



Pacific Conference of Churches

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

PCC: "Indo-Pacific Partnerships cannot come at the price of a Free Pacific"

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"Pacific Island Forum leaders have been urged to ensure that engagement in the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity" does not come at the cost of the freedom of Pacific Island territories struggling for self-determination."

Pacific Conference of Churches, General Secretary Rev. James Bhagwan, made the call following the presentation of a statement at today's Special Committee on Decolonization meeting on the Question of New Caledonia.

"We understand that Forum Leaders will receive and deliberate on the report by Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Observers to the 3rd Referendum in Kanaky – New Caledonia during their meeting in Suva in just under a month. It is imperative that they, in the spirit of Pacific regionalism, address the lack of moral or political legitimacy of a referendum that took place without the full participation the colonised people who have the right to self-determination," said Rev. Bhagwan.

The preliminary statement by the Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Committee on the 3rd New Caledonia Referendum on Independence, which took place on 12 December noted as significant the high percentage of non-participation by registered voters, "which should be taken into the contextual consideration and analysis of the result."

"The spirit in which the referendum was conducted weighs heavily on the Noumea Accord and New Caledonia's self-determination process. Civic participation is an integral component of any democracy and critical to the interpretation and implications of Sunday's poll," the PIF statement said.

"As Forum Foreign Ministers prepare to meet, it is important that, in the same spirit of regionalism demonstrated only last week, with very positive discussions with our Northern Pacific leaders, should extend to solidarity with Kanaky-New Caledonia which is one of our Pacific nations in-waiting."

"We hope that in the FFM and subsequent Leaders' meetings, our Pacific region will take the moral high ground and support a way forward for Kanaky-New Caledonia, which could include another referendum before the conclusion of the Noumea Accord period."

"We note the joint statement from the Permanent Missions of Papua New Guinea and Fiji at today's C-24 session that they look forward to continuing to engage in a spirit of constructive engagement and to contribute to a durable, lasting and peaceful solution for New Caledonia future status with ownership and leadership by New Caledonians."

Rev. Bhagwan said that the recent launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework by US President Biden, which includes Pacific Islands Forum countries Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, as well as Australia's recent strengthening of ties with France, should not come at the cost of reduced support for New Caledonia.

"Fiji as forum chair, and New Zealand along with Australia, which has recently announced an planned indigenous focus in its foreign policy, should leverage their roles in the Indo-Pacific Framework, the Indo-Pacific strategy to urge France to engage in a self-determination process for Kanaky-New Caledonia that respects the rights, dignity and culture of the Kanak people."

"This is also an important issue for the people of Maohi Nui – French Polynesia who are also on the UN List for Decolonisation yet face ongoing hurdles from France in their process for self-determination and restitution from the unwanted and forced participation of their people and fenua (land and sea) in destructive nuclear tests."

Rev. Bhagwan also urged Pacific Island Forum countries, in particular, Australia, to leverage their relationships with Indonesia to allow a UN Human Rights team in to Papua to investigate the reports of on-going human rights violations, a call that previous Pacific Island Forum Leaders' Meetings have made.

"The word 'Pacific' means peace. We cannot talk about the peace and prosperity in the Pacific, while our Kanak, Maohi and Papuan sisters and brothers struggle for peace and the right to determine their prosperity themselves."

The Pacific Conference of Churches has member churches in Kankay (New Caledonia), Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) and Tanah Papua (Papua – Indonesia).

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