



09 July 2022

Mr Henry Puna  
Secretary General  
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat  
**Suva, FIJI**

Dear Secretary General

I hope this letter reaches you in good health and spirit despite the unprecedented challenges facing our blue Pacific continent. I wish to acknowledge with appreciation your stern and steadfast leadership in guiding the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat during these tremulous times in the history of our Pacific family.

I also wish to thank you for your enduring friendship over the years and for continuing to seek genuine engagement and sincere resolve to address the issues that threatened our unity and solidarity as a family. I would also like to take this opportunity to offer my deepest regrets if the position that Kiribati has taken with regards to the Suva agreement and our decision not to participate in the upcoming Leaders meeting have offended you, the Cook Islands and our Pacific family. It was never meant to undermine your leadership of the Pacific's premier institution, nor is it directed at any member of the Pacific family.

Kiribati attaches great importance to our diplomatic relations and special friendship that we have enjoyed with the Cook Islands and the rest of the Pacific family. This strong bond has allowed us to stand shoulder to shoulder and work collaboratively on matters of mutual interest at the bilateral, regional and multilateral level. We have every intention to continue to work closely with all members of our Pacific family and to strengthen the strong bond that exists between us all in these challenging times.

Allow me Secretary General to clarify the reasons for Kiribati's inability to participate at the 51<sup>st</sup> Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting and why we could not sign on to the Suva Agreement.

Firstly, Kiribati remains concerned by our collective inability and to some degree, our reluctance as a region to address the core concerns outlined in the Mekreos Communique in relation to the Gentlemen's' agreement. For Kiribati, this is a matter of principle and one that touches on the need for equity, equality and the inclusiveness of

all members in the architecture of our premier regional institution. We believe that these are the very same principles that underpins our collective efforts to promote, uphold and strengthen Pacific regionalism.

The second reason is that while my government is grateful for and welcomed the efforts that have gone into preparing the reform packages under the leadership of the Fiji as Forum Chair, Kiribati is gravely concerned by the decision to forego the opportunity to genuinely discuss the appointment and tenure of the incumbent SG without Kiribati's involvement. In the invitation that was sent prior to the recent PDM in Suva, the proposal to voluntarily step down from the SG position as part of the reform package was no longer on the table for discussion. This is a misstep that does not allow the usual courtesies to discuss and agree on matters of regional importance in the Pacific way.

I acknowledge and deeply respect the decision that individual members of the Micronesian Presidents' Summit have taken regarding their return to the PIF and acceptance of the Suva Agreement, this is within their sovereign rights to do so. However, in acknowledging this, I wish to also affirm that there was never a MPS caucus decision on the PIF reform packages that Kiribati was part of, and particularly an MPS collective decision to return to the PIF. This is the third reason why Kiribati has chosen to maintain the stance outlined in the Mekreos Communique and to ensure that the value and mutual respect is accorded to all members of our Pacific family.

The fourth reason for which I am unable to join the 51<sup>st</sup> Forum Leaders Meeting was due to the dates of the Forum meeting coinciding with our National Day celebrations. As you may be aware Secretary General, the dates immediately before and after the 12<sup>th</sup> of July are of great importance to my fellow I-Kiribati, especially during these challenging times as we rebuild our nation in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the onset of the drought in Kiribati which has been declared as a state of disaster. As a small island state facing multifaced and overwhelming challenges, it would therefore be difficult for me to accord the same attention and priority that I should to another very important event like the PIF Leaders meeting, particularly my intention to continue to discuss the same stance which I have described above. It is also for that reason that I have sought kind consideration in my letter of 27<sup>th</sup> June to the Chair of the Forum if the opportunity to defer the meeting to later July can be entertained. I regret that this request was never considered or even acknowledged.

For the above reasons and to allow ample time and clarity well ahead of the Leaders meeting, I wish to convey that Kiribati has taken the sovereign decision to withdraw from the Pacific Island Forum with immediate effect. This decision was not taken lightly and have been thoroughly considered in light of the PDM developments and because we cannot set aside the values and principles that we firmly stand on with regards to the issues at hand.

I wish to further reiterate that Kiribati's stance on the issue of the PIFS SG position and our inability to attend this year's Leaders meeting was never meant to offend or be



against any of our Pacific Island brothers and sisters. I unreservedly offer my apologies if it has been taken in that light. It is meant to be a reminder to us all that our solidarity and unity as a region is dependent on how we treat each other with profound respect and understanding as we work through the challenges that we face as a region. I therefore further wish to reiterate Kiribati's firm commitment to continue to work with all on areas of mutual interest and to maintain the warm and very cordial relationship with our Pacific family, with the hope that through dialogue and diplomacy, we will resolve the impasse that we continue to face, including the opportunity to continue to engage through the various regional CROP platforms.

I kindly seek the assistance of the Secretariat in disseminating this letter to all members of the Pacific Island Forum.

Finally, allow me to take this opportunity to wish you and our Pacific family and partners a successful 51<sup>st</sup> Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting, and further reaffirm my Government's strong support as you all ably work to steer the Forum into what I hope would be a new era for Pacific unity and the solidarity.

Please accept, Secretary General, the assurances of my highest esteem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Taneti Maamau  
**BERETITENTI**