

2025 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting Secretary General – Welcoming Remarks

- Hon. Dr 'Aisake Valu Eke, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance of the Kingdom of Tonga, Chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum and FEMM,
- Hon. Vice President of Kiribati
- Hon. Deputy Prime Minister Fiji
- Hon. Deputy Prime Minister of Tuvalu
- Baron Waqa, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum
- Hon. Colleague Economic Ministers
- Distinguished Pacific Women Leaders
- Heads of Delegations
- Distinguished participants
- FEMM Observers,
- Excellencies & Senior Officials,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ekamawir omo, bula vinaka and good morning to you all.

- It is with great pleasure that I once again that I join the FEMM Chairman in welcoming you all to the 2025 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting. This has been an unusual but nevertheless very important year for the FEMM, this being the second meeting to be held in 2025. As Honourable Ministers will recall, there was a Special FEMM held in March this year specifically to endorse the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) Treaty and to approve the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED).
- PRED is now officially under implementation, and we shall have a formal launching of the PRED document during this meeting. The Resource and Economic Development (RED) is the first of the seven Thematic Areas of the 2050 Strategy to have a detailed implementation plan for the achievement of the Leaders' Vision which reflects the aspirations of our Forum Members for the Forum Secretariat to prioritise trade and economic development issues.
- PRED may be seen as a model or template for the development of similar implementation plans for the other six Thematic Areas. Without such comprehensive plans we shall be unable to satisfactorily report to Forum Leaders on the progress towards the achievement of the 2050 Strategy.
- With the fading of the impacts of COVID-19 we are now faced with a new set of challenges that threaten our ability to realise our Forum Leaders vision. The past few months have seen the emergence of further global trade, economic and geopolitical uncertainties. The war between Russia and Ukraine continues, as does conflicts in the Middle East.
- On the economic front, there have been ongoing impacts from the disruptions to global trade and we are still unsure what the situation for the region will be after the

1st of August. In these unsettling times we are like fish being circled by sharks, we are therefore better working together to survive the impending threats.

- We must stand with resolve and bind together. A common approach to addressing these challenges illustrates this. Together we are responsible for the largest part of the Pacific Ocean, an area and a region that cannot be lightly brushed aside.
- I suggest that we cannot therefore be complacent and think that we, in our region, will be immune from these developments. Although as a region we are in receipt of substantial official development assistance, as well as remittances from both workers on labour mobility schemes, as well as from permanent migrants, our national growth rates in terms of GDP are relatively low.
- In the Economic Update and Outlook that you will consider, the Secretariat has provided some policy options and measures for consideration that would assist in building resilience against fiscal shocks and provide a basis for reprioritising budget allocations as a contingency measure in case it might be needed.
- The Pacific Islands Forum, supported by its Secretariat and sister CROP agencies, has always promoted a strong commitment to regional cooperation and integration. Our economies, though diverse, share common challenges and aspirations. We have shown that working together can lead to positive results not only for the region but for our individual nations. Activities undertaken collectively and cooperatively will lead to collective benefits for all.
- Our Forum Trade Ministers met last week and they have made bold pronouncements that we must enhance our regional trade and cross border investment frameworks. By strengthening our intra-regional trade, we can create more opportunities for our businesses and improve the livelihoods of our people. We must continue to advocate for freer movement of our people within Forum Member states to facilitate greater regional economic cooperation and integration.
- FEMM has been deliberating on regional economic cooperation and integration for several decades, and there have been many successes in working together across a wide range of sectors, including aviation safety, security, governance, security and trade, to name but a few.
- But we need to go further if we are to deliver on our Leaders' vision as set out in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, and I quote - "As Pacific Leaders, 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".
- With the global uncertainties it is, as always, important that we maintain and deepen our relationships with our development partners to drive and implement the priorities of the PRED and the 2050 Strategy. I am confident that the expertise and dedication

of the Ministers present here today will lead to fruitful discussions and meaningful outcomes.

- I wish you all a productive meeting ahead, as always, your Secretariat stands ready to support you.

Tubwa kōr