concerted efforts in recognition of global commitments of the UN to achieving agreed ambition on finance, adaptation and mitigation;
14. **Commended** the robust efforts that Fiji is undertaking on the global scene to advocate for genuine and concerted efforts to be made to address island states concerns on Climate Change and for ambitious targets to be made by the international community, especially the big emitters, on managing temperature rise, resource allocation for loss and damage, and easy access for internationally promised adaptation funds.
15. **Expressed** positive disposition and affinity with calls by Fiji to redouble efforts towards a greener and bluer planet.
16. **Acknowledged** with appreciation that Fiji's leadership role on the global scene with respect to Climate Change has the effect of raising the profile of the whole MSG.

## **F: WORK OF THE MSG SECRETARIAT**

17. **Expressed strong concerns** at the seemingly lethargic, insipid and benign way the Secretariat was operating of late, but at the same time reaffirmed support to the work of the MSG Secretariat in advancing important policy issues.
18. **Noted the need** to have Members meet their assessed contributions, on a timely manner, with the clear intent of achieving financial sustainability and predictability of the Organisation going forward.
19. **Directed the immediate reform** of the Secretariat based on relevance and returns to Member's investments.
20. **Urged** for the reassessment of the operations of the MSG Secretariat including the reprioritization of its plans to adapt to the changing circumstances, closely aligned to the needs and priorities of the Membership.
21. **Directed** further for the MSG Secretariat to concentrate more efforts to securing other finances and assistance to supplement the core funding of the Secretariat with new established partnerships.

22. **Called on** the MSG Secretariat to unpack and implement the 2038 Prosperity Plan for All and also ensure the operations and work of the Secretariat factors in the dictates of the PIF “2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific”.

#### **G: MSG FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

23. **Expressed support** for the engagement of New Caledonia under the MSG Free Trade Agreement framework.
24. **Urged** the Secretariat to explore ways and means in which New Caledonia can be involved in the MSG Free Trade Agreement; and further acknowledged New Caledonia’s overtures of their intention to be a Member of the MSG Group.
25. **Encouraged** to maintain the posture of inclusivity and to remain open to partnerships with other countries outside the MSG Membership.
26. **Reflected** on the importance of the Melanesian Free Trade Agreement (MFTA) and recommended to expedite its signing, ratification and implementation by all members.

#### **H: COVID 19 AND ITS IMPACT**

27. **Underscored** the adverse effect that the COVID 19 pandemic has caused to the social and economic sectors of the Membership and further recognised the challenges associated with these recovery efforts in the region.
28. **Recognised** that the virtues of Melanesian solidarity and cooperation was critically vital to overcoming the challenges associated with the new normal caused by COVID 19, which includes the difficulties that may be encountered while pursuing economic cooperation and trade within the Group.
29. **Affirmed in a strong way** that post COVID 19 economic recovery calls for greater concerted efforts in supporting each other and stated unambiguously that there is strength in togetherness.

#### **I: MSG AND THE WIDER PACIFIC REGION**

30. **Emphasised** that the MSG was an integral part of the wider Pacific family and urged that in the pursuit of MSG interests, this must be done within the context of the wider Pacific region interests.
31. **Reflected** on the important role that the PIF plays in the wider Pacific family under the ambit of the Blue Pacific Continent and further acknowledged the geographical and economic advantage that the MSG Group has in the PIF.
32. **Acknowledged** that in the midst of the rapidly changing dynamics in the region that a stronger MSG Group is an enabler to building a stronger Pacific, that places us in a better position for global advocacy of our interests.

## **J: VANUATU'S INITIATIVE AT THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ)**

- 33. **Committed** the MSG to support Vanuatu's initiative to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) seeking an advisory opinion on the obligations of states under international law to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse impacts of climate change.
- 34. **Agreed** to support Vanuatu's request to seek the support of the PIF membership on this ICJ Advisory Opinion initiative.

## **K: HEIGHTENED GEO-POLITICAL COMPETITION IN THE REGION**

- 35. **Expressed concern** on the geo-political dynamics affecting the regional security landscape but acknowledged that there were associated opportunities arising from this increased competition for influence in the region that MSG members must discern and take advantage of.
- 36. **Emphasized the importance** of the MSG remaining united and steadfast in the pursuit and defence of their members interest in the face of this heightened geo-political competition, reminding each other that the real security threat was Climate Change.
- 37. **Alluded to** the fact that the Melanesian tradition of dialogue, tok stori, storian and talanoa as a fundamental tool to promoting consensus-based solutions anchored on mutual trust and understanding.
- 38. **Reaffirmed** collective regional commitments to ensure greater emphasis on advocating for anti-nuclear activities and testing in the Pacific, consistent with the ideals of a Nuclear Free Pacific.
- 39. **Drew attention** for MSG not to lose sight of the need to maintain interest in, and address, nuclear testing legacy issues, an issue that MSG had a strong interest in since its inception as a group.

## **L: MSG PRIME MINISTER'S CUP**

- 40. **Noted the advice** from the Prime Minister of Vanuatu on the count-down towards the hosting of the Inaugural Prime Ministers Cup in Vanuatu scheduled for 19 – 27 September 2022.
- 41. **Acknowledged the invitation** by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu to the other MSG Leaders to attend the Opening Ceremony of the Inaugural MSG Prime Minister's Cup Tournament - if their schedules permit.
- 42. **Noted further** the proposal by the incoming MSG Chair, Hon. Bob Loughman, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, to possibly convene a proper MSG Leaders' Summit in Port Vila, on the eve of the Official Opening of the MSG Prime Minister's Cup Tournament, if the situation permits.

## **M: MELANESIAN IDENTITY**

- 43. **Acknowledged** the notion that Melanesia stretches from Fiji to the East all the way to West Papua and the Papuan Provinces of Indonesia to the West.

## **N: THE TRADITIONAL HANDOVER CEREMONY OF CHAIRMANSHIP OF MSG**

After the closed session of the Special MSG Leaders' Summit, Leaders proceeded outside of the meeting room to witness the traditional ceremony where the outgoing MSG Chairman, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea presented traditional gifts to his other colleague MSG Leaders to show his appreciation for their support during his tenure as Chair of the MSG.

The traditional handover ceremony also saw, for the first time, the handing over of a symbolic "MSG Traditional Warrior Spear" from the outgoing Chair to the incoming Chair. The Spear was formally incorporated into the handover ceremony as a symbol of power and responsibility of the MSG Chairman as the "Chief Warrior" to protect what MSG sees as its interests and pierce through blockages in MSG's search for solutions.



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**Hon. James Marape, MP**

**Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea**

**And Chairman of the Special MSG Leaders' Summit**