



FORUM FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTERS' MEETING

**26 March 2008
Auckland, New Zealand**

OUTCOMES STATEMENT

As directed by Forum Leaders at the thirty-eighth Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga in October 2007, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Forum met in Auckland, New Zealand on 26 March 2008 to discuss the situation in Fiji and in particular, to review the progress being made towards a parliamentary election in the first quarter of 2009. The meeting was chaired by the Hon Sonatane Tu'akinamolahi Taumoepeau-Tupou, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tonga, and was attended by the Premier of Niue; the Prime Minister of Samoa; Ministers from Australia, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu; and officials from the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Fiji's delegation was led by the Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Civil Aviation. Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of New Zealand for hosting the meeting.

2. Ministers received a report from the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum-Fiji Joint Working Group on the Situation in Fiji (the "Working Group"), on the Working Group's discussions and activities since its inception in March 2007, particularly its efforts to encourage and support the return of Fiji to democracy. Ministers received a presentation from the Fiji Interim Government on Fiji's election preparations and related issues. Ministers also received a briefing from Commonwealth Representative Sir Paul Reeves on the Commonwealth's ongoing efforts to facilitate a broad-based political dialogue in Fiji.

3. Ministers:

- (a) reinforced the importance of the Fiji interim government honouring the undertakings made to Forum Leaders that a parliamentary election would be held in the first quarter of 2009, that this election would be held in accordance with Fiji's Constitution, and that the outcome of the election would be accepted by the Fiji Interim Government and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces;
- (b) noted the preparations advised by Fiji for the holding of an election in the first quarter of 2009, expressed concern about slow progress to date, and encouraged the Fiji Interim Government to intensify its efforts to achieve the election milestones endorsed by this meeting;
- (c) noted advice received from Fiji that a detailed timetable for election preparations would be considered by Fiji's interim Cabinet in the second week of April and provided to Forum members upon the

interim Cabinet's approval. Ministers emphasised the importance of such a timetable faithfully reflecting the commitments already made to Forum Leaders and the Working Group, and being provided and implemented without any further delay;

- (d) welcomed advice from Fiji that the appointment of the Supervisor of Elections would be finalised by the end of this week, and looked forward to such an announcement, recognising the impetus this could provide to election preparations;
- (e) emphasised the importance of the Fiji Interim Government ensuring that the People's Charter process would not delay or distract from the holding of an election in the first quarter of 2009;
- (f) urged Fiji to ensure that adequate and timely resources are made available to ensure the election timetable is met, both through its own budget and by cooperating with the international community to facilitate necessary assistance;
- (g) noted Fiji's position on the effects of travel bans, and the position of Australia and New Zealand;
- (h) expressed their concern about human rights abuses, threats to media freedom and judicial independence, and similar actions that were inconsistent with the creation of an environment in which free and fair elections could be held and Fiji's longer-term issues resolved;
- (i) acknowledged that an overall resolution of issues in Fiji would be a long-term exercise, and that resolution processes should be independent and inclusive. Ministers also affirmed that elections constituted a crucial prerequisite to creating the conditions in which this longer term resolution could be promoted; and
- (j) confirmed their support for efforts to encourage a genuinely independent and inclusive political dialogue to complement progress towards the March 2009 election, and welcomed the work of the Commonwealth to this end; recognised the potential for an initiative of this nature, along with elections, to assist in the achievement of a longer term resolution to the situation in Fiji; and expressed their appreciation for the Commonwealth's close cooperation with the Forum in pursuit of their respective and complementary activities in Fiji.

4. Ministers considered appropriate mechanisms for the Forum to continue monitoring and supporting Fiji's progress toward holding an election in the first quarter of 2009. Ministers acknowledged the assessment of Forum Leaders that the Working Group had proven a useful means for engaging with the Interim Government and implementing the decisions of Forum Leaders and Ministers, and as such, agreed that the Working Group should remain constituted. Ministers decided that a Ministerial Contact Group should be formed to further monitor the progress of Fiji's preparations for the election and the return to democracy, and report to the 39th meeting of Forum Leaders. Ministers called on the Fiji Interim Government to work closely with the Ministerial Contact Group. The Contact Group will consist of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu.

5. Ministers requested the Secretary General to write to Forum Leaders informing them of these outcomes.

Forum Secretariat
Auckland, New Zealand
26 March 2008