

10 April 2024, Nuku'alofa

Keynote Address by Tonga's PM at Forum dates launch

Keynote Address by the Prime Minister, Hon. Hu'akavameiliku

at the

Launching of the Theme of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum and Related Meetings

Your Royal Highness, Crown Prince Tupouto'a 'Ulukalala
Deputy Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament
Nobles of the Realm
His Eminence Cardinal Soane Patita Mafi and Church Leaders
Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Chief Executive Officers and Government Representatives
Distinguished Guests
Private Sector, Civil Society Organizations, Town Officers, Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

Malo e Lelei and Welcome to Tonga!



It is with great pleasure that I stand before you all today as the Incoming Forum Chair. Today signifies a special moment for Tonga – as it officially commences preparations for the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting. It has been many years (2007 in fact) since Tonga last hosted the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ meeting – the most important meeting in our regional calendar.

Hosting the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting is not only a prestigious honour and privilege, but comes with a great deal of responsibility as Tonga will be at the helm of driving the collective development aspirations of “our” Blue Pacific region.

We look forward to hosting our brothers and sisters from across the Forum family, and I look forward to your support to ensure we do so with great hospitality, and befitting our title as the “Friendly Islands”.

We have experienced significant challenges here in Tonga over the past few years. In 2018 Tropical Cyclone Gita ravaged our islands and our infrastructure. This was followed in early 2022 by COVID-19 and the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha’apai volcanic eruption, which combined to cause unprecedented damage to our homes, our families, our villages, and our economy. Tonga therefore understands first-hand, the importance

of building resilience at all levels – community, national, and regional. Tonga has prioritised resilient design in all its planning and work – placing the marginalized and vulnerable communities at the centre.

On top of this, we have dealt with transnational crime, with rising energy and food prices, and at the same time our education and health indicators have lagged due to disruptions because of natural disasters. These challenges have all tested us as individuals and as a nation.

Challenges like these are common across the Pacific. Our brothers and sisters for example in Samoa, in Solomon Islands, in Kiribati, in Palau, and in Vanuatu all face the same challenges and the same vulnerabilities, and across the Forum membership we all face the same need for financing to keep our public and private sectors afloat, minimizing disruption to key sectors such as Agriculture, Education and Health, (and soften the effect of external shocks to our economy).

Through all of our challenges – our people have never lost their will, and determination. In fact, it makes us stronger and more resilient as Pacific peoples.

With our unique vulnerabilities – we must build resilience into everything that we do: how we address the impacts climate change and environmental degradation, how we build our economies through collective solutions, how we build the capacity of our people through innovation and technology, and in how we address our continued health challenges by working together. We must BUILD BETTER NOW.

Within this context, it is important that we embed the idea of resilience in all of our regional priorities – from climate change adaptation, to economic development and trade, to regional security, to education and health, to environmental protection. And it is this idea of transformative resilience that Tonga has the opportunity to champion at the 2024 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting, drawing on its own unique experiences of the last few years.

Leaders have endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and its Implementation Plan, which underpin our region's collective commitment to a resilient Pacific. As set out in the 2050 Strategy - "our vision is for a resilient Pacific Region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives".

In all of these areas, resilience must frame and shape how we develop and how we monitor our regional policy priorities.

As a part of resilience-building, I am also committed to ensuring that the 2024 Forum Leaders Meeting is focused on results. With the 2050 Strategy now in place, we must move beyond visioning and policy deliberation, to a focus on the achievement of tangible results and outcomes at the national level.

With this in mind, it is my ambition that Leaders carefully examine the implementation of all key initiatives that have been put in place over the past few years, with a view to monitoring and measuring the tangible outcomes that have been produced.

After all, Pacific regionalism is first and foremost about the countries and the territories of the Pacific working together for the purpose of achieving more effective results and impacts at the national and community levels.

To bring these concepts together, I am pleased to announce that we have developed a theme for the 2024 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting. It is a theme that reflects our unique position as the Kingdom of Tonga but also resonates right across the Pacific Islands Forum Membership. And the theme is “Transformative Resilient Pasifiki: Build Better Now.” Tonga believes that the Pacific must now move beyond policy deliberation to implementation – achieve transformation by building better now. Tonga also recognises the importance of resilience, which cuts across all 7 thematic areas of the 2050 Strategy.

I believe this theme will set the tone and the parameters for the 2024 Pacific Islands Forum and the consideration of its Leaders by ensuring that the meeting agendas, and substantive reports and recommendations are all focused on resilience and results.

I am also confident that this theme will ensure that the 2024 Forum Leaders Meeting, chaired by Tonga, will mark a transition point in the Forum from planning and visioning, to a sustained focus on results – results for our region, member countries, results for our communities, results for our people, and results for the next generation.

The official logo we launched, captured the spirit of the THEME. The Dove is universally recognised as a symbol of peace and love. The Kalia is recognised as means of transportation that are common to most if not all in our Blue Continent. We are all in this journey, face with lots of challenges but there’s hope...in the horizon we have a rising sun, and rainbow to remind us theres always HOPE, theres always HOPE for a better Tomorrow.

In closing, I fully acknowledge that the success of Tonga’s Forum depends on all of our collective and shared efforts. It is not the role of one agency alone to convene the Pacific Islands Forum. All of us must come together as we prepare to welcome our brothers and sisters to Tonga in a few short months.

With the pleasure of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Tupouto’a ‘Ulukalala launching of the dates, our theme and the logo, the various communication tools, we look forward

to hosting a successful and happy 2024 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting on 26-30 August here in the Kingdom.

Malo 'Aupito