

FIFTH SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

Rarotonga, Cook Islands

20 – 22 March 1974

FORUM COMMUNIQUÉ

NUCLEAR TESTING

Members recalled the expressions of opposition to atmospheric nuclear testing at the last three meetings of the Forum. In particular they recalled the Joint Declaration on such testing made at the meeting last year. They deplored the fact that despite the declaration, France has since carried out a further series of tests in the South Pacific which has resulted in the deposit of radioactive fall-out in a number of countries in the region.

Members once again called on Governments, and in particular the Government of France, the only Government testing in the South Pacific, to heed the views of the Forum, the calls of the United Nations General Assembly and other international bodies and obligations under international law by bringing about an immediate halt to all testing.

Members were unanimous in expressing their concern at the potential health and other hazards to which their people and environment were exposed as a result of radioactive fall-out from such tests.

Members welcomed renewed efforts being made at the international level for a ban on nuclear weapons testing in all environments and agreed to encourage and support any constructive moves that would preserve the human family from the hazards of nuclear weapons testing and further the goal of nuclear arms control and disarmament.

SOUTH PACIFIC BUREAU FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

The Director's report on the activities of the Bureau over the past year was received by the Forum. Members expressed high admiration and appreciation of the wide range of effective work carried out by the Bureau over its short life and paid tribute to the Director and his small staff for their dedication to the furthering of regional cooperation in the South Pacific. The Forum approved the Bureau's budget for 1974 and welcomed the announcement by the Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea that Papua New Guinea would contribute \$F7,000 to the Bureau in addition to its normal budgetary contribution.

The Forum also received a report from the South Pacific Committee for Economic Co-operation and heard with interest an account of the progress made in establishing the permanent headquarters of SPEC. Members welcomed the announcement by the Prime Minister of New Zealand that the Government of New Zealand had approved the proposed plans and would meet the costs of construction.

The Forum endorsed the decision of the Conference of the Pacific Islands Producers' Association that the Association should be terminated and its functions absorbed by SPEC.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand advised that his Government had authorised an increase of 70 cents per case of bananas, to be financed in the first instance from aid funds and to be subject to review after 6 months. The intention was that the bulk of this increase should go to the Island producers, and his Government hoped that it would serve as an incentive to the growers and the marketing agencies to improve the overall quality of the bananas shipped. The detailed implementation of this decision would be worked out in consultation with the Governments concerned.

ASSOCIATION WITH THE EEC

The Forum heard with interest an account of the progress made in the negotiations on association with the European Economic Communities by Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa and of the assistance given to these members by SPEC in establishing a Pacific Secretariat in Brussels. Other members expressed their readiness to assist the three countries concerned in any way possible during these negotiations. They noted that SPEC and the Governments concerned would continue to keep them informed of developments. The Forum agreed that it was appropriate for SPEC to act in the interests of a group of members when requested to do so.

AID COORDINATION

The Forum stressed the need for better information on the availability of aid to the region, so that Island Members would know more about the potential sources of aid as well as the criteria applied by different donors. It was noted that SPEC had now embarked on drawing up a list of aid sources, public and private, and that the necessary service could thus be provided within the terms of the mandate previously laid down for the work of the Bureau.

LABOUR

The Forum considered a paper, presented by Australia, outlining developments at the Conference of South Pacific Labour Ministers held in Sydney in October 1973. The Forum expressed support for plans to hold a seminar in Suva in 1974 on problems of industrial relations and a further Conference of Labour Ministers in New Zealand later in the year. The meeting stressed the impact of trade union actions on the Island economies and expressed the hope that trade unionists in Australia and New Zealand would increasingly take into account the implications of their activities. It noted with interest the possibility of involving trade unions in economic and budgetary planning.

The meeting considered a proposal by the Premier of the Cook Islands for the introduction of a labour exchange scheme between the Island Members to provide further training and experience for lower level workers. The Forum commended this suggestion to individual member Governments.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Members discussed the problems of telecommunications within the region, with particular emphasis on problems of communications between Island Member countries. The Forum expressed its support for the course of action proposed in the SPEC Report of

the South Pacific Regional Telecommunications Meeting held in Suva from 28 November to 5 December 1973. This involves:

- upgrading of present telecommunications links;
- a feasibility study for a South Pacific regional telecommunications network;
- a telecommunications training project;
- investigation of maritime communications In the region.

The Forum felt that the proposed programme would be of great benefit in easing the problems which Forum Members had been discussing. In carrying out the programme, SPEC was asked to give priority to an examination of present operational techniques, with a view to a possible improvement in the use of existing facilities.

DISSEMINATION OF NEWS

The Forum discussed the need for fuller dissemination of regional news as a means of increasing mutual knowledge and awareness about developments in Member countries. It agreed that there was a particular need to increase the flow of supplementary and background information in order to put current news items in perspective. It was noted that circulation of news within the region would improve with the improvement of telecommunications and the possible role of Government Information Offices in assisting the process was considered. Some Members expressed concern about the harm which frequently stemmed from inaccurate reporting.

The Forum agreed to refer the topic to SPEC for consideration and asked the Bureau to report to the next Forum.

EDUCATION AND ADJUSTMENT OF MIGRANTS

The Forum welcomed with interest a paper on this subject which had been prepared by the Government of New Zealand. The Prime Minister of New Zealand informed the Forum that his Government was undertaking a complete review of its immigration policy. The Forum recognised the need for appropriate steps to be taken to help migrants make the adjustments necessary to life in a new country. It was a matter for individual Governments in the countries of emigration to decide to what extent preparation should be undertaken before the migrants leave.

PRESERVATION OF SOUTH PACIFIC CULTURE

The Foreign minister of Australia expressed his Government's desire to assist in preserving the cultural heritage of the Island countries of the South Pacific. To this end his Government was prepared to make \$A250,000 available as an initial contribution towards a five-year programme for the preservation and development of Pacific cultures. This programme would be region-wide and would be additional to the current Australian aid programme for the South Pacific and to the Australian voluntary contribution to the South Pacific Commission. The Forum warmly welcomed this initiative by the Australian Government.

REGIONAL EXAMINATION STANDARDS

The Forum discussed a suggestion by the Government of the Cook Islands for consideration of the establishment of special examination standards for medium level students in Island countries of the region. Members noted the need for levels of education and training to satisfy the aspirations of their peoples; at the same time it was felt that curricula should give greater emphasis to local history, languages and culture.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION TRAINING

The Forum discussed a paper by the Government of Papua New Guinea on the need for technical training within the environment. Members welcomed an offer by the Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea to make places available for Island students in his country's technical institutions. Forum Members were asked to consider how to improve the regional approach to technical education. Members noted the need to make better use of existing facilities within the region.

FOREIGN FISHING IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The Forum received a further paper prepared by the Government of New Zealand analysing the extent of foreign fishing in the South Pacific. The Forum thanked New Zealand for its work on this important subject and accepted its offer to present up-dated papers to future meetings.

The Prime Minister of Fiji referred to an offer which had been made by the International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management to assist in training and other measures to improve fisheries in the region. The offer was noted by the Forum and referred to SPEC for examination and recommendations on future action.

LAW OF THE SEA

Members expressed deep interest in the two forthcoming U.N. Meetings at Kenya and Venezuela on the law of the sea. It was agreed that it would be useful for Forum members to consult prior to the Venezuela meeting with a view to arriving at a consensus on the various matters to be discussed there.

REGIONAL SHIPPING

The Forum discussed the SPEC report on regional shipping and the reports of the subsequent meetings of the Technical Meeting on Shipping and the SPEC Committee, which recommended that, in the light of the information available, the way was now clear for the Forum to decide whether or not to proceed with the proposed regional shipping venture. Members re-affirmed the need to make progress in this key area by adopting a truly cooperative approach at the inter-governmental level.

It was pointed out that some member countries already operated shipping services in the region and members were asked to support these services. It was also pointed out that other Members were not well served by available shipping.

The Forum agreed as a first step, to establish a Regional Shipping Council, consisting of Ministers or their representatives from all Members of the Forum. The Council would organise, through SPEC, the studies and investigations needed as a basis for a subsequent decision by the Forum on the establishment of a Regional Shipping Corporation and on any other practical steps to improve shipping services throughout the region. The necessary groundwork for the setting up of the Council was entrusted to SPEC, along with the preparation of a report on future action to be considered at the next meeting of the Forum. The Forum welcomed with appreciation an offer by the Prime Minister of New Zealand to make an immediate grant of \$25,000 to enable work under this heading to be pursued with minimum delay.

TRADE EXPANSION

The Forum received a report prepared by a United Nations Mission commissioned by SPEC. It noted the view of the SPEC Committee that priority should be given to certain proposed projects designed to assist in filling the nutritional gap in the region. The Forum agreed that SPEC should use the report as a basis for further study and invited Member Governments to forward to SPEC their ideas on the report.

Members considered a paper by the Government of the Cook Islands which proposed the establishment of a regional centre for bulk purchasing. The Forum requested SPEC, in continuing its works on this subject, to give consideration to the proposals put forward by the Cook Islands.

The Forum discussed the impediments to regional trade posed by quarantine restrictions considered necessary to prevent the spread of pests and diseases within the region. It was recommended that each Government should proceed to review the continuing validity of its quarantine restrictions with a view to expansion of regional trade. Where any doubts existed there should be consultations between the Governments concerned. It was emphasised that quarantine measures should not be allowed to become a substitute for import restrictions.

The Forum received a paper by the Government of Australia on the Australian system of market assistance for developing countries which was introduced on 1 January 1974. The meeting expressed appreciation of this Australian initiative.

REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

At the request of the Prime Minister of Fiji, the Australian Foreign Minister gave the Forum an account of the reasons for the recent suspension of the Australian "easy visitor visa" system for Fiji and Colombia. They expressed the hope that the system might be restored as soon as possible.

Members of the Forum involved in the South Pacific Commission announced that their Governments would sign at an early date the Memorandum of Understanding on the merger of the South Pacific Commission and Conference which had been agreed, ad referendum, at a meeting of members held in Wellington in March 1974.

The Forum discussed the problems of regional aviation. It was agreed that a meeting of Ministers responsible for Civil Aviation would be arranged by the Government of Fiji before the next meeting of the Forum. This meeting would make a final attempt to resolve the difficulties that had arisen. In particular it would consider whether the regional airline should be continued or whether each country should concentrate on its national operation.

PACIFIC COUNCIL

The Prime Minister of New Zealand introduced a paper proposing the establishment of a Pacific Council. The Forum agreed to give the proposal careful consideration.

REGIONAL COURT OF APPEAL

The Forum favourably received a paper by Western Samoa on a regional court of appeal and agreed to refer the matter to the Law Conference to be held in Suva in the following June. The Conference would be requested to prepare a report to be considered by the next Forum.

NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Forum would be held in Nuku'alofa in July 1975.

ATTENDANCE AT THE FORUM

The Forum discussed a request by the Congress of Micronesia to attend the Forum in Rarotonga as an observer. Forum members agreed that the Premier of the Cook Islands should inform the Congress of the requirements for attendance of observers at the Forum, namely that, observer status is accorded to leaders of Governments approaching full self-government or independence, and request them in the light of this to advise the Government of Tonga, as the host of the next Forum, as to their possible attendance.

Rarotonga, 22 March, 1974