
Securing our future in the Pacific



Pacific Islands Forum with United Nations Missions

*Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu*

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PIF Statement on BBNJ IGC3 Opening Session

**Monday, 19 August 2019
CR 4**

Madam President,

I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Tuvalu.

Let me begin by conveying our profound appreciation to you, Madam President, and your team for the outstanding work that you have accomplished, and for the continued efforts to bring us all on board of our BBNJ paddling canoe. The 0-draft is a testimony of your able leadership in this process. We express our sincere gratitude for delivering this colossal task in late June to allow us to prepare for our third session. While we would have wanted more time, we are aware that the clock is ticking; and we must expedite our progress to accomplish our mandate by next year. The programme of work of this session is in our view, conducive to much productive negotiations and progress.

The 0-draft captures your efforts to strike a delicate balance among the competing interests at play. In that regard, it is a good basis to engage in constructive negotiations this week and to help us bridge our respective positions. Our work will be difficult as we need to make the BBNJ instrument future-proof, meaning we need to not be too prescriptive. Yet, we should not allow the BBNJ instrument to become too broad either, leaving too many uncertain decisions points to the COP, which could further delay the implementation of this critical instrument, and we should capture key elements in the instrument that reflect our ambition and move beyond the status quo. We also need to improve global governance,

with strong sets of common standards and criteria and a global level institution that ensures accountability, while not reducing or eroding the effectiveness of existing instruments and frameworks, including sub-regional ones.

Madam President, allow me to briefly highlight some of key components that, in our view, need to be reflected.

First, the instrument must rise up to the huge challenges and threats facing marine biodiversity. As stewards of the ocean, we strongly believe that we cannot agree on the lowest common denominator and we certainly cannot accept the status quo. We need to be ambitious enough so that we stop the decline of marine biological diversity and we make good on the multiple commitments made by our leaders.

Second, the instrument must be based on informed decisions. It must incorporate and recognize the knowledge accumulated through centuries by indigenous peoples and local communities. We thank you for including many references to TK in the text, and we note the different variations in reference to TK and science. In our view, Traditional knowledge is relevant in many circumstances when implementing the instrument, including when science is lagging. In that regard, we suggest that the appropriate formulation in the text should be “based on best available scientific information and relevant Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities” to highlight the complementarity between these two bodies of knowledge.

Third, the instrument must be inclusive and “leave no one behind”. We believe that the consideration of SIDS in the 0-draft must be strengthened to ensure that this group of countries, in particular Pacific SIDS, are given consideration to support their role, their rights, and their duties as stewards of the ocean.

Fourth, there is growing recognition of the need to give coastal states adjacent to ABNJ adequate consideration, given the possible impact on their exclusive economic zone rights. Coastal states should have the opportunity to partner in relevant ABMT proposals, including in design and implementation. In that regard, we think that the 0-draft is a good basis to furthering our discussions on this issue.

Related to this issue is the role of regional and sub-regional institutions that were established for conservation purposes under the Convention. Indeed, in our region, many institutions have mandates with relevance for the issues discussed in BBNJ. As these organizations are working together to support our delegations of the Blue Pacific, we see the value for the agreement to recognise and provide a structure which enables such existing organizations to do just that, while ensuring a robust global accountable and criteria-and-standard-setting level.

Madam President,

We know well enough that we still have much work to do. To bring us all to shore perfectly, we need everyone to be on board, which we are getting there. We then need to all paddle in the same direction and in a coordinated manner. This requires a skilful master navigator who sets the cap and stroke. With you at the helm, we are on the right path.

We stand ready to work in a constructive, cooperative manner over these next two weeks with all delegations, and to refine, amend, enhance, bridge, or merge the text we have in front of us so that we can make significant progress.

Thank you.