

**RMI FOREIGN MINISTER TONY DE BRUM
ADDRESS TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT FORUM
“LEADERSHIP FOR CLIMATE RESILIENT GREEN BLUE PACIFIC
ECONOMIES”
WEDNESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2015 (11.30am – 1pm)
SUVA, FIJI**

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today with all of you – my Pacific family. Gatherings like this always remind me that while our homes and communities are scattered across the biggest ocean in the world, we are all one family. Our cultures have grown together over millennia. As we like to say in the Marshall Islands, ‘Wa kuk wa jimer’ – we are all in the same boat together. Our lives and our destinies are forever intertwined.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year has been an apocalyptic year for the Pacific, and climate change is the culprit. From Nangka to Dolphin to Maysak, our region is starting to feel like a war zone. People have died, homes have been destroyed, and economies left in ruins. But while our boat has been rocked, our resolve to weather the storm and turn the tide has grown stronger. As I have said before, while some like to dismiss us as small island nations, we are in fact large ocean nations. As the big powers

pivot our way in a new “race for the Pacific”, we must be ready to play our part on the world stage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is the biggest year yet in determining the development prospects and pathways for the Pacific. After agreeing the SAMOA Pathway last year, the Pacific has worked hard and made a big contribution to the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are due to be adopted in New York in a few weeks from now. One big focus has been the Blue Economy, working together to secure our economic future through sustainable management of our fisheries. We sought to be leaders in this effort when we signed the PNA, which has shown great success – allowing our tuna industry to thrive for the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we have made progress out at sea, challenges grow onshore. I have said many times that water and energy are the very building blocks of a successful life and economy in the Pacific islands. Prolonged droughts are hitting some of our islands hard, and salt water is creeping into fresh water lenses in others, leaving many of us almost entirely reliant on rainfall, which is increasingly unpredictable due to climate change. Our response has been swift and impactful – from increasing the capacity of our water storage systems to installing solar water

purifiers in our remote atolls, we have fortified ourselves from future water scarcity. But we also recognize that these new challenges call for rethinking our traditional way of life, which has meant replacing our crop varieties with ones that are more drought resistant. We are clearly pushing ahead to bolster our resilience from every angle possible.

On the energy side of things, the costs of imported fossil fuels continue to drain our public coffers, and act as a serious drag on our development prospects. I know this is true across the Pacific. After the oil price shocks of 2008, the RMI Government embarked on a clean, green mission to embrace the new low-carbon future. We are currently in the midst of one of the most aggressive national decarbonisation efforts in the world. We have solarized our outer atolls and taken steps to even improve our demand-side efficiency in our major population centers. Every gallon of fossil fuels we no longer use is literally money in our pockets. This is money that can go towards public health and education – issues all our islands are struggling with in this rapidly changing world.

I must also mention that we are trying to tackle our water and energy challenge *together* by actively seeking to bring Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion technology to our shores. This technology would exploit the temperature difference at the ocean surface and seabed to produce clean, renewable energy

and in addition, it could produce byproducts of freshwater and hydrogen. Our need for energy and water would be addressed but most excitingly, this would even create a new economic frontier for our country. With the hydrogen that is produced, the Marshall Islands could look to one day becoming a clean energy *exporter*. There could be no greater boon to my people and the people of the world who stand to benefit from this technology.

In many ways the challenges we face are truly opportunities for our islands to build stronger and more resilient economies – we must *all* see it this way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In exactly 100 days from now we will be in the final hours of negotiations in Paris working out the details of the most important international agreement for the Pacific region. The outcome will literally shape the destiny of our region. The Paris Agreement is likely to be our last opportunity to bend the global emissions curve towards a sustainable level that ensures our survival.

In the Marshall Islands, we are doing everything in our power to make Paris a success. In July, we were the first island nation to present our INDC, or post-2020 emissions reduction target, and I did so personally to the incoming host of COP21, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius. It includes a target to reduce

emissions by 32% below 2010 levels by 2025, and we also provided an indicative target to further reduce emissions by 45% below 2010 levels by 2030 en route to zero emissions by the middle of the century. This is what climate leadership looks like.

The sad reality is that, however ambitious we might be at home, none of it will matter if the world doesn't follow our lead. What some people casually refer to as the 'ambition gap,' the reality is our islands cannot survive in a world in which the temperature rises more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. And the current Agreement would put us on track to nearly 3 degrees Celsius. Despite what some people are saying, this 'ambition gap' is not something that can simply be dismissed or wished away – it is a gap which is home to the future of our countries and that of our children. Without acknowledging this and tackling it head on, we are en route to a climate catastrophe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The best way to avoid this is to secure a Paris Agreement that is designed for ambition. This requires three key ingredients that the Marshall Islands is currently fighting for in negotiations:

First, the agreement needs to establish short 5-year commitment cycles that bring countries back to the table to lift their ambition over time. This is how we close the 'ambition gap.'

Second, the agreement should include a long-term decarbonisation goal that commits the world to reach net zero emissions as early as possible in the second half of this century. This would send a clear, decisive signal to governments and businesses around the world that the low-carbon era has arrived. I'm encouraged to see that seven of the world's most advanced economies – the G7 – embraced such a goal this past June at such a critical time on the road to Paris.

Third, the core of the agreement should be legally binding. This is how we can ensure trust among Parties. In the absence of such an accountability mechanism, we risk signing a document that does little more than offer lip service to climate action. We simply do not have time to engage in such frivolous exercises any longer.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world must know that the Pacific Islands are *leaders*, and not simply *bystanders* to the unsustainable path the world is currently headed on.

Too often we let our big brothers in the Pacific family dictate our policies to us, rather than seeking to engage them in a discussion about what really matters to our shared region. Sometimes we need to be frank and fearless in telling them that enough is enough: you are talking about our survival here in a way you would not tolerate others doing to you. If

Australia and New Zealand genuinely want to be considered Pacific powers then this means not only projecting their presence, but protecting ours. This must not be a debate over semantics – it is a debate for regional security and for our survival.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Between now and Paris and even beyond, we as the Pacific Islands must speak with a unified voice on climate change and make it the centerpiece of our meetings with world leaders. The next UN General Assembly in New York in just a few weeks' time is our next big opportunity to do this. And I hope that Secretary-General Sharma who is with us here today will stand with us and make climate change a prominent topic in the agenda of the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November. Coming literally on the eve of Paris and with dozens of island countries in attendance – including three of the four atoll nations of the world with the only exception being the Marshall Islands – this is an opportunity the world cannot afford to miss. The Pacific family is counting on you.

But most importantly, we cannot forget that leadership begins at home. Through forums like this, we have a chance to build and strengthen our family and to steer the world to calmer waters. We must not be deterred by our size – after all, we are the largest ocean nations in the world! Let us make this the

year we secure a safe future for our children and grandchildren to ensure that our Pacific family lives on.

Thank you and kōwhiri tāta.