

PACNEWS

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PAC - DIPLOMACY: RNZI

PACNEWS 3: Tue 17 Feb 2015

Pacific Islands Forum head supports discussion on regional bodies

SUVA, 19 FEBRUARY 2015 (RNZI) --- The head of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat says it is appropriate that Fiji has called for a discussion on regional architecture in the Pacific.

Last year, Fiji and Australia have called a meeting this month to discuss membership of the Forum among other issues.

No exact dates have been given and the meeting is now said to be held next month.

Fiji, which was suspended from the Leader's Forum until after last September's election, is refusing to resume its full membership until there is a discussion on whether donor nations, such as Australia and New Zealand, can also be members.

The Forum's Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor says such a discussion is important and the leaders of the Forum countries cannot ignore it.

"They have to get in a room. They have to discuss this. They have to consider before they come into that room all the consequences of all the different scenarios of what could happen. I would like to see Fiji to be back as a very active member of the PIF (Pacific Islands Forum) because it is a very valuable member of the Pacific region," said Dame Taylor... PACNEWS

Tuvalu delegation in Geneva to report on UN human rights conventions

FUNAFUTI, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (FENUI NEWS) --- A delegation from the Tuvaluan Government is on its way to Geneva to report to the United Nations on its implementation of human rights conventions.

The government team will also report on the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Puaita Fauvaka Etuati leader of the delegation told *Fenui News* that the delegation will present Tuvalu's report on its achievements of what is required under CEDAW.

Etuati said the meetings will last two weeks and members of the delegation will all be involved in the presentation of the reports in sections relevant to their area of work.

Lupe Tavita from the Gender Affairs Department and a member of the delegation said Tuvalu has signed and ratified CEDAW. She said the island nation has done quite well in its effort to accomplish what the Convention requires.

Tuvalu reports to the United Nations every four years under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The UPR provides a unique opportunity for Pacific Island States to discuss their human rights situation with the international community.

The report was compiled by the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

Tuvalu's delegation includes Etuati, Tavita, Ministry of Health Assistant Secretary Lilly Tagisia Faavae, Crown Counsel Laigane Italeli, School's Supervisor Maseiga Ionatana and Sunema Aunese from Tuvalu's Permanent Mission to United Nations... PACNEWS

Queensland's Helidon cult leader living large in Vanuatu

PORT VILA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (SUNSHINE COAST DAILY) --- A Queensland cult leader is being accused of fraud on a massive scale by former followers, as she is tracked down in Vanuatu living the high life.

Debra Burslem founded the Magnificat Meal Movement in the late 1980s at Helidon, near Toowoomba in south-east Queensland. It was created as a Catholic off-shoot.

It has also been widely attacked as a cult.

With tales of seeing Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and spruiking herself as a prophet, she first amassed followers, then she allegedly amassed their money.

On an apparent crusade to build a basilica or church at a cost of more than \$40 million, her disciples delivered a flood of cash, including 10% of their income, plus gifts and donations.

She is even accused of funneling funds through a doomed gold bullion scheme and profiting from the commission.

On her website, she writes that she rides exclusively in cars made by luxury Mercedes Benz because they have "mercy" in the name.

A Current Affair reporter Chris Allen tracked down Burslem on the Pacific Island, a tax-free haven where she goes by the alias "Princess"

The bizarre nickname apparently a nod to how all are royalty in the kingdom of God.

The reporter says she was found shopping for homewares.

Unwilling to speak to the reporter, it was Burslem's former disciples who told Nine the extent of her alleged fraud.

Former member Clare Birchley was among Burslem's key holy warriors.

"[Ms Burslem] has burned through life savings belonging to other people," she said.

"She has chewed up decades of their lives."

Birchley even said her leader demanded to always fly first class on the dime of followers because it helped her "pray better".

Her faith wavered "towards the end" when Burslem would always have a message from God or the Virgin Mary that happened to fit with her scheme.

"There always seemed to be a convenient message from Our Lady or from Jesus at the end, depending on what she was trying to engineer."

In her Pacific Island retreat, "Princess" now charges \$200 a night for believers wanting to visit.

On her website she addresses critics, telling disciples:"They simply do not count in my life as I am too busy getting on with the wonderful joy filled work of mercy and the business of providing abundantly for peace solutions and mercy."....PACNEWS

TONGA - DIPLOMACY: RADIO &TV TONGA

PACNEWS 3: Tue 17 Feb 2015

King and Queen of Tonga have an audience with Pope Francis in Rome

NUKU'ALOFA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (RADIO & TV TONGA) --- The King and Queen of Tonga were warmly welcomed by Pope Francis to the Vatican's Apostolic Palace in Rome on Monday.

They were in Rome to attend the ordination of Tonga and the Pacific's first Cardinal, Soane Patita Paini Mafi.

During their private discussion, the leaders talked about the country's social and economic developments and the contribution of the Church in some of these areas.

At the end of the meeting, the King of Tonga presented Pope Francis with a framed picture of their Majesties. In return, the head of the Catholic Church gave the royal couple a medallion.

Before meeting with the Vatican's Secretary of State, the Pope asked the couple, to pray for him.

King Tupou VI's other engagement included the keynote address at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)'s 38th General Council Meeting, also in Rome.

He was invited to share Tonga's successful implementation of an IFAD funded pilot programme in 2003 known as MORDI Tonga Programme. To date, Mordi has helped more 60 isolated communities in Tonga.

His Majesty conveyed his support to the theme of this year's General Council, "Rural Transformation: Key to sustainable development."

To make this transformation a reality there needs to be an increased focus on building the risk management and resilience capacity of rural people to manage a changing environment, said King Tupou VI.

His Majesty called for increased access to climate finance by rural communities.... PACNEWS

Tongan PM wants issue of MA60 resolved between government, China and NZ

NUKU'ALOFA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (RADIO & TV TONGA) --- Tonga's Prime Minister of Tonga, 'Akilisi Pohiva says it is not the responsibility of the new government to solve the issues surrounding the Chinese made MA60 aircraft nor does it have anything to do with the plane being grounded.

However, it is the duty of the governments of Tonga, People's Republic of China and New Zealand to resolve the impasse. The MA60 which operates flights between Tongatapu and the outer-islands was grounded last week.

Prime Minister Pohiva made the remarks at a joint media conference with the visiting New Zealand's foreign Minister. Murray McCully.

"It's highly technical and the government does not have the capacity to involve in dialogue in this issue. All we can do is ask him and the Chinese government to sit down and resolve the problem."

Minister McCully was asked whether this latest move would allow New Zealand to release millions of dollars in aid to the tourism sector, withheld for a number of years.

In response, Minister McCully said part of the aid money was released last year and the rest would be given to the government in the coming years.

"The Prime Minister and I are on the same page that there are people internationally who make these decision independently on behalf of the country. We too in NZ make decisions for the sake of aviation safety. It is something that we both need to achieve, said McCully.... PACNEWS

Deep sea mining – starting a dialogue

PORT VILA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (PiPP) --- A report on the Vanuatu Government's consultation on deep sea mining (DSM) has been presented to the Vanuatu Lands and Natural Resources Minister, Ralph Regenvanu, and other government officials by the Pacific Institute of Public Policy (PiPP).

The report urges wider community consultation and analysis, and invokes the 'precautionary principle' when dealing with such a new and little understood mining business. It highlights the many conversations and concerns raised during an initial public consultation held at the Chief's Nakamal in October 2014.

Vanuatu has had little experience of mining compared to other Pacific nations, so there is a need to learn from the experience of others in the region and develop a whole of government response to fully weigh the costs and benefits.

There are currently 154 underwater exploration licences in Vanuatu at a time when many countries in the Pacific are being courted by mining companies to harvest rich undersea minerals. The report asks whether governments and communities are ready to handle the many associated issues ranging from consultation processes, to legislation, environmental protection, tax policy, kastom, maritime boundaries and capacity constraints.

The Vanuatu government requested PiPP to be an independent observer at the first consultation and provide a report outlining many of the issues involved so that Vanuatu can develop good public policy around this contentious issue.

PiPP's acting executive director Dulciana Somare-Brash and senior analyst and economist Mark Evans prepared the report.

Dulciana Somare-Brash said after the report handover: "I am delighted to present this report which is appropriately called "Starting a dialogue". Vanuatu has the benefit of navigating its overarching strategy to match the sentiments of its people who are right now saying they want to find out more about deep sea mining and what it might mean to their kastom and livelihoods into the future.'

"We suggest the need for wide community consultation and for government to carefully identify all the policy areas involved so it gets a good deal if mining proceeds and the national interest is protected.'

Regenvanu thanked PiPP for its report and said government was developing a framework for further public consultations.... PACNEWS

FIJI - MIDA: FIJI TIMES

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DPP withdraws charges against Fiji Media Authority Chair

SUVA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (FIJI TIMES) --- Fiji's Director of Public Prosecutions has withdrawn charges of annoyance against Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) chairman Ashwin Raj in the Suva Magistrates Court.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) said in a statement that Raj's case was referred to Director of Public Prosecutions Christopher Pryde after receiving representations last week.

"Following a review of the case, the DPP concluded there was insufficient evidence to proceed with the matter," the statement said.

"The charge was therefore withdrawn by way of a nolle prosequi when the matter was called in court last Friday."

Raj has also complained to Commissioner of Police Ben Groenewald about police handling of his case.... PACNEWS

FIJI - POLICE: FBC NEWS

PACNEWS 3: Tue 17 Feb 2015

Two questioned in Fiji over steroid bust

SUVA, 19 FEBRUARY 2015 (FBC NEWS) ----- Fiji Police have interviewed two suspects in relation to the discovery of three cartons containing white powder Testosterone Enanthate which is an anabolic – androgenic Steroid.

The three cartons arrived on a plane at Nadi Airport last Thursday.

The Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority confiscated the cartons with total weight 44 kilograms, imported from Hong Kong and listed as STC coloured pencils.

The importee is a local woman who had the steroids sent through air freight.

The substance is a prohibited import under the Illicit Drugs Control Act of 2004...PACNEWS

NEW | CALE - GOVT: RNZI

PACNEWS 3: Tue 17 Feb 2015

New bid in New Caledonia to elect president fails

NOUMEA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (RNZI) --- The latest bid to elect a president of New Caledonia has failed.

The French High Commissioner in New Caledonia had convened a meeting of the territory's 11 government ministers for them to choose a president.

However, they could not agree on who should lead the government and no vote took place.

New Caledonia has been without a president for more than two months after the previous administration led by Cynthia Ligeard collapsed following a disagreement over fiscal policy among the anti-independence parties.

The Congress re-elected the same 11-member government in late December which remains in caretaker mode because there is no president.

The employers' organisation has decried the impasse and called for the situation to be resolved as important matters need to be addressed, such as the planned introduction of a value added tax by 2016.

The three anti-independence parties in the collegial government have six ministers and the pro-independence parties five....PACNEWS

TUVALU - SCHOLARSHIPS: FENUI NEWS

PACNEWS 3: Tue 17 Feb 2015

Five Tuvaluans selected for Morocco Government scholarships

FUNAFUTI, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (FENUI NEWS) --- The Government of Morocco has selected five Tuvaluans for its scholarship awards for this year.

They are Siusan Etaki, Martin Satupa, Silio Loaloa, Sarah Nakoli and Jenny Naina Sumeo.

Tuvaluan Assistant Pre-Service Training Officer, Nemaia Paulo said the five were selected from the seven applications that met the criteria of the scholarship.

Paulo said his office received 27 applications following the re-advertising of eight scholarship awards from the Moroccan Government early this year.

"From this 27 applications, our office assessed the applications and we selected seven possible candidates and sent for final approval by the Government of Morocco," said Paulo.

"Out of this seven, only five were picked up and were notified by the office."

Paulo said the Education Department is now working closely with the Embassy of Morocco in Canberra, Australia on the visas of these five students who are expected to leave Tuvalu either at the end of this month or early next month.

Upon arrival, the students will be met by staff of Cities International University and the two Tuvaluans who went on earlier to study in Morocco.

These students will study French on their first year as the courses will be conducted in French, then continue with their study programmes.

One of the five awardees was interviewed by Fenui News said he was looking forward to start his study programme.

He is not worried about Morocco being a new host country for his studies because he had heard a lot of positive stories from the two Tuvaluan students who are already in Morocco... PACNEWS

PACNEWS BIZ

TUVALU - SEASONAL WORKERS: FENUI NEWS

PACNEWS BIZ: Tue 17 Feb 2015

26 seasonal workers leave Tuvalu for New Zealand

FUNAFUTI, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (FENUI NEWS) --- Twenty six Tuvaluans have left for New Zealand to take part in the Recognized Seasonal Employment scheme (RSE).

Labor Officer, Trinny Uluao said this is the first lot under the scheme to be employed by Taylor Corporation for seven months.

Uluao said Taylor Corp takes two groups of seasonal workers from Tuvalu annually.

The second batch of seasonal workers is expected to depart at the end of the year.

She added that four locals have returned from the Australian Seasonal Workers scheme... PACNEWS

SOL - SEASONAL WORKERS: SIG

PACNEWS BIZ: Tue 17 Feb 2015

Additional support for Solomon Islands seasonal workers to Australia and New Zealand

HONIARA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (SIG) --- Solomon Islands seasonal workers to Australia will receive additional support from both the governments of Australia and New Zealand in 2015.

The renewed focus comes amid declining employment numbers of Solomon Islander seasonal workers to Australia.

The Australian seasonal work programme, now in its fourth year, allowed for 43 workers in 2012, nine in 2013 and only two in 2014. In contrast, Solomon Islands sent about 500 seasonal workers to New Zealand in 2014.

This year, only 20 workers have been sent to work in Australian farms.

The Director of the Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), Susannah Smith, visited Solomon Islands last year to discuss possibilities of increasing the number of Solomon Islanders to work in Australia.

In November, a DFAT sponsored advisor joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade's Labour Mobility Unit in Honiara to support efforts to increase Solomon Islander participation.

In addition, the new Solomon Islands Democratic Coalition for Change Government promised a renewed focus on labour mobility.

In its recently released policy statement, the government pledged to "support the labour mobility initiative programme" during its four year term. This year, labour mobility is being considered a national economic priority.

Several weeks ago the Core Economic Working Group (CEWG), a key financial advisory committee to the Prime Minister, met with staff from the Department of External Trade to discuss issues including labour mobility on their influential agenda.

Even with a renewed focus on the Solomon Island Seasonal Workforce, competition from regional countries remains strong.

In January, Fiji entered the seasonal worker programme for the first time and its government recently approved selection criteria for workers to be recruited under the New Zealand "Recognised Seasonal Employer" scheme.

On average, a worker can save about SBD \$30,000 (US\$3855) after six months of work. This money is usually spent on school fees, the family home, own a car or to start a business – all of which stimulates the national economy.... PACNEWS

FIJI - BANKS: FBC NEWS

PACNEWS BIZ: Tue 17 Feb 2015

BSP starts work on acquisition of Westpac in Pacific

SUVA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (FBC NEWS) --- Bank South Pacific (BSP) has started work on its acquisition of Westpac operations in Samoa, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga.

BSP Group CEO Robin Fleming and Chairman Kostas Constantinou have been visiting the operations in those countries to ensure a smooth transition of services.

Fleming says a green occupation of the Pacific should be expected in four months time, when BSP's acquisition of Westpac in the five island nations is completed.

"Across the region we will continue to look at other opportunities that may present itself. But first and foremost is our activities over the next few months will be the transition and integration of Westpac into BSP. The full rebranding of that operation as people will now see a lot more green across the Pacific".

Westpac has retained its operations in Fiji and Papua New Guinea saying it reflects their desire to increase focus on their growth plans in these two larger markets where they have a strong history.

A Transitional Services Agreement signed by Westpac and BSP will ensure there will be as little disruption on the day of the switch over for customers.

Current Westpac staff in the five countries involved will be absorbed by BSP.

"Job security is not only contained in the agreement but it's also an undertaking from myself and that is one of the reasons why I actually visited these countries and the chairman accompanied me on those three days to ensure that staff have confidence. BSP sees them as a big part of our future businesses in those countries".

BSP bought the five Westpac operations for AUD\$125 million.

Fleming says while this is a big investment, the returns will come over time – similar to when the bank started operations in Fiji...PACNEWS

SOL - INFRASTRUCTURE: SIG

PACNEWS BIZ: Tue 17 Feb 2015

30 locals undergo training on road infrastructure work in Solomon Islands

HONIARA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (SIG) ---- Thirty locals in Solomon Islands will benefit from a one year training program launched Thursday last week with the aim of equipping local supervisors (contractors) with technical quality skills to do government construction works in the country.

The training is a joint initiative of the Solomon Islands Government, through the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID) and a technical team from Brisbane, through the Government of Australia.

The one year training will be facilitated by the Training Sector Development Program (TSDP).

Speaking at the launch, TSDP team leader, David Spring said his team was pleased to be in Solomon Islands and committed that his group will ensure local supervisors are trained to the highest standards of road construction.

He stressed the intensive training will cover all aspects on infrastructure construction, mostly around road construction.

Spring said training locals will help reduce the cost MID spends on private companies.

"And with the professionalism these supervisors have, they will be able to build infrastructures in the Solomon Islands according to the standard of infrastructure construction," he said.

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, Moses Virivolomo acknowledged TSDP and the Government of Australia for facilitating the programme.

Virivolomo said knowledge gained from the training will have a great impact on the development of the country, especially in terms of infrastructure.

Since the ministry halted its own infrastructure construction at the height of the ethnic tension, the ministry had been without machineries and top supervisors to carry out major infrastructure work for government.

Until now, the ministry contracts consultants, contractors and the private sector to carry out major infrastructure work.

"This training will help the supervisors to build good relations with the ministry, understand each other in what they are doing, so that at the end of the day, the ministry and the local consultants will achieve qualities of the work with less maintenance costs," he said.

Virivolomo said of the thirty trainees, 28 will train as supervisors and two will train as technical investigators.

The training was funded by the National Government through the MID, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Australian Gov't and New Zealand Gov't under the project of the Transport Sector... PACNEWS

PNG - LNG: SMH

PACNEWS BIZ: Tue 17 Feb 2015

PNG drilling lifts Antelope gas field hopes

SYDNEY, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (SMH) --- Drilling at the disputed Antelope natural gas field in Papua New Guinea has increased hopes that the resource could be large enough to underpin an expansion of LNG capacity in the country.

Venture operator InterOil revealed overnight Australian time that the Antelope-5 well had struck the targeted gas reservoir at the field some 230 metres higher up than anticipated.

The news comes after last week's resolution of a dispute over the ownership of the field between InterOil and ASX-listed Oil Search, which was decided in favour of the US company. As a result, French oil major Total SA has been confirmed as a third partner in the Elk-Antelope field, where gas volumes have been put at anywhere between 3 trillion cubic feet to more than 12 tcf, making it the biggest discovery in Asia for several years. Oil Search retains its stake in the field.

Whether the size of the field is closer to the lower or higher ends of that wide range will help determine whether Elk-Antelope is developed as a separate LNG project or potentially combined into an expansion of ExxonMobil's existing \$US19 billion PNG LNG venture. Oil Search has a stake in both PNG LNG and Elk-Antelope and has been pushing for a merged development, but InterOil and Total have voiced a preference for a stand-alone LNG project.

Citigroup analyst Dale Koenders said that while risks still remain around the quality of the Antelope reservoir, striking the reservoir at a higher depth than anticipated "infers a larger resource all else equal".

Koenders said the results from the drilling had increased the likelihood that the size of Elk-Antelope is closer to Oil Search's base-case of 5.3 tcf of gas rather than its low-case estimate of 3 tcf. He said success at the next well, Antelope-6 was required for the size of the field to reach into the 7-9 tcf range.

Citigroup said it believed the market was assuming a resource of 7.1 tcf for Elk-Antelope, which is the base case being assumed by InterOil, and that the latest drilling result was supportive of that estimate....PACNEWS

PACNEWS *In Focus*

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Fiji Speaker of the House of Representatives takes up UNFPA High-Level Champion Role

SUVA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (UNFPA PACIFIC) --- In a groundbreaking partnership for the region, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Pacific Sub-Regional Office announced the acceptance of Fiji's first woman Speaker, Dr Jiko Luveni as UNFPA's Pacific High-Level Champion.

"I accepted it with a deep sense of responsibility," Dr Jiko said to a gathering of stakeholders Tuesday, 17 February at the official announcement of her status in Suva, Fiji.

"The mandate areas the UNFPA was given by the United Nations General Assembly includes some of the most socially and culturally sensitive areas of our lives, but they are also development areas very close to my heart."

Accepting her role, Dr Jiko agreed to advocate at all levels of society for behavioral change in the mandate areas of the organization, in particular in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights and youth.

Dr Jiko said she felt a sense of urgency in advocating for change for the better in such issues when one considered the impact a vastly increased accessibility to all sorts of information the internet and telephone networks has enabled for people, particularly young people.

"The people in our communities, villages, provinces and however else we are grouped, especially our children and young people, must hear facts from us, not the internet. And they must hear it before they develop practices that we may never be able to wean from them," Dr Luveni said.

"Leaders, whether heads of faith-based groups, state or traditional leaders, we are all collectively responsible for the dissemination of correct and timely information on issues around sexual and reproductive health and rights; the dynamics of gender equality and maternal health or how and the benefits of planning the number of children we have according to what we can afford, and the medical benefit of spacing children.

"We have to be compassionate and care enough to speak frankly to our children and youth. Socio-cultural status quo that used to prevent a discussion between children and parents of topics like why condoms will not only prevent unplanned pregnancies but can also protect you from a HIV infection, must begin from home."

The UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office had worked with Dr Luveni in her previous capacity as head of a ministry that, as a development agency, UNFPA worked with closely, and as head of Fiji government delegations to regional and international meetings. Dr Jiko is also a former UNFPA Pacific staff member.

UNFPA Pacific Director and Representative Dr Laurent Zessler said the organization was humbled by Dr Luveni's acceptance of the role adding that to champion or advocate for a particular issue, one would have to sincerely believe in the cause and in the potential change for the better.

"It is to our advantage that she had not lost her personal interest and commitment to the various mandate areas of the UNFPA – from reproductive health issues to those surrounding violence against women," Dr Zessler said.

"In her position as the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives in Fiji, Dr Jiko Luveni is in a position to convince her contemporaries that fundamental to all other development initiatives, is the need to address population-related issues.

"We see in Dr Luveni an articulate and passionate advocate for behavior-change in sexual and reproductive health and rights-related issues. Dr Luveni was unanimously voted to her position and we have absolute faith in her ability to work across political affiliation, ethnicity and faith."

In her capacity as the UNFPA Pacific High-Level Champion, Dr Luveni will be involved in global and regional engagements; she will also be involved in the work of UNFPA towards achieving the Samoa Pathway, which is the 2014 Outcome Statement of the Third Conference of the Small Island Developing States in Samoa, and achieving the Family Planning 2020 project goal, that by then, 2020, 120 million more women in the world will have access contraceptives and information about planning their family..PACNEWS

PACNEWS DIGEST

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Tuvalu and Kiribati join countries progressing responsible management of deep seabed minerals

SUVA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (SPC/ EU PACIFIC) --- While deep sea mining is yet to commence in the region, Pacific Island countries are proactively developing legal instruments to ensure appropriate management of their deep sea mineral resources, with particular attention to the protection of the marine environment.

Tuvalu has become the fourth Pacific country to enact specific legislation for deep sea mineral activities, alongside the Cook Islands, Fiji and Tonga.

With technical assistance from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Tuvalu has set new standards, with its Seabed Minerals Act 2014 which requires coastal communities to not only be consulted prior to the approval of mining projects within Tuvalu's waters, but also for any mining project Tuvalu sponsors in international waters.

Tuvalu's Attorney General, Ese Apinelu, said that Parliament is pleased to have contributed to this development which will strongly enhance the sustainable management of Tuvalu's deep sea resources.

"I'm hopeful that we're witnessing the beginning of a trend that will accelerate new policies and initiatives. I'm thankful for assistance provided by the Deep Sea Minerals Project which has now equipped Tuvalu with a set of tools that will allow us to maximise the benefits of deep sea minerals for our people," Attorney General Apinelu said.

A partnership between SPC and the European Union, the pioneering Deep Sea Minerals Project is assisting Pacific Island states by providing technical advice and assistance to enable them to make informed decisions about deep seabed mining.

Deep sea minerals, such as sea floor massive sulphides, cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts and manganese nodules located in international waters can only be accessed via sponsorship of a State.

Kiribati, through its State-owned company, Marawa Research Exploration Limited, last month signed a contract with the International Seabed Authority and, by doing so, joined Nauru and Tonga; countries that have also signed contracts for exploration in international waters.

This latest contract is for an exploration license for polymetallic nodules in the Clarion Clipperton Fracture Zone in the East Pacific.

Kiribati's Mineral Development Officer, Tebete England, thanked SPC and the EU for their assistance.

"This is a great milestone we've achieved. In addition, Kiribati is undertaking public consultation on a draft Deep Sea Mining Policy and is drafting specific deep sea minerals legislation with the assistance of the Deep Sea Minerals Project," Ms England said.

The Head of the EU Delegation for the Pacific, Ambassador Andrew Jacobs, commended the Governments of Tuvalu and Kiribati for their recent achievements in the deep sea mining industry.

"The formulation of new legislation for Tuvalu and the issuance of an exploration license for Kiribati augurs well for the industry in the region.

"These achievements once again reflect the leading role the EU-SPC Deep Sea Minerals Project has in the sustainable management of seabed minerals on the Pacific's ocean floor and we're proud of the project in this regard," Ambassador Jacobs said.

Deep sea mining has the potential to provide developing island States with much needed revenue to address development issues but this must be balanced against social and environmental considerations, SPC's Geoscience Division Director, Professor Mike Petterson said.

"SPC will continue to work with the countries to develop the legal instruments required and assist with capacity building and awareness raising programs in this fascinating, emerging area," Professor Petterson said.

Progress to improve the governance and management of their deep-sea minerals resources in accordance with international law, with particular attention to the protection of the marine environment and securing equitable financial arrangements for Pacific Island countries and their people of these 15 Pacific Island nations is among the on-ground benefits to Pacific communities to be highlighted during the EU Year for Development 2015...PACNEWS

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PACNEWS DIGEST

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Civil registration and vital statistics in the Pacific

GENEVA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (WHO) ----- If someone asks you to prove who you are, you would show them your driver's licence, passport or birth certificate – official documentation that confirms your name, date of birth, where you were born and your family relationships. This proof-of-identity is used to enrol a child in

school, drive a car, open a bank account, travel the world, vote in an election and get married; many of life's milestones!

However, many children are born and people of all ages die without their births and deaths ever recorded. The only way to count everyone is through civil registration. Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) is the recording of every birth, marriage, death, adoption and divorce in a country. Strong health systems begin with CRVS

The information generated guides governments and leads to good governance, decision making and the protection of human rights and legal identity. CRVS systems provide a critical platform for country planning and development needs.

Countries need to know how many people are born and die each year – and the main causes of their deaths - to develop well-functioning health systems and to design effective public health policies and measure their impact. CRVS allows countries to identify their most pressing health issues, inequities in service delivery and the burden of disease in each population.

Coordinated Pacific action to improve CRVS

Many Pacific Island countries do not have adequate CRVS systems and face many legal, financial, human resource and geographical barriers. There is a strong need for active coordination and collaboration among all involved. Institutional capacities need to be strengthened and legislative gaps filled. Awareness on the benefits of CRVS and its importance for development must continue to be generated.

The Pacific Islands governments are improving CRVS data under the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (PVSAP), which is led by the Brisbane Accord Group and part of the South Pacific Community ten year Pacific Statistics Strategy, 2011-2020. Under this Action Plan, 15 countries and 3 territories in the Pacific region have completed rapid CRVS assessments within 4 years. Almost all (89%) of these countries have undertaken more in-depth assessments and over one third have developed a draft or final national CRVS improvement plan.

WHO is assisting the implementation of the PVSAP by strengthening Health Information Systems in the region, training doctors on causes of death, and providing support on International Classification of Diseases coding.

Pacific islands progress in CRVS

Pacific Island governments are making progress towards establishing more robust CRVS systems. Improving births, deaths and cause of death data for policy making was also reaffirmed as a regional priority at the 2014 Pacific Health Ministers Meeting. Below are a few examples of country-specific progress.

Fiji

Fiji has rolled out CRVS certification trainings for doctors and training on certification has also been incorporated as a standard and compulsory part of the medical degree offered by Fiji National University.

Kiribati

Kiribati is undertaking a comprehensive assessment of their CRVS system which will form the basis of a national CRVS improvement plan. The assessment has engaged a broad group of stakeholders, recognizing that community leaders and churches are essential to improving CRVS in Kiribati.

Samoa

Samoa has formalized their national CRVS committee. The committee developed a draft National CRVS Improvement Plan and began implementing projects to improve CRVS. Linking the Improvement Plan to the national strategy for the development of statistics allows CRVS to be elevated in the national agenda. Solomon Islands

Access to registration is improving in Solomon Islands; just 20 births were formally registered in 2007 but by June 2014, more than 35,000 people legally had their birth registered. Fifteen additional "satellite service centers" in health facilities were opened to provide more access to registration.

Tonga

In Tonga, a 2011 exercise to reconcile CRVS data revealed higher than anticipated early adult mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs). As a result, existing NCD responses were reviewed and Tonga was able to attract additional support for health programs.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu has improved birth registration by registering children through schools as part of their initial enrolment processes and new births at hospital prior to discharge. They have also included "catch up days" in remote areas. In one year (2013 to 2014), birth registration rates for children under 1 year increased from 35% to 57%.

Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade, 2015 to 2024

The first Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific was held in November 2014 and an agreement to achieve universal and responsive CRVS systems by 2024 was made. The Ministers endorsed a Regional Action Framework of goals, national targets and action area and adopted a Ministerial Declaration to "Get everyone in the picture" in Asia and the Pacific. The 'Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade, 2015 to 2024' was born.

This means that by 2024, the births and deaths of more Pacific Islanders will be registered, enabling governments to design more effective public health policies and build stronger health systems.....PACNEWS

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New PMS to improve Vanuatu's Public Postal

PORT VILA, 17 FEBRUARY 2015 (VANUATU GOVT) ---The recent successful awareness workshops by the Australian-funded Pacific Islands Centre for Public Administration (PICPA), based at The University of the South Pacific (USP) will now see Vanuatu's Public Service adopting a new Performance Management System (PMS).

PICPA Performance Management Specialist Henry Khaisum and Iva Tavai, Advisor Service Delivery, Operations and Implementation have been in Vanuatu since January 26, 2015 to complete the awareness programme for about 120 Directors and Director Generals of Government Departments in Port Vila and Luganville.

VPSC Chairman Kanam Wilson said traditional weaknesses in the Public Service like time management will now be addressed through the new PMS.

"Punctuality and time management will be monitored to confirm whether a public servant is performing. If one is not performing then there are mechanisms in place to help public servants perform," he said.

"What PMS will strive to achieve is to nurture a Public Service culture whereby you gradually claim ownership of the system and adopt a sense of pride for it."

"We are confident that through the new PMS, all the essential elements of effectiveness towards providing service delivery will be captured," Wilson said.

In an effort to boost individual performances of public servants, the VPSC in conjunction with the Prime Minister's Office, is introducing service excellence awards for public servants.

There will be three categories of awards, a Public Service Award, a Ministerial Award and a Departmental Award to motivate excellent performance.

The new PMS is a culmination of work by PICPA which first begun in 2013. The policy was approved and launched on July 29, 2014.

Reflecting on the new system, Advisor Henry Khaisum said the initiative introduced by the Vanuatu Public Service Commission was very important and that PICPA is honoured to be part of the journey of transformation in Vanuatu....PACNEWS