



micah



**SUBMISSION** JUNE 2020

**Photo** The Prime Minister meets with Pacific Church Leaders during Micah's Voices for Justice 2019

# Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific Region

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE  
AND TRADE - FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND AID SUB-COMMITTEE**





# Pacific Conference of Churches

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26<sup>th</sup> June, 2020

The Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee  
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Australian Parliament  
Canberra  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Honourable Members of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee,

**RE: INQUIRY INTO STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH COUNTRIES IN THE PACIFIC REGION.**

Warm greetings from your Pacific sisters and brothers of faith!

The Pacific Conference of Churches welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region. This inquiry is important, not only in the recommendations it will make but in the recording of the many organisations, institutions and communities in Australia that have a commitment to ensuring a strong balanced partnership of their country with their Pacific family.

This submission by Micah Australia is a crucial example of the type of partnership the Pacific Churches and are seeking with our partners in Australia: one that is both consultative and co-creative in process and promotes equity through self-determination, and a flourishing Pacific that is inclusive of first peoples and Pacific diaspora. As the saying goes, "Nothing about us, without us."

Since before Federation, Pacific Communities and First People of Australia have had a spiritual bond, as people of the land, sea and sky. Australian people and communities of faith have been pioneers of churches in the Pacific, and Pacific islanders have witnessed, taught and lived the gospel to Australian communities. The Christian paradigm of mission has changed from a paternalistic, colonial-oriented relationship that is hierarchical, to one that seeks common and shared mission as equal members of the Body of Christ and as sisters and brothers in faith and service of all creation.

The priorities and principles articulated in the submission by Micah Australia highlight that the most effective form of the Pacific Church Partnership is one that is woven with strands of mutuality, relationship-building between Pacific and Australian communities of faith, solidarity, celebration of indigenous wisdom and spirituality, affirmation of First People and a recognition that the issues that affect the Pacific are issues of concern and action by Australia.

The Pacific Conference of Churches would like to commend the work done over the last 18 month by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop the Pacific Church Partnership Programme in consultation with the Pacific Conference of Churches and its partners in Australia. This is part of the relationship building that is required for communities to walk and work hand in hand and for all voices to be heard.

A key step in this relationship building, is a proposed gathering of Pacific Church Leaders in Australia to meet with the Australian Government, Churches and Church Agencies and Christian social enterprises and in particular with First People and Pacific Diaspora. Perhaps this gathering would be a good way to commemorate the opening of Australia's bubble to the Pacific when it eventuates.

The Pacific Conference of Churches, commends the Micah Australia submission to this committee and would also welcome the opportunity to speak to the committee. We wish you well in your deliberations.

In Peace,



**James Shri Bhagwan (Rev)**  
**General Secretary**



## Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress National Executive

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Interim National Chairperson:

Rev Mark Kickett:

[REDACTED]

Interim National Administration Assistant:

Ian Dempster:

[REDACTED]

*Postal:* 312 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Brooklyn Park, SA, 5032

29 June, 2020

Dear Matt,

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress of Australia, proudly stand in solidarity with our partner Churches in the Pacific. We believe that our shared stories, cultural connectedness and colonising history connect us not just in a spiritual way but also in ways of Truth and Justice. We firmly believe in a God of Justice and as the peak body on First Peoples within the Uniting Church and it's agencies, we affirm the submission from Micah as it also stands for Truth and Justice.

We further recognise that this submission and its sentiment is also an opportunity for Congress to cement its place within the Pacific Region as we seek to develop ongoing partnerships in holistic ministry and cross cultural partnerships with our Pacific Christian brothers and sisters to build sustainability for all within a holistic framework.

We congratulate Micah in their partnering and inclusive approach in reaching out to include First Peoples Voices in this submission on Pacific relationships.

Peace & Blessings,

Rev Mark Kickett  
Interim National Chair  
UAICC



## Introduction

Micah Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. It recognises the priority that the Australian Government has given the Pacific through its Pacific Step-Up and the range of historical, geographical, relational and strategic imperatives which motivate that choice.

As a coalition of churches, Christians and faith-based organisations, Micah is aware of the significant role that the Christian faith has played in shaping the relationship between the Pacific and Australia. Together with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Micah has worked to develop the submission to this inquiry shaped by that history and relationship, to outline the shared priorities that we have together and the principles we believe should guide the further development of partnerships between Australia and the Pacific, particularly with churches and faith-based organisations.

In developing this submission, Micah has engaged with First Nations Christian leaders in Australia from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) that is in covenant relationship with the Uniting Church in Australia. This has assisted in deepening the understanding of Micah of the significance of the common history of colonisation, trauma, resilience and healing which has shaped the indigenous peoples of this region. Micah and the PCC both want to ensure Australia's First Nations peoples have a critical role in shaping the future of Australia's partnership with the Pacific. ▶



*"This submission by Micah Australia is a crucial example of the type of partnership the Pacific Churches are seeking with our partners in Australia: one that is both consultative and co-creative in process and promotes equity through self-determination, and a flourishing Pacific that is inclusive of First Nations peoples and Pacific diaspora. We believe that the most effective form of the Pacific Church Partnership is one that is woven with strands of mutuality, relationship-building between Pacific and Australian communities of faith, solidarity, celebration of indigenous wisdom and spirituality, affirmation of First Nations peoples and a recognition that the issues that affect the Pacific are issues of concern and action by Australia."*

*Rev. James Bhagwan, General Secretary,  
Pacific Conference of Churches*

Photo Pacific Leaders out the front of Parliament House during Micah's Voices for Justice 2019 (top), Rev James Bhagwan (right)



Finally, it is impossible to consider the terms of reference for this inquiry without considering the impact that COVID-19 is having on the world and the impact it will have on all aspects of life in the Pacific. While the health impact to date has been mercifully small, this is a fragile reality. The primary impact to date has been on other aspects of wellbeing, particularly economic, due to the reliance on regional interconnectedness and on tourism. This has knock on effects to wellbeing in other areas of life including issues like food security and mental health. It has also had an impact on the church needing to rely on technology for worship gatherings and making it difficult to provide the high-level of pastoral care they are so relied on for. COVID-19 is an important reminder of the interconnectedness of life and the interconnectedness of the world. If we are to be truly safe as a world then the worst impacts of COVID-19 need to be ended everywhere. Therefore, while Australia continues to step-up in the Pacific, it cannot afford to step down elsewhere in the world, either in the rest of the Indo-Pacific or from its commitments globally.



*“When our spiritual hearts as First Peoples, here in Australia, join with the ancestral hands of our brothers and sisters in the Pacific, we connect the stories of our land, our oceans, and our people, but importantly we join hands and hearts for shared justice. When the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress at the heart of the Uniting Church in Australia, is joined with our Pacific Islands brothers and sisters in Christ, the Creator, we are strong with resilience, hope, justice and self-determination”*

*Alison Overeem, Palawa First Nations woman, Member of the UAICC National Executive*

**Photo** Foreign Minister Marise Payne meeting with Pacific Church Leaders in February 2019, Marise Payne Twitter (top), Alison Overeem (right)

# Summary of Policy Calls

1 Engage with Pacific churches and faith-based organisations as an indispensable partner in the implementation of the Pacific Step-Up.

2 Prioritise the following issues, in implementing the Pacific Step-Up, as critical to the people of faith in the Pacific:

- a. Ecological stewardship;
- b. Self-Determination (including political, economic and cultural self-determination);
- c. Gender and generational equity, dignity and empowerment for marginalised communities.

3 Adopt the following principles in engaging with Pacific churches and Christian leaders in the Pacific:

- a. Begin with a partnership approach;
- b. Build a sustainable partnership;
- c. Be guided by self-determination and local leadership;
- d. Draw on the wisdom of indigenous peoples;
- e. Built on strengths;
- f. Create relationships of reciprocity;
- g. Based on a holistic view of life;
- h. Embracing opportunities for the future.

# Mapping of Historical and Current Church Partnerships

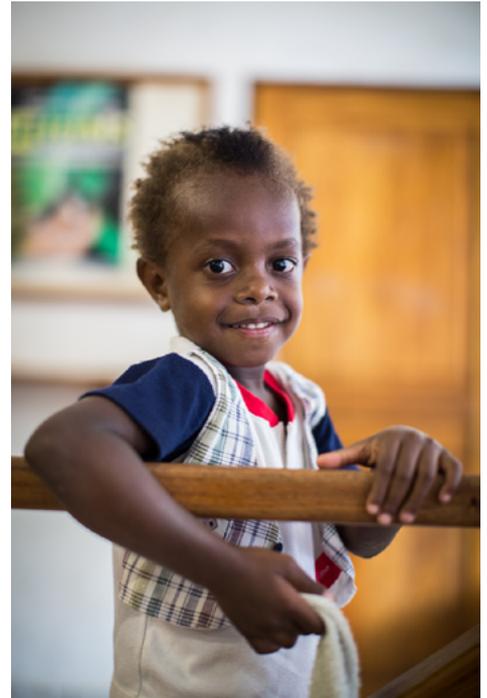
## **HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES**

The spread of Christianity in the Pacific region has a long and complex history. The origins of Catholicism in the Pacific can be traced back to the Spanish Jesuits in the seventeenth century while the Protestant tradition arises out of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the late eighteenth century.

The work of the LMS was first focused on Polynesia and along with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), they represent the first major involvement of Australian Christians in the missionary movement in the Pacific. Meanwhile it was the American and European missionaries (Germany and France) that were primarily responsible for missionary work in Micronesia. Finally, it was a few decades later in the nineteenth century that the work of missionaries from a diverse range of denominational backgrounds, including from Australia, were involved in missionary work in Melanesia. An often underacknowledged part of the missionary history, is the role of Pacific islanders in missionary work between islands. Over the course of 200 years, there was a transformation in the Pacific, which meant that by the turn of the 20th century 90% of Pacific Islanders professed Christianity. Pentecostal missionary activity was first established in Fiji in 1914 leading to the first Assemblies of God congregation beginning in Fiji in 1926. In the middle of the century, in 1948, Australian Assemblies of God missionary work began in Papua New Guinea. The growth in PNG of the movement was significant with 123 congregations in the early 60s then reaching 1,475 in 2004. Across the Pacific there has been a remarkably diverse range of Christian activities and expressions - that complex history is reflected in the diversity of Christian traditions now found in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

**The Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College were established in 1966 and have been central to the establishment of an ecumenical identity in the Pacific.**

This missionary history is closely connected to the colonial history with all its failures and problems of loss of life, land and culture. This is an experience that the Australia's First Nations peoples and the peoples of the Pacific share. They can readily see themselves in each others' stories and appreciate the grief ▶



**Photo** Tycre 4 years old waits for his father Miller who is being served at the National Bank of Vanuatu on Malekula island (DFAT Image)

<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Ernst, Manfred and Anna Anisi, *The Historical Development of Christianity in Oceania in The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, First Edition. Edited by Lamin Sanneh and Micahel J McClymond, John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

and pain which is part of that common experience and history.

While a lot of the origins of missionary activity in the Pacific came from the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, many Australians were also involved in this work. A few denominations in Australia trace their relationship with the Church in the Pacific back over 150 years. Many Australian and Pacific churches were joined structurally. Many of today's aid and development agencies have their roots in the missionary endeavours of their forebears. Through the process of political decolonisation of the Pacific, many Australian churches have also needed to reassess their relationship with the Pacific. The Pacific and Australian churches have needed to reimagine their relationship and how it can be expressed in ways that learn the lessons of history, and seek to forge a future which does not recolonise but is founded in genuine mutual partnership.

Recently, discussions between the PCC, Micah, and churches in Australia and their aid and development agencies, have been part of forging a shared vision for that new future. These discussions are now also expanding to include Christian voices and leaders from other sectors - including the private sector, health and education. This recognises a greater desire from Australian Christians from all walks of life, seeking greater engagement and collaboration with their Pacific Island counterparts across a range of fields and new opportunities.

**We welcome the recent investment of time, attention and resources by the Australian Government into this area, particularly through the Pacific Church Partnership Program, which has demonstrated a real willingness from the Government to support and help build on this shared and rich history outlined.**

It has positively demonstrated to those making this submission, the beginnings of how the Government can be a positive force for supporting strengthened relationships into the future. It is our hope and belief that this submission and subsequent dialogue, will only continue to build on this moving forward.



Photo Solomon Islands, Malu'u (DFAT Image)

# Current State of the Church in the Pacific

Below is recent census data on religious affiliation in the Pacific. As noted above, there are significant shifts in religious affiliation arising from the growth of new Christian movements, particularly from within the Pentecostal tradition. Many of the mainline churches in the Pacific also have relationships with both their partner churches in Australia and their aid and development agency.

COUNTRY	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
<b>Cook Islands</b>	Cook Islands Christian Church - Congregational (49.1%) Roman Catholic (17%)
<b>Federated States of Micronesia</b>	Catholic (50%) Protestant (47%)
<b>Fiji</b>	Methodist Church in Fiji (36.2%, 66.6% Indigenous Fijian) Roman Catholic (8.9%, 13.3% Indigenous Fijian) Hindu (33.7%, 76.7% Indo-Fijian) Muslim (7%) Assembly of God (4.0%) Seventh Day Adventist (2.9%) Anglican (0.8%)
<b>Kiribati</b>	Roman Catholic (55.8%) Kiribati Uniting Church - Presbyterian (33.5%)
<b>Nauru</b>	Nauru Congregational (35.7%) Roman Catholic (33%) Assembly of God (13%) Nauru Independent Church (9.5%)

COUNTRY	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Niue	Congregational Christian Church of Niue (67%) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (10%) Roman Catholic (10%)
Palau	Roman Catholic (49.4%) Protestant (30.9%)
Papua New Guinea	Roman Catholic (27%) Evangelical Lutheran (19.5%) United Church in Papua New Guinea (11.5%) Seventh Day Adventist (10%) Pentecostal (8.6%) Evangelical Alliance (5.2%) Anglican Church of Melanesia (3.2%)
Republic of the Marshall Islands	Protestant (54.8%) Assembly of God (25.8%) Roman Catholic (8.4%)
Samoa	Congregationalist (31.8%) Roman Catholic (19.4%) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (15.2%) Methodist (13.7%) Assembly of God (8%)
Solomon Islands	Anglican Church of Melanesia (31.9%) Roman Catholic (19.6%) South Sea Evangelical (17.1%) Seventh-day Adventist (11.7%) United Church in the Solomon Islands (10.1%)



COUNTRY	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Tonga	Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (36%) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (18%) Roman Catholic (15%) Free Church of Tonga (12%) Church of Tonga (7.2%)
Tuvalu	Congregational Church of Tuvalu (97%)
Vanuatu	Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu (27.9%) Anglican Church of Melanesia (15.1%) Seventh-day Adventist (12.5%) Roman Catholic (12.4%)



*Since 2016, Believe Global (Planetshakers Church) has been involved in the Pacific region with a vision to bring sustainable change and development to nations such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In partnership with government bodies as well as local churches, Believe Global has conducted numerous large-scale community events, leadership and life skills programs in primary and secondary schools, inmate rehabilitation programs in prisons and other humanitarian work. Over the last four years, Believe Global has delivered face-to-face programs to over 145,000 students and seen over 500,000 people attend community events.*

**Photo** Anglican Overseas Aid's church building in Vanuatu (top), Believe Global Fiji (right)

# Current Relationships between Churches in the Pacific and Australia

## MICAH MEMBERS

<b>Act for Peace</b>	Papua New Guinea (1 project) Tonga (2 projects) Vanuatu (4 projects)
<b>Adventist Development and Relief Agency</b>	Fiji (2 projects) Pacific Regional (2 projects) Papua New Guinea (5 projects) Solomon Islands (5 projects) Tonga (1 project) Vanuatu (2 projects)
<b>Baptist World Aid Australia (TransformAid International)</b>	Fiji (1 project) Papua New Guinea (4 projects) Solomon Islands (1 project) Vanuatu (2 projects)
<b>Caritas Australia</b>	Fiji (3 projects) Kiribati (1 project) Pacific Regional (6 projects) Samoa (2 projects) Solomon Islands (2 projects) Tonga (1 project)
<b>CBM Australia</b>	Papua New Guinea (1 project)
<b>Global Mission Partners (Churches of Christ)</b>	Papua New Guinea (1 project) Vanuatu (4 projects)
<b>TEAR Australia</b>	Pacific Regional (1 project) Solomon Islands (1 project)
<b>The Salvation Army International Development</b>	Papua New Guinea (1 project)

This is a list of all the Micah members, church-based agencies and Christian faith-based organisations that work in the Pacific. Of the over \$21 million of the Government's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funding which flows into the Pacific, over \$6.8 million is through church or faith-based agencies in 2019-20.

**MICAH MEMBERS**

<p><b>UnitingWorld</b> (updated for June 2020)</p>	<p>Fiji (6 projects) Kiribati (2 projects) Papua New Guinea (5 projects) Solomon Islands (3 projects) Tonga (1 project) Vanuatu (4 projects) Tuvalu (2 projects)</p>
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<p><b>World Vision Australia</b></p>	<p>Papua New Guinea (22 projects) Solomon Islands (6 projects) Vanuatu (8 projects)</p>
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**OTHER CHURCH-BASED AGENCIES**

<p><b>Anglican Board of Mission</b></p>	<p>Pacific Regional (1 project) Papua New Guinea (3 projects) Solomon Islands (1 project) Vanuatu (3 projects)</p>
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<p><b>Anglican Overseas Aid</b></p>	<p>Papua New Guinea (1 project) Solomon Islands (3 projects) Vanuatu (3 projects)</p>
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<p><b>Australian Lutheran World Service</b></p>	<p>Papua New Guinea (3 projects)</p>
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<p><b>Quaker Service Australia</b></p>	<p>Papua New Guinea (1 project)</p>
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**OTHER CHRISTIAN FAITH-BASED AGENCIES**

<p><b>Australian Marist Solidarity</b></p>	<p>Fiji (4 projects) Kiribati (1 project) Papua New Guinea (5 projects) Samoa (1 project) Solomon Islands (8 projects) Tonga (1 project) Vanuatu (3 projects)</p>
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<p><b>Australian Mercy</b></p>	<p>Papua New Guinea (1 project)</p>
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*The Church Partnerships Program in Papua New Guinea has been running for sixteen years and supports churches to improve their capacity to deliver health and education services, especially in remote areas, as well as deliver a broad range of activities in support of gender equality and social inclusion, peace and prosperity, and disaster risk reduction. It includes the following churches in Papua New Guinea: United Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Baptist Union and the Salvation Army supported by their denominational counterparts in Australia.*

Photo Church Partnerships in the Pacific (DFAT Image)

**OTHER CHRISTIAN FAITH-BASED AGENCIES**

<b>Mary MacKillop Today</b>	Fiji (1 project) Papua New Guinea (2 projects)
<b>MercyWorks</b>	Papua New Guinea (4 projects)
<b>Mission World Aid</b>	Papua New Guinea (1 project) Solomon Islands (2 projects) Tonga (2 projects)
<b>The Leprosy Mission</b>	Pacific Regional (1 project) Papua New Guinea (1 project)
<b>World Hope International</b>	Papua New Guinea (4 projects)



*The Alynath Kindy School is supported by Thornleigh Community Baptist Church (TCBC), in partnership with the local community of Kwaio Valley (a village on the outskirts of the capital, Honiara). The School provides children of aged between 3-7 with a quality basic education that prepares them for primary school. TCBC currently assists with the payment of 3 local teacher's salaries, so that the small amount of school fees collected from families can be invested back into the school's infrastructure and educational resources. The school has future plans to purchase its own land, which is an important step towards official registration from the local government (and additional funding).*

Beyond the formal aid and development partnerships of agencies, there are many other significant partnerships between Australian and Pacific churches, schools and theological colleges.

Beyond the larger formal development projects of the Church and faith-based agencies, there are literally hundreds (if not more) of smaller projects based on direct ties and connections that exist between many local Australian congregations and Christian schools, with churches and schools in the Pacific. Some of this is born of long-standing missionary links, this is a particularly the case between many congregations in Queensland and the churches in Papua New Guinea. The significant diaspora communities from the Pacific that are increasingly enriching the life of Australian congregations also provide a strong connection to the Pacific, particularly Tonga and Samoa.

In many cases, churches and Christian schools are running short term trips to the Pacific to visit and participate in these projects, building new connections between young Australians and young people in the Pacific.

Theological education has also been a long-standing source of partnership between the Pacific and Australian churches. Pacific churches continue to deepen their exploration of a uniquely Pacific theology. Regular exchange of academic staff and students has been a long-standing practice for many denominations stretching back decades which continues today. The Pacific Theological College developed its PhD studies in partnership with Charles Sturt University. And the Avondale College of Higher Education has established the Driscoll Pacific Islands Student Scholarship to support students from the Pacific with their studies. And as Australian First Nations Christians seek to explore theology born of their experience, they have identified the value of theological dialogue and exploration with Pacific theologians born of their shared culture and history.

**Photo** Members of TCBC sharing with children at the Alynath Kindy School (Photo TCBC)

Unless otherwise noted this data is drawn from the ACFID website last updated November 2019.

# Shared Priorities for the Pacific

Micah Australia has worked closely with the Pacific Conference of Churches to identify this shared set of priorities. In doing this, Micah is seeking to demonstrate that the Pacific Step-Up should arise out of, and be deepened by, the partnership that already exists between the Pacific and Australian peoples. As the Australian Government, particularly through the Office of the Pacific in DFAT, seeks to expand and deepen its work with churches in the Pacific, it should shape its approach around these priorities.

## 1 ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

As Christians we believe we have a responsibility to be stewards of the whole of the ecology which we believe is created by God. In the context of a changing climate and broader ecological degradation (both on the land and in the ocean), this is impacting directly on the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the people of the Pacific. As a Blue Continent, the impacts on climate change on the oceans will impact the Pacific most directly.

Globally the world is recognising the need for countries to achieve zero emissions by 2050. Australia takes great pride in seeing the Pacific as 'family'. If this is to have true meaning, then Australia needs to heed the call of Pacific people for Australia to step up. The investment in resilience and adaptation for the Pacific is welcome, however it also needs to be joined with a credible plan to achieve the 2030 emissions targets. Micah supports a just and equitable transition of the Australian economy, and recognises there will need to be careful consideration of the impact economic transition has on the livelihoods of those impacted. It will also be necessary to continue to scale up funding for resilience and adaptation as the consequences of climate change continue to occur in the Pacific.

Further, the Pacific churches are recognising that there will be a need to relocate people due to climate-induced displacement. This will not only involve significant economic and social dislocation but also has a deep impact on the cultural and spiritual dimension of life. Just as First Nations peoples in Australia have identified the

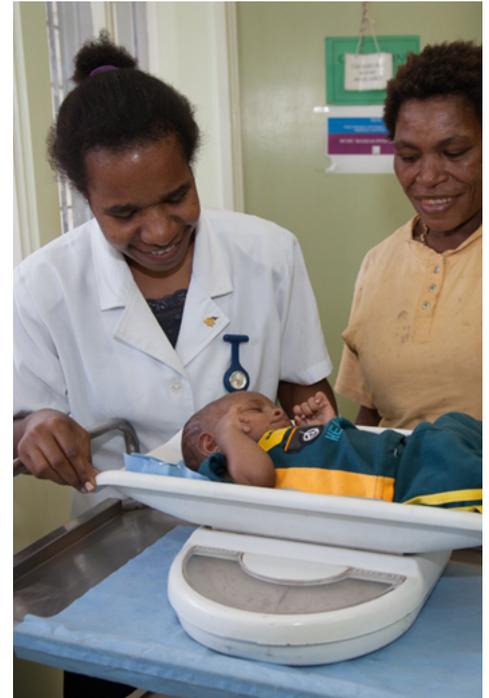


Photo Susu Mama's, Port Moresby General Hospital (DFAT Image)

significant pain caused by land dispossession, so too will this be a reality for those displaced by climate change. Locally people in the Pacific are working on the implications of climate-induced displacement. The PCC has identified the need to work on a Pacific-wide framework to deal with necessary relocation which will be able to consider the economic, cultural social and spiritual impacts.

The PCC is also seeing the ecological impact that seabed/deep-sea mining is having on the Pacific. They are calling for a moratorium on seabed/deep sea mining due to it not being consistent with the Precautionary Approach and the concern of Pacific communities for free, prior and informed consent.<sup>3</sup>

## 2

### SELF-DETERMINATION

#### a. Political Self-Determination, Leadership and Social Accountability

Effective governance is critical to the future of the Pacific. It rests on three important principles – consultation, participation of all and the consent of the people. The future of the Pacific rests in the hands of the people of the Pacific and their democratically legitimate leaders. Fundamental to that effective governance is the ability of churches and other civil society actors to hold governments to account. It is also critical to foster systems and cultures of accountable leadership. In building on existing partnerships between Pacific and Australian church leaders (including First Nations church leaders), there will be a Pacific Church Leaders' Meeting in the second half of 2020 to build shared understanding and priorities. This commitment to self-determination and local leadership is consistent with the principle of localisation outlined in the Grand Bargain from the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Many of Micah's members are signatories to that Grand Bargain and are striving to implement its commitments. Churches and faith-based organisations are important local actors in the localisation agenda.

Australia's First Nations peoples have expressed their hopes and aspirations for a voice in the decision making affecting their lives, through the Statement from the Heart. Similarly, Pacific peoples continue to advocate for right to self-determination, particularly respecting the rights of indigenous peoples in the use of their land. In addition, the PCC continues to support the UN C24 process of decolonisation of Maohi Nui (French Polynesia). Further, it supports the UN processes for address human rights abuses in West Papua.<sup>4</sup> ▶



*Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) is a consortium of eight Australian based development and humanitarian church agencies that exist to build the resilience of communities, to strengthen the capacity of partners, and to enhance agencies' effectiveness in responding to disasters, especially in the Pacific.*

**Photo** CAN DO (Image via Australian High Commission Solomon Islands)

<sup>3</sup> Moratorium on deep sea mining, 2 October 2019, <https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/moratorium-on-deep-sea-mining>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/#>

## b. Economic Self-Determination and Empowerment

Sustainable development in the Pacific needs to acknowledge a holistic understanding of the wellbeing of the Pacific people. Fundamental to this development is recognising the impact of the ecological crisis on the lives of the people of the Pacific. Therefore, the churches of the Pacific have recognised the need to bring together the political, economic, social, spiritual and ecological strands of life – this is described as 'Reweaving the Ecological Mat'. As the Pacific responds to the COVID-19 crisis, this interconnectedness is a reminder that the pandemic not only impacts on the health of people, but all aspects of their life. Australia's support for the Pacific in responding to the pandemic will need to support Pacific governments to ensure the development gains are not put at risk or reversed by the pandemic.

Australia's support for economic empowerment of the Pacific whether through aid, trade, investment or migration, should not seek to pit economic outcomes against ecological outcomes, but rather recognise the inherent interdependence of people and planet. The wellbeing of all should be the primary determinant of development.

One important economic initiative of the Australian Government has been the Seasonal Worker Program. While the program has led to economic benefits for workers and their families and communities at home in the Pacific, there have been some significant challenges for migrant workers. There are a number of instances of the program having significant negative consequences for workers physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, the PCC recommends a practical and pastoral framework for supporting migrant workers and their families before, during and after their deployment. There have been pilot programs started that seek to address this but the time has come to invest in scaling these.

## c. Cultural Self-Determination

The Pacific is a region of diverse and rich cultures which, if allowed to flourish and grow, will enrich us all. As Micah has listened to both Pacific christian leaders and Australia's own First Nations christian leaders, it has come to understand the centrality of culture to life for both. Deeply connected to land, history and spirituality, culture grounds all of life for the indigenous peoples of both the Pacific and Australia. In the Christian community this is expressed through theology, which needs to be authentically explored and expressed by the Christian peoples of the Pacific. ▶



*Migrant workers, here on various temporary visas, also have emerging needs in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. At the moment they cannot travel home, and their capacity to send money back to their families, let alone provide for themselves, has also been reduced. The Anglican Dioceses of Melbourne and Wangaratta are providing enhanced pastoral care for Melanesian migrant workers. This project is being shaped in partnership with Pacific Church leaders and the Pacific Conference of Churches.*



*TEAR Australia is supporting Ola Fou in Solomon Islands (a local NGO) to implement a project. It is an intensive training course for up to 20 youths to equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to identify and respond to the needs and rights of their own communities. Each of the 20 students will in turn mentor 6 young people, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, to develop small-scale practical responses to address priority needs in communities. The desired outcome of the project is the changes that OFS hope to see in youths' attitudes, capacities, confidence, dignity – and the positive view of young people by adults and the elderly in the community.*

**Photo** Seasonal Worker (Image via Department of Agriculture) (top), Patricia Kennedy is Ola Fou's Training Leader in the Solomons (Image via TEAR) (bottom)

### 3 GENDER AND GENERATIONAL EQUITY, DIGNITY AND EMPOWERMENT FOR MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Christians believe all people are created in the image of God. This simple but profound belief has a direct impact on how we think about gender and generational equity, dignity and empowerment for marginalised communities. The PCC recognises identity issues for young Pacific Islanders and high rates of gender-based-violence and abuse in Christian homes and communities, as significant issues that need addressing. Australia has seen the negative consequences for women and young people of COVID-19 including increases domestic violence and increases in unemployment, particularly for women and young people.

Micah and the PCC affirm that violence, abuse and disempowering gender relations have no place in Christian community. Many of Micah's members are working directly with communities in the Pacific to tackle gender-based-violence, grounded in theological and scriptural interpretation.

It is critical in seeking to shift social norms, for example in gender relations or stigma against people with disabilities, to work through existing social structures and frameworks, such as churches, to achieve lasting change. Alongside this it is important to work with those directly impacted such as with womens, youth, child-focused or disability organisations.

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (PWSPD) has been a significant long-term investment by the Australian Government in supporting women in the Pacific to shape its future. As it comes to an end over the coming year, it will be important to work directly with women in the Pacific to shape any future investment. Micah supports a renewal of PWSPD in line with the priorities of women in the Pacific. Women church leaders in particular have a unique voice and role which could be drawn on in shaping the future of PWSPD.

The Pacific Church Partnerships Program has already worked with the PCC to identify Safe Church as a first initiative in supporting the safety of children in churches in the Pacific. The PCC would value further support in building the capacity of churches on issues of gender, disability and youth engagement.



*The PCC released statements to all Member Churches as Pacific countries called for State of Emergency restrictions and lockdowns in response to COVID-19. These letters called on Pacific Churches and Christians to look past "God's punishment and blame" as the causes of COVID-19 and to see adhering to Government restrictions and health directions as faithful actions of Christian discipleship and care and protection of neighbours. The PCC also addressed the increased experience of domestic violence and violence against women and girls as a result of limited movement, isolation and stress in the home from biblical theological foundations. UnitingWorld worked through their relationship with the PCC to link these letters to Pacific biblical resources and made these available widely to Pacific Church leaders to support their leadership during COVID-19 through a range of Australia aid funded mechanisms. Through the Pacific churches, these messages have reached widely into Pacific communities and homes through national radios, TV, congregational preaching and instead communication avenues.*

**Photo** Women from Naviyago Village in Fiji learn how to build and cultivate garden beds (DFAT Image)

# Approach to Partnership, Churches and Faith Based Organisations

As Micah has considered the future of Australia's relationship with the Pacific, it believes that it is as important how Australia pursues its partnership as what the partnership focuses on.

It believes these principles have general applicability to the relationship, however they are particularly relevant to how the Australian government pursues its partnership with Pacific churches. Micah welcomes the ongoing commitment of the Government to the Pacific Church Partnership Program, and believes these principles should shape the ongoing development of that partnership. Micah also seeks to affirm again at this point, its readiness and willingness to be of assistance in helping to form and nurture this partnership in close relationship with the PCC.



**Photo** Frances Namoumou from the PCC addressing Australian Christians during Micah's Voices for Justice 2019 (Micah Australia Image)

## FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

### 1 Begin with a partnership approach

Building relationships in the Pacific culture is foundational, so too in the church. Therefore, for any program or activity to be successful, it needs to be founded on a strong partnership. Too often policy makers commence with seeking a programmatic response to an identified need or problem, without putting the foundational work into listening carefully to one another to build a partnership of mutual respect and trust. Micah recommends policy makers begin with a partnership approach, and only after this is firmly established, should programmatic response arise out of that partnership.

### 2 Build a sustainable partnership

Complementary to the first principle is building a sustainable partnership, which can be resilient and withstand future shocks. The Australian and Pacific churches have forged such partnerships and believe this provides a valuable platform for policy makers in seeking to build similar partnerships. ▶

### 3 Be guided by self-determination and local leadership

Pacific people have a strong vision for their own future which should be the guiding light for Australia's partnership with the Pacific. It is grounded in the values and priorities of the Pacific. This is a vision which prioritises a future of self-determination rather than swapping to a different regional power. It is also critical that Australia recognises not only the role of government leaders but also the leaders of other critical institutions in the Pacific such as churches, and seeks to work with those institutions.

### 4 Draw on the wisdom of indigenous peoples

The people of the Pacific have an ancient wisdom and knowledge that stretches back thousands of years. Those who are recent arrivals to this region have a responsibility to listen to and take heed of that wisdom. This also underlines the central role of Australia's First Nations people in Australia's partnership with the Pacific. They should be given a seat at the table when engaging with and building partnerships with the Pacific.

### 5 Built on strengths

Just as the Pacific see the ocean as a water that connects rather than divides, so too does Australia need to look at the strengths of the Pacific, rather than simply the deficits. While many development actors have been readily able to highlight the difficulties of working in the Pacific, this principle invites those actors to explore what unrecognised strengths they can build upon.

### 6 Create relationships of reciprocity

It has become common to talk about moving away from 'donor' and 'recipient' models of partnership. However, for this to have true meaning, it requires to grow true relationships of reciprocity. The recent example of receiving donations and defence personnel from the Pacific during the bushfire season is a good example of the importance of reciprocity of relationship. This sort of sharing should be built into all partnerships with the Pacific. ▶



*In the evaluation following Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu it was found, "The Vanuatu Council of Churches has a strong relationship with the [National Disaster Management Office] and assumed responsibility for coordinating church agency response operations as well as having a strong operational focus on protection and disability." <sup>2</sup>*

**Photo** DFAT Staff from the High Commission greet the arrival of an Australian funded COVID-19 support package (DFAT Image)

<sup>2</sup> Humanitarian Assistance in the Pacific: An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Australia's Response to Cyclone Pam, February 2017, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/cyclone-pam-evaluation.pdf>.

## 7 Based on a holistic view of life

As is found in the work of the churches in 'reweaving the ecological mat', policy makers in Australia need to understand that the Pacific world-view takes a holistic view of life, which does not readily separate economic, cultural, social, spiritual and ecological wellbeing. Therefore, in considering policy responses, typical models which divide these aspects of life do not necessarily translate well. Pacific academics, economists, theologians, social thinkers and policy makers are reimagining the reality of this, with development frameworks and indicators being developed. This work should be embraced by Australia's policy makers as they seek to partner with the Pacific.

## 8 Embracing opportunities for the future

Across the development landscape there is growth in new modalities and actors. This is equally true in the Pacific as elsewhere. While traditional institutions such as governments and churches have a critical foundational role to play, if they can be connected with emerging private sector actors, social enterprises that embody these partnership principles can deliver shared benefits for all. There is also the opportunity to harness the connection of the significant Pacific diaspora in Australia.

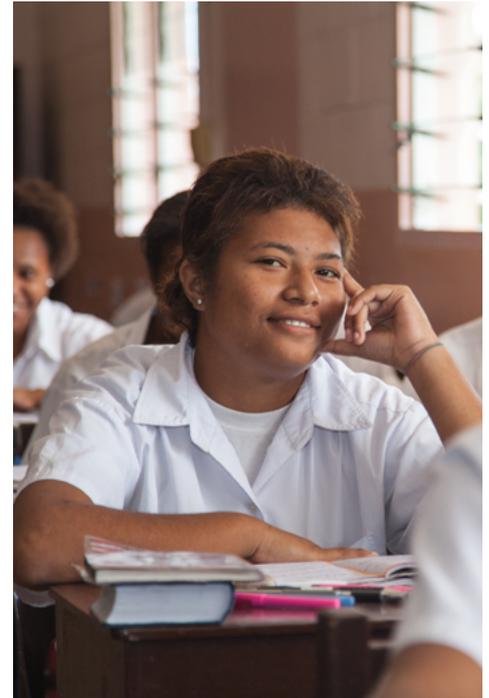


Photo Students from Caritas Technical Secondary School, East Boroko, PNG (DFAT Image)

In the review of the international development policy earlier in 2020, Micah called for the establishment of a Faith and Development Advisory Group and the development of Partnership Principles for Faith and Development. Micah believes that while these are important priorities for the whole of Australia's International Development Program, there is merit in considering piloting such a mechanism with the Pacific.

Micah looks forward to the opportunity to work with the PCC and DFAT to further deepen Australia's partnership with the Pacific. It thanks the committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry and would welcome the opportunity to share further with the committee if it wishes.



**micah**



Photo Students from Caritas Technical Secondary School, East Boroko, PNG (DFAT Image)



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