

“BIKETAWA” DECLARATION

Forum Leaders recalled their 1995 Vision Statement, the Forum Economic Action Plan *Eight Principles of Good Governance* and the 1997 Aitutaki Declaration. With the aim of elaborating upon these earlier statements and in the interests of regional cooperation, Forum Leaders while respecting the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of another member state committed themselves and their countries to a number of guiding principles and courses of actions:

- (i) Commitment to good governance which is the exercise of authority (leadership) and interactions in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, participatory, consultative and decisive but fair and equitable.
- (ii) Belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political process in framing the society in which he or she lives.
- (iii) Upholding democratic processes and institutions which reflect national and local circumstances, including the peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government.
- (iv) Recognising the importance and urgency of equitable economic, social and cultural development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the peoples of the Forum.
- (v) Recognising the importance of respecting and protecting indigenous rights and cultural values, traditions and customs.
- (vi) Recognising the vulnerability of member countries to threats to their security, broadly defined, and the importance of cooperation among members in dealing with such threats when they arise.
- (vii) Recognising the importance of averting the causes of conflict and of reducing, containing and resolving all conflicts by peaceful means including by customary practices.

2. Forum Leaders recognised the need in time of crisis or in response to members' request for assistance, for action to be taken on the basis of all members of the Forum being part of the Pacific Islands extended family. The Forum must constructively address difficult and sensitive issues including underlying causes of tensions and conflict (ethnic tensions, socio-economic disparities, lack of good governance, land disputes and erosion of cultural values). To this end, the Secretary

General in the future after consulting the Forum Chairman should urgently initiate the following process:

- (i) Assess the situation, make a judgment as to the significance of the developments and consult the Forum Chair and such other Forum Leaders as may be feasible to secure approval to initiate further action;
- (ii) Consult the national authorities concerned regarding assistance available from the Forum; and
- (iii) Advise and consult with the Forum Foreign Ministers, and based on these consultations, undertake one or a combination of the following actions to assist in the resolution of the crisis:
 - (a) A statement representing the view of members on the situation;
 - (b) Creation of a Ministerial Action Group;
 - (c) A fact finding or similar mission;
 - (d) Convening an eminent persons group;
 - (e) Third party mediation;
 - (f) Support for appropriate institutions or mechanisms that would assist a resolution; and
 - (g) The convening of a special high level meeting of the Forum Security Committee or an ad hoc meeting of Forum Ministers.
- (iv) If after actions taken under (iii) the crisis persists, convene a special meeting of Forum Leaders to consider other options including if necessary targeted measures.

3. Any regional response to a crisis should take account of the guidelines set out in Annex A.

Annex A

- (i) Actions are discussed with the authorities in the country concerned;
- (ii) The Forum and persons involved on behalf of the Forum should have credibility i.e. must be seen as honest and impartial brokers who are genuinely interested in bringing about a fair resolution;

- (iii) There must be coherence and consistency in the strategy followed;
- (iv) There must be continuity and conclusion of the process i.e. staying the course;
- (v) There must be cooperation with other key international and regional organisations and national actors and coordination of all these efforts;
- (vi) There must be a sufficient degree of consensus on the resolutions by those who have to implement them i.e. local players and supporters and those that support them (i.e. outside organisations and governments); and
- (vii) The intervention must be cost-effective.