

SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

SUVA, 12-14 SEPTEMBER, 1972

FINAL PRESS COMMUNIQUE

The President of Nauru, the Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Western Samoa and Fiji, the Premier of the Cook Islands, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Lands of Tonga met in Suva from 12-14 September for the third meeting of the South Pacific Forum.

This meeting, the first to be held in the Islands, was welcomed by participants as reflecting the acceptance of the Forum as a permanent regional institution. It was also appropriate that the meeting should be held in the capital of one of its Island members where the Bureau for Economic Co-operation is to be located.

As at the first two meetings in Wellington and Canberra, discussion centred on matters of immediate and practical concern. The measures which were considered were directed towards the social and economic well-being of the peoples of the member countries, with special emphasis on ways and means of developing mutual trade.

The South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation

The Forum decided to conclude as soon as possible an Agreement for the establishment of a South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation and approved the terms of a draft text which they initialled. They undertook to recommend its adoption to their governments.

The Forum confirmed the appointment of the Honourable Mahe Tupouniua, Minister of Finance in Tonga, as Director and appointed Mr. K.W. Piddington, formerly Head of the Economic Division of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be Deputy Director. They will be starting work in Suva in November.

Membership of Forum and Bureau

While upholding the principle that membership of the Forum should be restricted to decision-makers from independent or self-governing countries, members wished to find a way in which a country such as Papua New Guinea, which expects to become self-governing by the end of 1973, and which has expressed a genuine interest in becoming a member of the Forum, can be associated with it at an earlier date.

The Forum considered that it would be inappropriate to establish different types of membership in either the Forum or the Bureau. Prospective members could be invited to attend its own meetings as observers in the period immediately prior to achieving self-government. It noted the request made by Mr. Michael Somare, Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea forwarded to Fiji, the host Government, raising the question of attendance at the Forum. The Forum decided to invite Papua New Guinea to attend future Forum meetings as an observer until such time as it met the criterion for full membership at self-government or independence. Membership of the Bureau need not be restricted to members of the Forum, providing that the Forum itself decides to approve an application

from a non-member. The services of the Bureau should, however, be available to territories in the region who are not members whether or not they contribute financially.

Trade and Economic Co-operation

The Forum considered how regional co-operation in trade and economic matters might be strengthened and discussed the possibility of arrangements amongst Forum members to facilitate trade and economic development.

It is appropriate that the co-operation of the Forum countries should have culminated in the formation of the Bureau of Economic Cooperation at a time when the enlargement of the EEC has made changes necessary in the trading patterns of Forum countries.

The options available to certain Island members of the Forum in regard to their future relations with the enlarged EEC were discussed. Members recognised that it would be necessary to weigh up carefully the respective advantages and disadvantages of these options bearing in mind possible regional arrangements in the longer term.

Ways must be found to strengthen economies of Island members of the Forum by extending the production and processing industries. In particular, special consideration should be given to:

- the development of further processing of primary products
- the rationalisation of import substitution industries
- the establishment of export-oriented manufacturing industries

The Forum decided that the Bureau for Economic Cooperation should be asked to carry out a commodity by commodity and an industry by industry study to identify where and in what manner development might take place. This study will examine exports by Island numbers within the region and look at export possibilities beyond the South Pacific. It will take into account quarantine and commercial regulation besides tariffs.

The Bureau is also asked to report on the factors which need to be taken into account in deciding whether and on what conditions Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa should seek association status with the EEC.

Forum members acknowledged the need to make the use of existing opportunities such as those available under the General Scheme of Preferences for developing countries.

Australia and New Zealand expressed their willingness to work closely with island members and the Bureau in finding solutions to the many important trade and economic matters which they must now face. This could include such assistance as:

- cooperation in assisting fair commercial access to each others market for agreed commodities
- facilitation of investment and encouragement of joint ventures in industries using Islands' raw materials

- encouragement of cooperation in consultancy services, in design and construction projects including joint ventures with a maximum practicable use of Island resources
- supporting the negotiation of international agreements to improve the conditions of trade in primary products.

The Forum discussion highlighted the fact that no single or simple action is likely to solve trade problems. There must be continuing action over a wide range of activities if the islands are to expand and diversify their trade in the region and in wider world markets.

Nuclear Testing

The question of nuclear weapons tests was extensively discussed in the light of the series of tests recently concluded by France.

Members were unanimous in expressing their deep concern that the French Government should have failed so significantly to accord recognition to the wishes of the peoples of the South Pacific area despite the views so clearly indicated by both government and peoples. The fact that radioactive fallout from this year's series was low because of the nature of the test explosions carried out did not lessen their opposition which would remain unaltered until such time as a firm assurance was given that the South Pacific would not be used as a site for further experimentation of this kind with its resulting implications for men and his environment, and in particular the marine environment.

Members exchanged views as to the ways and means by which they could pursue their common objective of bringing to an end all nuclear weapons tests in all environments by any country. The Prime Minister of New Zealand and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia informed the meeting of the steps being taken by the two Governments to invite Pacific member states of the United Nations similarly concerned about this matter to meet in New York during the early stages of the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, and outlined the approach which they intended to adopt. The warm support of other Forum members was voiced for this initiative.

Law of the Sea

The Forum discussed a number of issues concerning the Law of the sea including the breadth of the territorial sea, the question of resources jurisdiction over a wider area of sea and of the sea-bed, a special regime for archipelago states and rights of passage through waters subject to the jurisdiction of coastal states. They agreed that there was a large area of common interest among members of the Forum and that there should continue to be close consultation among them in relation to the prospective Conference on the Law of the Sea.

Members of the Forum recognised Tonga's historical association with the Minerva Reefs, welcomed the Tongan Government's continuing interest in the area and agreed that there could be no question of recognising other claims, and specifically that of the Ocean Life Research Foundation, to sovereignty over the reefs.

University of the South Pacific

The Forum agreed that, because they contribute to University finances, regional representation on the 1972 University Salaries Committee should be increased to four so that members can be appointed from Tonga and the British Solomon Islands in addition to Fiji and Samoa.

Telecommunications

The Forum noted that the UNDP has recruited two experts to study telecommunications improvements and that their reports will be considered at a Technical Meeting in 1974.

Regional Development Bank

The Forum took the opportunity to discuss the report of a UNDP visiting mission which has recommended the establishment of a regional development bank which will be an item on the agenda of the forthcoming South Pacific Conference in Apia

Regional Shipping

The Forum considered a paper reporting the results of a recent Seminar on Shipping held in Western Samoa. Members discussed the feasibility of a regional shipping line, inflationary increases in freight rates, the need to improve present services, and a number of features about the trade of the region which should be taken into account in deciding what kind of shipping services are required.

The Forum commissioned the Bureau to carry out further studies into the financial and operational structure of regional shipping line. An important objective of the study would be to determine the extent to which such line would be economically viable and to make recommendations on ways and means of achieving this aim. The Forum noted the suggestion that Australia might be able to assist in the study to be made by the Bureau. It accepted with appreciation Australia's offer to do whatever it could to assist.

Demographic Problems

The Forum reviewed the cause and effect of population problems, particularly those arising from education systems not adapted to contemporary needs, and supported an approach to UNESCO to organise a Conference, in conjunction with the South Pacific Commission, to consider population problems, urbanisation and resettlement in the Pacific region.

Tourism

The Forum discussed the effects of tourism in the region and supported a proposal, to be discussed at the South Pacific Conference in Apia, that UNESCO might be asked to undertake a study of tourism in the South Pacific with particular reference to its impact on the way of life of the islands.

Next Meeting

Members gratefully accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister of Western Samoa to hold the next meeting of the Forum in Apia before the 1973 South Pacific Conference.