

AITUTAKI DECLARATION ON REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

- (1) Forum Leaders recalled the 1992 *Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation* (the Honiara Declaration) which recognised that an adverse law enforcement environment could threaten the sovereignty, security and economic integrity of Forum members and jeopardise economic and social development;
- (2) The Forum recognised the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, environmental damage and unlawful challenges to national integrity and independence and reaffirmed its commitment to take a comprehensive, integrated and collaborative approach to maintaining and strengthening current mechanisms for cooperation among members in dealing with threats to the security, broadly defined, of states in the region and of the region as a whole;
- (3) Forum Leaders, recalling their commitment to existing regional and international cooperative security arrangements, accepted the need for the region to take on a more comprehensive approach to regional security consistent with the relevant principles of the United Nation's "*Agenda for Peace*";
- (4) The Forum noted that the most immediate risks to security in the region hinge on regional and domestic developments, including natural disasters, trans-national crime including drug trafficking, and economic, social and environmental policies;
- (5) The Forum expressed concern about the vulnerability of member countries to external threats to their sovereignty;
- (6) Forum Leaders also acknowledged, that security challenges could arise with little warning, and the region needs to be able to respond quickly to them;
- (7) The Forum recognised that coordination mechanisms enabling the region to respond to specific types of security threats are already well developed in the region through the South Pacific Forum, other regional organisations, and sub-groupings, and that unnecessary duplication, overlap, and waste should be avoided;
- (8) Forum Leaders acknowledged that existing arrangements have not provided explicit mechanisms to facilitate consultations that would enable members to respond promptly and effectively to requests for assistance;
- (9) The Forum considered that the enhancement of existing mechanisms would help build confidence within the region in relation to political and security issues and agreed that dialogue on political and security issues should be broadened;
- (10) Forum Leaders expressed support for the following guiding principles governing security cooperation in the region;
 - The Forum is committed to promoting a comprehensive, integrated and collaborative approach to security in aid of the region,
 - Good governance, sustainable development and international cooperation, including preventive diplomacy, are among the most effective ways of overcoming the vulnerability, building mutual confidence and strengthening the overall security of states in the region,
 - Recognising that it is best to avert the causes of conflict, the Forum is committed to reducing, containing and resolving all conflicts by peaceful means, including by customary practices,

FORUM EYES ONLY

- Forum members will give effect to their shared commitment to peace and security by engaging in practical forms of cooperation in accordance with this Declaration and international law.
- (11) In line with these principles, the Forum agreed to further develop mechanisms for preventive diplomacy including use of the Forum Regional Security Committee, the good offices of the Forum Secretary General, eminent persons, fact finding missions and third party mediation;
 - (12) Forum Leaders also agreed that the Forum Regional Security Committee Meeting be strengthened through the addition of a second session for consultations on broader security issues;
 - (13) The Forum agreed that the Forum Regional Security Committee should give early consideration to the circumstances whereby the Committee would be convened in response to emergency situations;
 - (14) Forum Leaders agreed that procedures should be developed and put in place which would better facilitate responses by the region's disciplined forces, including early consideration of Status of Forces Agreements for this purpose.

18 September 1997