



**MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT, PRODUCTIVITY & WORKPLACE  
RELATIONS - HONOURABLE AGNI DEO SINGH**

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[Sitting of Parliament 02<sup>nd</sup> – 06<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji]

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Thursday, 05 September 2024

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**UPDATE ON THE BLUE PACIFIC BIG OCEAN STATES (BPBOS)  
PLATFORM FOR LABOUR MINISTERS WITH A FOCUS ON A 'ONE  
VOICE' FOR THE ILO PACIFIC ISLANDS MEMBER STATES IN  
RELATION TO EMPLOYMENT ISSUES**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Mr. Speaker Sir**, I rise to update this august house on the Blue Pacific Big Ocean States (BPBOS) Platform for Labour Ministers with a focus on “One Voice” for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Pacific Island Member States in relation to employment related issues.

**Mr. Speaker Sir**, the BPBOS labour platform was established by the Government representatives of the 11 ILO Pacific Island Member States, in consultation with their social partners. Fiji is the current Chair of the BPBOS while the Government of Cook Islands holds the role of the Secretariat.

## **PURPOSE OF BPBOS**

**Mr Speaker Sir**, the purpose of BPBOS is to bring together leaders and representatives from the Pacific Island nations to discuss common employment challenges, opportunities and strategies for sustainable development. BPBOS is a body for the Pacific Island nations to seek technical expertise and guidance on employment related matters. It will be the voice for Pacific Island nations in: -

1. Advocating or raising awareness on the impacts of climate change on employment and developing resilient societies.
2. strengthening compliance and promoting decent working conditions in the maritime labour sector and assisting with trade agreements.
3. strengthening the spirit of tripartism in the Pacific in line with ILO Convention 144.
4. amplifying the voice of ILO Pacific member states within the ILC and Asia and the Pacific Group (ASPAG) forums.
5. promoting decent work and advancing social justice.

6. assisting member states in meeting the reporting obligations on ILO instruments.
7. connecting with key stakeholders to assist with the unique challenges faced by Pacific Island member states relating to labour mobility and skills development, labour standards and compliance, labour law reform, and progressive management of labour relations.

## **BACKGROUND**

**Mr Speaker Sir**, I wish to delve on the establishment of this labour platform. **Mr Speaker Sir**, at the 2017 International Labour Conference, a tripartite meeting was called on Friday 9 June 2017 for all Pacific Island Member States of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Participants from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands attended this meeting. All expressed a common wish to have regular meetings at each International Labour Conference (ILC).

At the 2019 Conference, a second tripartite meeting was called on Wednesday 12 June 2019. The participants were: Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu and the Cook Islands. It was unanimously decided that a Terms of Reference would be adopted by the larger group of Pacific Island Member States during the Pacific Tripartite High-Level Forum (PTHLF) on Climate Change and Decent Work in the Pacific on 24-27 July 2019 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

At the Pacific Tripartite High-Level Forum, the Labour Ministers requested a presentation on the Big Ocean States (BOS) and further made significant changes to the draft TOR: -

1. to amend the name of the platform to align and recognise our region under a single appellation as defined by our Pacific Leaders; and
2. to restructure the platform as a regional Government platform given that both the social partners have existing corresponding platforms and to channel their voice accordingly.

**Mr. Speaker Sir,** on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019, a ministerial resolution, the Blue Pacific Big Ocean States (BPBOS) labour resolution was accepted and signed by the Ministers. This was to affirm our joint commitment in establishing this platform and finalising the content and adoption of the TOR at the 50<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum on 13 - 16 August 2019 in Tuvalu. Following the signing of the labour resolution, the Labour Ministers voted for the new Chair, Vice Chairs and Secretariat for a period of 2 years.

**Mr Speaker Sir,** Fiji Labour Minister, my predecessor, was elected as Chairperson while the two vice chairpersons were the Kiribati Labour Minister and the Samoan Labour Minister. The Labour Minister for Cook Islands was elected as Secretariat.

**Mr Speaker Sir,** in 2024 at the High-Level Tripartite Dialogue on Decent Work and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of April in Suva, the Fiji Minister for Employment, Productivity and

Workplace Relations was reconfirmed as the Chair of the BPBOS and Cook Islands as Secretariat. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, regrettably nothing has been done since 2019 for reasons best known to the former Chair.

In June 2024 at the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva this year (2024), the Pacific member states met at the PIFs Office. In attendance were tripartite representatives from Australia, Cook Island, the Federated State of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu. The Secretariat represented by the Cook Islands presented and distributed the TOR for comments. All the members present at the meeting agreed to the proposal. Thereafter, I as the Chair requested the Secretariat to meet to finalise the TOR and the way forward for the BPBOS labour relations platform.

## **FUNCTIONS OF THE BPBOS LABOUR PLATFORM**

**Mr Speaker Sir**, the functions of the BPBOS labour platform are to:

- a. facilitate collaboration and building of synergies among ILO Pacific Island Member States around the issues of social justice, decent work and good faith employment relations via coordinated efforts and mutual support.
- b. strengthen the visibility and capacity of participants to advocate and support a unified Pacific voice.
- c. provide and/or utilize relevant tools and information for advocacy, dialogue, and awareness regarding Pacific issues.
- d. support the ILO Pacific Island Member States in attending employment related meetings and events.
- e. facilitate discussion on Pacific labour issues and aim to increase resources towards the interest of the BPBOS from international organisations.

## **OUTCOME OF THE BPBOS MEETINGS**

**Mr. Speaker Sir**, following the outcome of the ILC meeting in June 2024, and reconfirmation on Fiji's

chairmanship, swift action has been taken to revamp and advance the work of the BPBOS labour platform. **Mr. Speaker Sir**, a two-day meeting was held on 26-27 August 2024 in Auckland, to review the draft Terms of Reference for the BPBOS Labour Ministers' Platform.

The meeting was held at the Fiji Trade Office between the Fiji Government as the Chairperson of the BPBOS and Secretariat, represented by the Secretary for Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Government of Cook Islands and respective delegations of both governments.

"The two-day meeting was a success, and it saw the completion of the review of the Draft TOR for the BPBOS Labour Ministers' Platform for circulation to the respective Labour Ministers of the ILO Pacific Island member states for their perusal and feedback.

**Mr. Speaker Sir**, the two days meeting was fully funded by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Office for the Pacific Island countries.



## **CONCLUSION**

**Mr Speaker Sir,** the Blue Pacific Big Ocean States (BPBOS) Labour Platform is key to recognising and aligning the Pacific region under a single Pacific voice on employment issues and ILO Agendas.

This labour platform is crucial for the ILO Pacific Islands member states on the emphasis of raising visibility and having a common voice in the Pacific at the international arena where issues that affect the Pacific are to be heard, in particular, decent work, employment issues, labour mobility and climate change.

**Mr. Speaker Sir,** I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the ILO Office for the Pacific Island countries for their continued support and commitment towards the ILO Pacific Island member states in advancing social justice. Not forgetting the full support from the Fiji High Commission Office and Fiji's Trade Office in Auckland for hosting our 2 days meeting to complete the review of the TOR.

**Mr Speaker Sir,** I thank you for this opportunity.

**-ENDS-**