



MSG LEADERS' CAUCUS

27 August, 2024

Davina House - Nuku'Alofa, Kingdom of Tonga

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. The MSG Leaders' Caucus was held in Nuku'Alofa, Kingdom of Tonga, on the margins of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting (PIFLM53) on 27 August 2024, for the purpose of discussing issues of particular concern to the MSG, with a view to arrive at common positions, where possible, prior to discussions at the Plenary and Retreat. The MSG Leaders' Caucus was arranged with assistance from the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Secretariat and the Tongan PIF-Organising Committee.
2. The Summit was Chaired by Hon, Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas, MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu and Chair of the MSG. Leaders in attendance were Hon, James Marape, MP, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, and Hon, Jeremiah Manele, MP, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, His Excellency Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Fiji High Commissioner to New Zealand as the Special Envoy representing the Prime Minister of Fiji, who was indisposed to attend the Caucus, and Hon. Louis Mapou, President of the Government of New Caledonia.
3. Senior Officials of the MSG Member countries accredited to attend the PIF meetings were also present at the MSG Leaders Caucus to provide assistance to their respective Leaders.
4. The proceedings included a kava ceremony after the opening formalities of the meeting to signify the intention of the Chair to have a Talanoa-type session amongst the Leaders.
5. The proceedings and key decisions of the Leaders Caucus meeting are highlighted below;

OPENING FORMALITIES AND PROCEDURES

6. The MSG Leaders Caucus commenced with an Opening Prayer by Richard Balkonan of the Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs, External Trade, and International Cooperation.

7. The MSG Chair, Hon. Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas, in his remarks welcomed and thanked his colleague MSG Leaders for availing themselves to participate in the Caucus. The Chair emphasised that side meetings like this, on the margins of the PIF meetings, provides valuable opportunity to discuss issues of specific interest to the MSG Group. This enables the development of common approaches and positions to take to the PIF. He briefly outlined that the agenda consisted of New Caledonia, Ocean of Peace initiative by Fiji, Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI) circulated by Australia, MSG Leaders' Dialogue with Indonesia, the scheduled Special MSG Leaders' Summit and related meetings for November in Fiji, and the UN Secretary General's post. Emphasis was made on the need for MSG to be involved in the PIF Troika led mission to New Caledonia, the need to design and frame PIF initiatives and anchor them on Pacific needs and interests. Caution was expressed not to allow initiatives that may be developed to suit the geo political and geo machinations of the region's big powers. He underscored the importance of the MSG Leaders dialogue with the President of Indonesia as an opportunity to strengthen ongoing efforts and advocacy for the welfare, livelihood and development aspirations of the Melanesians in the Papuan Provinces of Indonesia. He then reminded his colleague Leaders of the proposed MSG Special Leaders' Summit for November and expressed hope that all Leaders will be able to find time to come together as a Group in November in Fiji. A copy of the Chair's Statement is attached as ***Annex I***.

8. The Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Mr Leonard Louma, OBE, in his introductory remarks provided further clarification on the agenda items including highlighting some of the salient features and background on the issues. The Director General stressed that the MSG Leaders Tokyo Joint Statement on New Caledonia articulates and provides the basis for MSG's approach to the New Caledonia issue and MSG's support for FLNKS aspirations. He stated that views expressed by Members on New Caledonia at the Caucus will provide useful guidance to the Secretariat when developing the Roadmap for Assistance to the FLNKS as agreed to by the MSG Leaders during their sideline meeting on the margins of the PALM10 in Tokyo. With respect to the Ocean of Peace initiative by Fiji, he recognised the need, relevance and the importance of this initiative and appealed to the MSG Group to continue to provide whatever support is necessary when it is considered at the PIF.

9. On the issue of the Policing Pacific Initiative, DG Louma felt compelled to advise the MSG to take a precautionary approach and ensure that this initiative is designed and framed to suit the real needs of members. He pointed out that collective policing is not a new concept and MSG members would do well to explore synergies between the PPI and the proposals contained in the MSG Security Strategy, such as the Formed Police Unit, to operationalise sub-regional self-help collective policing initiatives. He stressed the importance of utilising sub-regional arrangements to contextualise and implement the wider regional initiatives. On MSG Leaders dialogue with Indonesia, he reported to the Leaders that the Secretariat continues to maintain dialogue with the Indonesian authorities to find new opportunities on when this dialogue could take place. The Director General then thanked all the MSG Leaders and officials who were present and looked forward to implementing the collective decisions that would be reached by the Caucus. A copy of his Remarks is attached as ***Annex II***.

AGENDA ITEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. AGENDA 1: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

10. On the basis of prior consultations, and given time constraints, the MSG Chair sought the understanding of the Leaders to amend the provisional agenda so more focus will be spent on the New Caledonia issue, which would entail more time to be given to FLNKS to provide a comprehensive brief on the New Caledonia dossier to the MSG Leaders. The Chair suggested that other issues on the provisional agenda could be dealt with in more detail in the next MSG Leaders' Summit proper.

B. AGENDA 2: STATEMENT BY LEADERS

11. Leaders agreed to the MSG Chair's proposal to forego this, as Leaders would have the opportunity to speak to the specific issues when they are brought up under the different agenda items.

12. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola representing Fiji as the Special Envoy took the floor to extend the apologies of Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka.

13. Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele, while agreeing to the proposal by the Chair, indicated that it would be useful to hear the brief from the FLNKS first before any discussions can take place on New Caledonia.

C. AGENDA 3: KANAKY/NEW CALEDONIA

UPDATE BY THE PRESIDENT OF NEW CALEDONIA

14. Honourable Louis Mapou, President of the New Caledonia Government, presented an update on the New Caledonia issue on behalf of the FLNKS. President Mapou firstly thanked the MSG Leaders for according him the right to be able to sit with the MSG Leaders at this Caucus. He recalled a request he made to the French Government for permission to be given for New Caledonia to affiliate with the Melanesian Spearhead Group as associate member. He expressed confidence and hope that this meeting would signal the beginning of an evolution in thinking for New Caledonia to be part of the MSG, given that New Caledonia was an integral part of the MSG agenda since its inception. In relation to the law-and-order situation in New Caledonia, he mentioned that although tensions have now somewhat eased, there were still some small areas where law and order challenges remained unresolved and roadblocks are still maintained. He highlighted the fact that the foundations on which New Caledonian society was built were being called into question, with attacks on churches, schools and so on.

15. He anticipated that by mid-September this year, the situation in New Caledonia would return to normalcy. President Mapou briefly described to the Leaders the extent of the violence that transpired since early May and briefly outlined the disastrous effects of the May events have had on the social and economic front and the resulting complicated challenges that it has created for the future. In addition, President Mapou mentioned the growing doubts and impatience of Kanak youth in the face of their long-awaited independence. He informed the Leaders that he has raised with the PIF TROIKA during their recent meeting to call on France to expeditiously reopen negotiations on the future status of New Caledonia so that new conditions with clear intention can be established. He mentioned that while the lack of majority for the new Government was complicating matters, they are also anticipating and hoping a new Government to be formed in France would provide a new opportunity to establish a new level of understanding and for future support from France.

16. He highlighted that the recent elections in New Caledonia, proved successful for the pro-independent parties. He highlighted that this trend whereby Pro-Independent parties in New Caledonia have retained control of the Government and have successfully elected an independentist representative to the French Assembly, was as a result of the huge turnout of the population of New Caledonia and particularly independentist voters. This trend, which began with the referendums, was confirmed by the legislative elections, which showed a victory for the independentists. He said that discussions are now underway internally and that they are looking forward to reinstating efforts and discussions to bring New Caledonia to

the inevitable access to full sovereignty. He reminded the meeting that New Caledonia is historically a settlement colony and there have been unresolved issues of racism and segregation.

17. This has been an ongoing challenge to the efforts to build the foundations of unity and cooperation amongst the communities. He also informed the Leaders that in his discussions with the PIF TROIKA with respect to the visit to New Caledonia, he emphasised the importance of the need for support of the Region in order to gain the confidence of the people of New Caledonia. He stated that the recent tensions resulted in eleven (11) deaths and that the people are slowly recovering and are healing from this traumatic experience. He mentioned that discussions are continuing to develop new policies for the reconstruction of New Caledonia. He concluded that the New Caledonia Government sees new windows of opportunities ahead on these important discussions with the French President.

18. Following the brief by the President of the New Caledonia Government, Leaders while expressing sorrow for the lives lost and the destructions caused by the May upheavals, took the opportunity to discuss the types of support needed to assist New Caledonia. They reaffirmed support for FLNKS aspirations for the proper exercise of their right to self-determination of the indigenous peoples of New Caledonia (Kanak), urged the MSG diplomatic efforts at the UN and other international fora to be stepped up, called for the objectives and scope of the PIF Mission to be clearly defined, and directed the MSG Secretariat to develop a credible Roadmap of Assistance to FLNKS in their quest for independence. In addition, a suggestion was made for France to wait until the PIF TROIKA Mission to New Caledonia is undertaken and the report of their findings is made, in order to properly reset its approach to the situation in New Caledonia, including the decolonization process.

19. The Leaders;

- i. **Thanked and welcomed** the brief update provided by the President of the New Caledonia Government on the political, economic and social situation in New Caledonia;
- ii. **Called** on the Government of France to allow the PIF Mission to visit New Caledonia quickly and to include the New Caledonia Government in the preparations and development of the terms of reference for the PIF TROIKA led mission;
- iii. **Noted** the call for MSG to assist New Caledonia in future to help restore law and order as necessary so as to promote peace and security in our region; and

iv. **Tasked** the Secretariat to continue liaising with Members, as well as in consultation with the FLNKS Political Bureau, to develop a Draft Roadmap for Assistance to FLNKS and have the draft tabled for the consideration of the MSG Leaders when they next meet in 2025.

D. AGENDA 4: OCEAN OF PEACE

20. On this agenda, the Leaders did not discuss this but noted the Paper that was submitted by the Secretariat commending this initiative as being useful and necessary, and recommending that the MSG render the requisite support at the PIF for this Initiative to be pursued.

E. AGENDA 5: PACIFIC POLICING INITIATIVE (PPI)

21. On this agenda, the Leaders did not discuss it. Note was taken of the precautionary approach suggested by the Secretariat in the Paper on this item and acknowledged that national interests and due PIF process and protocols on the vetting of this initiative may be necessary in the consideration of this item at the PIIFLM53.

E. AGENDA 6: MSG LEADERS DIALOGUE WITH THE PRESIDENT OF INDONESIA AND POSSIBLE VISIT TO THE INDONESIAN PAPUAN PROVINCES

22. Leaders were reminded by the Director General that during the 22nd MSG Leaders Summit in Port Vila, it was agreed for the MSG Leaders to undertake a visit to Jakarta and make representations on the developments in the Melanesian/Papuan provinces in Indonesia. This is part of the broader strategy approved by MSG Leaders to develop constructive dialogue platforms with Indonesia.

23. It was noted that since that decision in August 2023, two (2) opportunities for the MSG Leaders to meet with the President of Indonesia was provided by the Indonesian Government, (i) during the High-Level Meeting of the Archipelagic Islands States (AIS) in October 2023 in Bali, and the World Water Forum in May 2024. These two dialogue arrangements with the President of Indonesia did not materialise, because the MSG Prime Ministers were not in attendance.

24. The meeting acknowledged that the dialogue with the President of Indonesia is important for better understanding to be created on issues pertaining to West Papua and the Papuan Provinces, for demarcations

to be made directly at the highest levels on the welfare and development aspirations of the Melanesian peoples in the Papuan provinces of Indonesia.

25. The Leaders:

- i. **Noted** the updates by the MSG Secretariat;
- ii. **Reaffirmed** the validity of previous decisions of MSG Leaders with respect to West Papua and the Papuan Provinces of Indonesia
- iii. **Underscored again** the importance for the creation of a dialogue platform between the MSG Leaders and the President of Indonesia as a platform for exchange of information, frank and open discussions to be held on West Papua and the Papuan Provinces, and make demarcations at the highest levels on relations between the MSG and Indonesia;
- iv. **Noted** the outstanding request by the PIF for the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner to visit West Papua;
- v. **Expressed** deep appreciation to Prime Minister Rabuka and Prime Minister Marape for their PIF Special Envoy role to meet with the Indonesian President at the 2023 APEC Leaders meeting in San Francisco; and
- vi. **Tasked** the Secretariat to continue to liaise with the relevant Indonesian Government authorities and determine future opportunities for dialogue between the MSG Leaders and the Indonesian President, as well as to undertake possible visits to the Indonesian Papuan Provinces, including the possibility of a dialogue during the inauguration ceremony of the New President of Indonesia in October 2024.

F. AGENDA 7: SPECIAL MSG LEADERS SUMMIT – 14 NOVEMBER 2024

26. Leaders were briefed, by both the Secretariat and Fiji's Special Envoy, on the MSG Special Leaders' Summit scheduled for November in Fiji, including the ceremony for the handover/takeover of the MSG Chairmanship.

27. The Leaders:

- i. **Noted** the request by Fiji for a further postponement of the MSG Leaders' Summit and associated MSG Governing Body meetings to 25 - 29 November 2024;

- ii. **Agreed**, at the request of the Secretariat, for only the MSG SOM and FMM to convene, as a Budget Session, on the proposed new dates to consider the 2025 Work Programme and Budget of the Secretariat; and
- iii. **Tasked** the Secretariat to continue to liaise with the MSG Chair, the incoming Chair and other MSG Members to determine a convenient time to convene the Special MSG Leaders' Summit for the handover/takeover of the MSG Chair to take place.

G. AGENDA 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB)

- 28. On the proposal by Papua New Guinea to consider the possibility of having a PIF Candidate for the UN Secretary General Position, the Leaders;
 - i. **Agreed** to have this issue tabled in the next meeting of the MSG Leaders for consideration.
- 29. Invitation by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea to the MSG Leaders' to attend the visit by the Papal on 6 – 9 September 2024 and the 50th Independence of Papua New Guinea on 16 September 2025.
- 30. The Leaders;
 - ii. **Welcomed** the invitation by the Prime Minister to his colleague MSG Leaders' to attend the two upcoming events in Papua New Guinea, consisting of the Pope's Visit from 6 - 9 September 2024, and the 50th Independence Celebrations in 2025;
 - iii. **Noted** the proposition by Prime Minister Marape to convene an MSG Leaders' Caucus in the margins of Papua New Guinea's 50th Independence Anniversary celebrations in Port Moresby on 16 September 2025.

H. CONCLUSION

- 31. MSG Chair thanked all the Leaders, Foreign Ministers, Senior Officials, and the Director General of the MSG Secretariat for their support and contributions during MSG Leaders' Caucus and encouraged his colleague Leaders to maintain and carry with them the spirit of solidarity demonstrated in the MSG Leaders Caucus to the PIF Leaders' Meetings.
- 32. The MSG Leaders' Caucus was closed with a prayer by His Excellency Ratu Inoke Kubuabola.



Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas, MP
Prime Minister
Republic of Vanuatu
& Chair of the Melanesian Spearhead Group

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