

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
by Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum

Honourable Ministers, Senior Officials, Representatives of CROP Agencies, Development Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen

Honourable Ministers, we need not be reminded of the context within which we meet today – the coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19 has had severe consequences for the global and our national economies. It affects us all and its impact on the livelihoods and prospects of our people will be felt for some time to come. Our countries have risen to the extraordinary challenges posed by the pandemic, by mobilising all government resources as well as domestic policy measures, to combat and respond to the crisis.

However, we should also remind ourselves that COVID-19 pandemic did not simply arrive in a vacuum. Rather, it arrived in the midst of growing uncertainty about the future of our Blue Pacific, due to inherent vulnerabilities faced by the region due to climate change. For the Pacific, COVID-19 amplified the persistent vulnerabilities that continue to challenge our resilient development and our security.

Therefore, far from being the cause of current social, economic and political challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, in some cases deepening and broadening them, and in other cases accelerating their arrival. It is within this existing context that we should consider the broader issues around the COVID-19 pandemic, in the Pacific region and our responses.

Among other things, the impact of climate change together with COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact by worsening the level of poverty and inequality within several Member States. Our vulnerability to climate change induced natural disasters, and the broader human security challenges that arise from these threats has created new challenges that will require innovative and collective approaches.

This meeting provides an important avenue for Honourable Ministers for Finance and Economic Development, to share key lessons and explore opportunities for regional initiatives to support and complement each country's domestic efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic compels us to carefully think about what investments, policies and partnerships we require to secure our economic resilience and the wellbeing of our people now and into the future. It provides the opportunity to envisage what we want the "new normal" to be, for our region – do we simply wait until the global economy recovers, or do we use the opportunity to assert a regional economy that supports Pacific priorities?

Honourable Ministers, the agenda before you I hope enables an appropriate and effective discussion on such matters. As you will note, the substantive matters for discussion focus on the vulnerabilities outlined earlier – the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the region's underlying economic challenges, including access to financing for resilience development, and economic inequalities.

I wish you well in your deliberations and productive meeting ahead.