



# MELANESIAN *Tak*

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*A quarterly newsletter to inform our readers about key work activities undertaken at the MSG Secretariat*  
Political Stability, Economic Prosperity, Social Equality and Inclusivity and Sustainable Development are the MSG's core objectives as endorsed by Leaders in the "MSG 2038 - Prosperity for All Plan"

## VANUATU HOSTS 2023 MSG GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS



*Members of the MSG Foreign Ministers Meeting and Senior Officials Meeting following the first in-person Governing Body since 2020.*

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) successfully concluded last month with Members approving the outcomes of the preceding MSG Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) at the MSG Secretariat in Port Vila, Vanuatu on Friday 30th June 2023.

MSG FMM Chair, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade of Vanuatu, Hon. Jotham Napat, welcomed MSG Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and Senior Officials to the first MSG Governing Body Meeting to be conducted face-to-face after the COVID-19 lockdown, noting that the last in-person meeting was conducted in 2020 in Suva, Fiji. Members reaffirmed the importance of the meeting and urged the Group not to lose sight of the noble vision of the MSG Founders. They encouraged each other to make concerted efforts towards implementing the various MSG mandates

specified in the MSG 2038 Prosperity for All Plan and reminded each other and the Secretariat of the need to ensure that these efforts complement efforts under the 2050 Blue Pacific Continent Strategy.

The meeting was attended by Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, Deputy Speaker and Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fiji; Jean Creugnet representing FLNKS; Bill Olmi, Acting High Commissioner to Fiji, PNG; Hon. Jeremiah Manele, Minister for Foreign Affairs & External Trade for Solomon Is.; Hon. Matai Seremiah, Minister for Trade & Commerce, Vanuatu and representatives of Associate Member, Republic of Indonesia.

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*Leonard Louma, OBE*



## FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL'S DESK

Greetings from your Secretariat!

The highlight of the second quarter was the convening of the much-anticipated Governing Body meetings with the approval of outcomes of the preceding MSG Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) by the Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM). It was good to finally meet up with our Members following the COVID-restrictions.

I must especially commend and thank Vanuatu for hosting the in-person meeting, the first since the last Governing Body in Suva, Fiji in February 2020. The meeting was the culmination of a sustained effort over several months, since last year, to convene an MSG Governing Body Meeting.

Members rightfully paid tribute to the late John Palmer, Manager Corporate Services, who was instrumental in the framing and preparation of the 2023 Work Programme and Budget. Mr Palmer sadly passed on 6 May 2023. Members reaffirmed the importance of the meeting and urged the Group not to lose sight of the noble vision of the MSG Founders.

I encouraged the SOM Members to be candid in their observations to help the Secretariat improve both the Work Programme & the accompanying Budget.

I also assured members that the Secretariat's financial situation is sound, owing to the prudent fiscal measures and financial expenditure adjustments undertaken by the previous DG and Acting DG.

Unlike previous Balanced Budgets, the 2023 Budget will be a Surplus one. Another highlight was the successful conclusion of the National Workshops on the MSG Green Trade Project in all our Members' capitals. These undertakings are in accordance with the 2038 Prosperity for All Plan where it calls for adding value to commodities as well as creating enabling environment for trade to prosper. The first series of workshops identified challenges, opportunities and regulatory measures governing exports of priority products for MSG Members, which included vanilla for Papua New Guinea, kava for Solomon Islands, virgin coconut oil for Vanuatu and ginger for Fiji. The second series of national workshops focused on the presentation and validation of national Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) Reports and the draft Export Guide including a collation of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) for each MSG country.

I acknowledge the generous financial contributions from the UN and the EU which enabled the MSG Secretariat and our development partners, namely UNCTAD Green Trade & IMPACT Project and Pacific Community's SAFE Project to make this possible. We were also delighted to host the Bluepreneur - Coastal Youth Community Training at the MSG Secretariat, in conjunction with the Archipelagic & Island States (AIS) Forum Secretariat. The Secretariat has taken the view that its activities will be focused on community based entrepreneurial development for womenfolk and youth. In addition, this quarter saw the convening of the successful 5th MSG Regional Security Strategy (RSS) Meeting in Suva, Fiji.

With July now upon us we eagerly await two main events - the convening of the Leader's Summit and the upcoming 7th Melanesian Arts & Culture Festival (MACFEST) to be hosted by Vanuatu. The last MACFEST was held in Honiara in 2018. Port Vila will surely be a hive of activity as a melting pot of Melanesian arts and culture on display.

*Vinaka Vakalevu, Tank Yu, Tenkiu Tru, Tankyu Tumas, Merci Beaucoup.*

## DG LOUMA ACKNOWLEDGES MEMBERS OF THE MSG GOVERNING BODY AT FIRST BUDGET SESSION



*SOM Chair DG, Kalfau Kaloris (L) and MSG Secretariat DG, Leonard Louma during the SOM meeting.*

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, commended the presence of Senior Officials during his first Budget session since his appointment to the position in 2022.

In his welcome remarks, the Director General acknowledged and paid tribute to several people who held senior positions in MSG countries and have contributed substantially to the work of the MSG.

The DG commended Vanuatu for convening the face-to-face SOM meeting and then briefly provided an outline of issues to be discussed, drawing Members attention to the importance of convening the SOM and MSG Leaders Meetings as required by the Agreement of the MSG.

DG Louma also paid tribute to the late John Palmer, Manager Corporate Services, who was instrumental in the framing and preparation of the 2023 Work Programme and Budget. Mr Palmer passed on 6 May 2023.

DG Louma told members that this was his first Budget as head of the MSG Secretariat and proffered that he would do his utmost to answer any queries arising from the Meeting Papers on both the Secretariat's Work Programme and Budget session.

He stated, "As you are all aware, the Budget Session is scheduled to be held in the year prior to the financial year in question." He further pointed out that despite previous decisions taken to specifically hold the Budget Sessions in November each year, this has not been adhered to. DG Louma admitted that this posed difficulties for the Secretariat, noting that if the Governing Bodies responsible for considering and approving the Secretariat Budget are not able to meet, the Director General is not allowed to expand more than a quarter of the total budget of the preceding year.

"The financial situation of your Secretariat, I am happy to assure you, is sound," he stated.

The Director General revealed that the 2023 Budget will be a Surplus Budget unlike previous Balanced Budgets.

"It is our intention to aggressively investigate options to reduce reliance on Annual Assessed Contributions of Member States to fund activities of the Secretariat. Ultimately, it is our objective, in the long term, to reduce Members Contributions towards the operations of the Secretariat," DG Louma said.

# MSG COUNTRIES SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDE NATIONAL WORKSHOPS ON MSG GREEN TRADE PROJECT



Facilitators and participants of the MSG Green Trade Project workshop in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

National workshops on the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Green Trade Project & Joint IMPACT-SAFE Workshop on Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) & International Trade Promotion which began in Port Vila, Vanuatu earlier last month were concluded in the other MSG capitals of Suva, Honiara and Port Moresby.

The first series of workshops to introduce the MSG Green Trade Project were conducted virtually last year and discussed and identified challenges, opportunities and regulatory measures governing exports of priority products for MSG Members, which included vanilla for Papua New Guinea, kava for Solomon Islands, virgin coconut oil for Vanuatu and ginger for Fiji.

The second series of national workshops, which have just been completed for Vanuatu, Fiji, Solomon Islands & PNG focused on the presentation and validation of national Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) Reports and the draft Export Guide including a collation of Non-

Tariff Measures (NTMs) for each MSG country.

The MSG Secretariat presented on the MSG Trade Agreement and the Melanesian Free Trade Agreement (MFTA), which identifies market access opportunities for MSG-made products to achieve the objectives of strengthening intra-regional and international trade.

The recent workshops also focused on presentations from the United Nations Conference on Trade & Development (UNCTAD) collation of NTM data, bilateral trade and investment relations with the European Union (EU), Pacific Community (SPC) SAFE Project activities and export challenges with respect to exporting to the EU market.

The national workshops in the four MSG countries were made possible through the generous financial contributions from the UN & the EU and also enabled its development partners, namely the MSG Secretariat, UNCTAD Green Trade & IMPACT Project and SPC's SAFE Project to facilitate.

# MSG SECRETARIAT & AIS FORUM SECRETARIAT CONCLUDE BLUE ECONOMY & ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING



Facilitators & participants of the inaugural Bluepreneur Training hosted by the MSG Secretariat in conjunction with the AIS Forum Secretariat.

To empower coastal communities in Melanesia, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat and the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum held a three-day training on Blue Economy and Entrepreneurship in the Pacific.

Called the "Bluepreneur: Coastal Youth Community Training" in Vanuatu, from 15th-17th June 2023, the programme was aimed at providing learning and knowledge to increase awareness of the blue economy and sustainable maritime activities of the local communities.

The objective of the training was to empower local communities in Vanuatu in the blue economy sector, owing to the fact that Asia-Pacific regional trade is expected to continue growing modestly.

Small businesses serve as a key for economic development and contribute significantly to the financial stability of the local community. Therefore, the ecosystem of youth in an entrepreneurial role is essential to supply those needs.

Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, in his opening remarks, expressed his optimism about this inaugural joint-programme of the AIS Forum Secretariat and the MSG.

The training was attended by young entrepreneurs, mainly youth & established women entrepreneurs in Port Vila.

As one of the side events of the 7th Senior Official Meeting (SOM) of the AIS Forum, this was the first collaboration between AIS Forum and MSG and conducted under the auspices of the MSG Roadmap for Inshore Fisheries Management and Sustainable and AIS Blue Hub initiative.

Three key experts from Vanuatu, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea were invited to lead participants at this training.

A number of key topics covered during the training included business fundamentals, business management, planning and setting goals and impact based on the SDGs, marketing strategy, basic book-keeping and finance concepts for MSMEs, including a development session for product formulation.

It is hoped that after the training, the participants will be able to build a sustainable business for utilizing the ocean resources, such as start-ups in their respective countries in the Pacific region, particularly in Vanuatu.

# MSG SECRETARIAT AT 7TH SENIOR OFFICIAL MEETING OF THE ARCHIPELAGIC & ISLAND STATES FORUM IN FIJI



*Participants of the recent 7th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum in Suva, Fiji. The MSG Secretariat was represented by Senior Executive Adviser, Chris Waiwori.*

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat participated at the recent 7th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum held in Suva, Fiji.

Co-hosted by Fiji, Indonesia and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the meeting was convened in preparation for the 1st High-Level Meeting (1st HLM) of the AIS Forum to be held in Indonesia in October 2023. It was held to strengthen the collaboration of activities implemented by the AIS Forum Secretariat, in particular on strategic blue innovative solutions in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In his opening remarks, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, said climate-change remains the most existential threat to our long-term security and sustainable development that is linked to rise in sea levels, loss of biodiversity, extreme weather events and outbreaks of diseases for our AIS.

He emphasised the need to strengthen commitment towards invaluable, strategic partnership and strong leadership to effectively address climate and ocean issues.

Participants acknowledged the concrete collaboration among participating countries in fostering knowledge exchange, sharing of best practices, and implementing joint initiatives. Through these collaborative efforts, AIS have been able to leverage their collective strengths and experiences to address common challenges and work towards sustainable development.

The meeting recognised that AIS are especially vulnerable to climate change and degradation of ocean health, hence the call on the AIS Forum to explore and identify various emerging threats and potential areas of cooperation, including but not limited to the issue of food security caused by extreme weather events, which have been amplified by the effects of climate change.

The meeting was attended by representatives of countries from the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Cabo Verde, the Union of the Comoros, Cuba, Cyprus, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Madagascar, Marshall Islands, Malta, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, Samoa, Seychelles, Singapore, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu, and the UK.

## MSG SECRETARIAT REITERATES SUPPORT FOR FLNKS AT C-24



*Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, with other delegates during a break at the Pacific Regional Seminar on the Implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in Bali, Indonesia on 24 May 2023.*

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat has reiterated its support for the call by the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) on the Administering power to return to the spirit of the Noumea Accord, in the negotiations post-Referendums, which has resulted in the peaceful co-existence of all stakeholders in New Caledonia.

Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, made the statement while delivering his remarks at the Pacific Regional Seminar on the Implementation of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in Bali, Indonesia on 24 May 2023.

The theme was "Innovative steps to ensure the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Non-Self-Governing Territories". It was held under the auspices of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (C-24). DG Louma said that the FLNKS, a member of the MSG family, consists of and represents the indigenous and colonised people of New Caledonia – a Non-Self-Governing Territory and entitled to the ultimate objectives of the decolonisation process – that of independence.

DG Louma said that as a party and signatory to the Noumea Accord, FLNKS continues to engage, in good faith, with the Administering Power to achieve its aspirations of full sovereignty. He emphasised that the spirit and intent that went into the framing of the Noumea Accord embodies the "irreversibility" of the process towards full sovereignty. He noted that the circumstances and manner in which the Third Referendum in New Caledonia was conducted in December 2021 during the height of Covid 19 challenges, and despite calls to defer the referendum by the FLNKS, leaves much to be desired. This he said, has inevitably called to question the credibility of the process and the legitimacy of the results when 56.13% of the registered voters did not participate in the referendum. DG Louma emphasised that, MSG is of the view that in the absence of a decision by the General Assembly that New Caledonia, a Non-Self-Governing Territory, has attained a full measure of self-government in terms of Chapter XI of the UN Charter, the Administering Power has the obligation to faithfully discharge its responsibilities to prepare New Caledonia for independence within the spirit and meaning of the UN Resolution 1514 (XV).

# MSG SECRETARIAT FAREWELLS MANAGER CORPORATE SERVICES, JOHN PALMER



*DG Leonard Louma, staff and friends of the late John Palmer accompanied his body to the airport to be repatriated back to the Solomon Islands.*

The MSG Secretariat family farewelled the Manager Corporate Services, John Palmer, who passed away at the Vila Central Hospital on the morning of Saturday 6 May 2023.

Mr Palmer, who hailed from Maringe, Isabel Province in the Solomon Islands, had served the Secretariat since 2015.

He had a vast regional experience after having served in the Solomon Islands Government, USP and the Pacific Community prior to joining the MSG Secretariat.

A week-long Haus Krai was held at the MSG Secretariat to allow friends, family members and those that come to know the late John Palmer, to pay their final respects.

A condolence book was also opened to convey messages of sympathy and condolences for his family back in Honiara. His body was repatriated back to the Solomon Islands on Wednesday 10 May 2023. Mr Palmer's last official work travel was to Port Moresby, PNG.

The MSG Secretariat thanks the Government and people of the Solomon Islands for Mr Palmer's life of service which he led with honor and integrity.

Mr Palmer, who is survived by his wife and four children will be dearly missed.





# MSG SECRETARIAT HEAD CALLS FOR MELANESIAN INCLUSIVITY AT 7TH MELANESIAN ARTS & CULTURE FESTIVAL



*Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma, delivering his remarks at the soft launch of the 7th MACFEST.*

The Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, has appealed to the Local Organising Committee (LOC) and the Government of Vanuatu to include all Melanesian communities in the region when it hosts the 7th Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival (MACFEST) in Port Vila this month.

Speaking at the soft launch, DG Louma said, “we have to be proud of our Melanesian heritage and we need to cut across colonial legacy boundaries and show the world that Melanesia extends from the west to the east”.

MACFEST is the flagship event of the MSG held every four years and this will be Vanuatu’s second time to host the Festival in Port Vila.

DG Louma referred to a conversation between MSG leaders recently, where they affirmed that Melanesians do not only inhabit the countries and members that make up the MSG, but that Melanesian communities stretch from the west to the east. “I am hoping that Vanuatu will continue to uphold the tradition of MACFEST by being inclusive and that we can expect MACFEST 2023 to be bigger, larger and more representative of the Melanesian communities across the region,” he stated.

DG Louma added that, like sports, arts and culture has a binding effect on our people “. Yet if we allow other things to play a role in the determination of who to invite and who not to, there is a real risk of diminishing MACFEST’s value and importance”.

“Our people should be allowed to witness and enjoy the full range and splendor of the Melanesian spectrum of cultural colours. The size and geographical scope of the Melanesian communities existent today must be allowed to be manifested at this Vanuatu MACFEST,” he remarked.

“It is times like this that Vanuatu emerges from the crowd to show leadership, as it has shown many times in the past, that it is a genuine leader in the MSG. Vanuatu punches well above its weight when it comes to the defence of what is Melanesian and Vanuatu should be proud of that record,” he said.

He mentioned the many instances where Vanuatu showed leadership including the Lakatoro Declaration which became a rallying point for MSG countries to support the notion of a nuclear-free Pacific and the re-enlistment of New Caledonia into the Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24), among others.

# FIJI MILITARY COMPLETE REHABILITATION WORKS AT VANUATU SCHOOL



*Members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces with students and staff of Oneisua Presbyterian College.*

The Oneisua Presbyterian College outside Port Vila, Vanuatu was a hive of activity on Friday, 21st April when the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) formally handed over to the school management following the completion of rehabilitation works. School Principal, Rossie Netvurak, said they were grateful to the Fiji Government and RFMF for their huge contribution that would leave a lasting legacy on the Oneisua community. "Every morning when we get up the soldiers are already working away, when we're finished for the day, they are still at it. We have bonded very well with them and we are so happy that they were able to come and put their skills to good use here at our school," Ms Netvurak said. The School Council representative said this type

of gesture was indicative of the unity that existed within the Melanesian region and it only served to strengthen our bond.

Commanding Officer, Major Timoci Naivalu said heeding the call of the Fiji Government and coming to Vanuatu was a blessing. He acknowledged the Governments of Fiji and Vanuatu, Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office and the MSG Secretariat, among others, for enabling completion of the work.

Acknowledgement was also accorded to the Vanuatu Mobile Force, Vanuatu Police Force and Vanuatu Ministry of Education.

The RFMF was part of the Fiji Rapid Response Team deployed to Vanuatu in March to assist with cyclone rehabilitation.

# NEW CALEDONIA WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS VISIT MSG SECRETARIAT



*Members of the Rural Women of New Caledonia Association with some staff of the MSG Secretariat*

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat received a delegation of New Caledonian women entrepreneurs and agricultural farmers from the Rural Women of New Caledonia Association on April 17, 2023.

Led by Honourable Valentine Eurisouke, Vice-President of the Northern Province and elected member of the Congress of New Caledonia, the group visited Port Vila from 17-21 April 2023.

In her welcome remarks, Mrs. Sovaia Marawa, Programme Manager for Trade & Economic Development and Officer in Charge, said she was excited to receive the women entrepreneurs on behalf of the Director General, Mr. Leonard Louma

and staff.

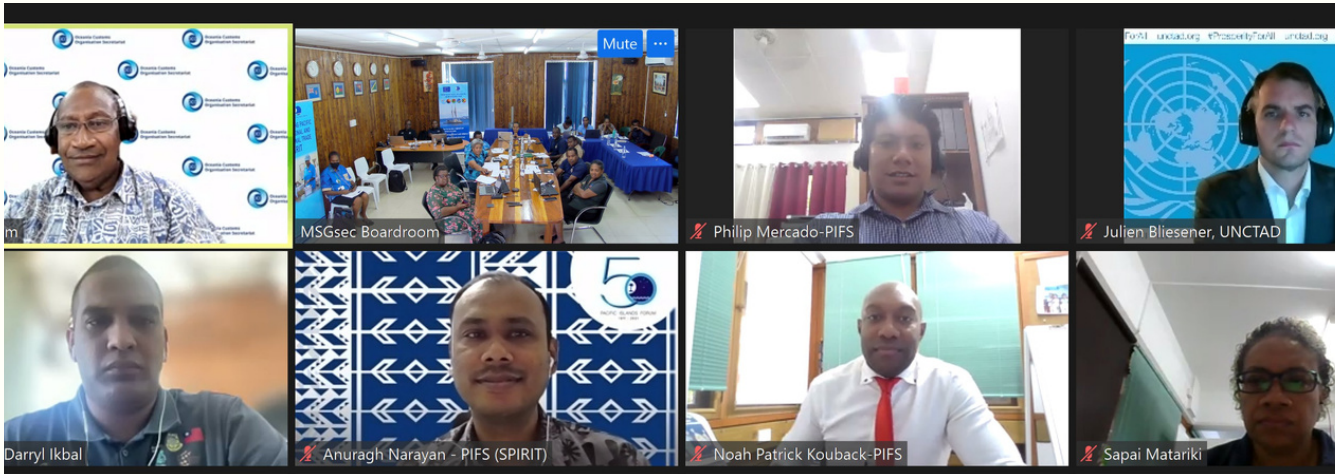
Mrs. Marawa then briefed them on the history of the MSG and Work Programmes and added that the Secretariat exists to serve its Members.

The objectives of the visit were to collaborate and network with producers, processing companies (fruits, roots, vegetables etc) and women's groups involved in farming, processing and high value-added products.

As customary, the delegation exchanged gifts with Mrs. Marawa.

The Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia is a Member of the MSG.

# TRADE STATISTICS, KEY TO GUIDE POLICY MAKERS: DG LOUMA



*Participants of the 1st Melanesian Hybrid Symposium on Supporting Implementation of Trade Agreements with Applied Data Analysis for Vanuatu.*

Trade statistics play a key role in providing analytical information to inform and guide policy advisers and policy makers on international trade negotiations as well as support the implementation of bilateral, regional and international trade agreements.

These were the words of the Director General of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat, Leonard Louma, when closing the 1st Melanesian Hybrid Symposium, on Supporting Implementation of Trade Agreements with Applied Data Analysis for Vanuatu earlier last month.

The MSG Secretariat he said, recognizes the importance of trade statistics and to address the challenges and capacity deficiencies confronting the organization, the Tradecom GAP Assessment Report funded by the ACP Programme was conducted in 2018. The GAP Assessment Report identified strategies to assist the MSG Secretariat to efficiently monitor intra-regional and international trade flows.

“Whilst the Secretariat heavily relies on national statistics compilers for our Members, we also recognize that they face on-going capacity and operational challenges that impact on their ability to deliver trade statistics.

“We understand that Members national statistics compilers are being assisted by the Pacific Community and recent developments are to capture trade flows under the MSG Trade

Agreements and other regional and international trade agreements such as WTO, PICTA and PACER Plus,” he said. On this note, the Secretariat encourages Members to complete the International Merchandise Trade templates and publish the information in the Bureau of Statistics websites.

The Secretariat’s new mandate under the Melanesian Free Trade Agreement (MFTA) requires Members to coordinate efforts to undertake, amongst other things, cooperation in areas of research and statistics necessary for monitoring the performance and operation of the MSG Free Trade Area. To this end, DG Louma said, the MSG will form a Working Group on Statistics to provide relevant trade statistics in monitoring trade flows under the MSG Trade Agreement and facilitate the establishment of national and regional databases and trade information networks for the MFTA.

At regional level, the MSG Secretariat is collaborating with the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) and assisted by the UNCTAD and the United Nations Trade and Industry Statistics Section in developing a Pacific Commodity Trade (PACComTrade) Database.

The PACComTrade Database will provide relevant and timely information on goods that are imported and exported in the Pacific.

# MSG SECRETARIAT JOINS VANUATU UN ICJ HISTORIC CLIMATE VICTORY PARADE



*Leaders of the Fiji Rapid Response Team with some members of the senior staff of the MSG Secretariat.*

Staff of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat joined the Vanuatu United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ) Climate Victory march and celebrations in Port Vila on Thursday.

They joined custom groups, students, civil servants, private sector, Foreign Missions and NGOs in the march that ended with an official programme at the Independence Park.

The parade was held to mark Vanuatu's historic win at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) with the Adoption of a Resolution on Climate Change and Human Rights. The adoption follows warnings by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) experts that global average temperatures could reach 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels by 2030-2035, reinforcing the urgent need for drastic action.



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