

Vanuatu Declaration

Representatives of Pacific Islands governments, courts, non-government organisations, and other parties from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu meeting in Port Vila on 5 September 2023 to discuss the future of the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute (PaCLII) and maintaining and enhancing the sustainability of free access to law in the Pacific region, communicate the following outcomes of their discussions:

Recognising that free access to law is essential for the rule of law and access to justice, the representatives acknowledge PaCLII's critical role in the provision of access to Pacific law, and recognise that PaCLII is a fundamental part of the legal fabric of the Pacific region.

The meeting notes that:

1. PaCLII plays an essential role in the region for access to legal information;
2. PaCLII provides critical infrastructure to facilitate provision of national legal materials as well as enabling the development of a robust regional Pacific jurisprudence;
3. Free access to legal materials is not free to produce, and that in order for PaCLII to continue to perform its vital function, it is necessary that core funding be provided; and
4. In order to fulfil its role, PaCLII needs to become a sustainable organisation supported by appropriate governance.

The meeting expresses its gratitude to the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the Vanuatu government for their support of PaCLII. The meeting is also grateful to the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for providing the Critical Gap Funding to enable PaCLII to continue for twelve months and to allow this Summit to have taken place. The meeting strongly encourages DFAT to provide multi-year core funding to enable PaCLII to continue while an effective longer-term sustainability plan is developed.

The meeting urges all countries, chief justices, law societies and legal practitioners to support PaCLII. It encourages all jurisdictions within the region to give effect to their unanimous support for the maintenance and further development of PaCLII by:

1. Formally supporting the funding application to DFAT for core funding and approaches to other possible funding sources to achieve sustainability; and
2. Raising with governments and relevant regional organisations – including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Judicial Council, the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON) and the South Pacific Lawyers' Association (SPLA) – the significance of PaCLII as a cornerstone of regional efforts in the law and justice sector.

The meeting also encourages all jurisdictions to continue and enhance the local coordination mechanisms between relevant institutions such as government law offices, Parliament and the courts, and establishing systems for the timely provision, to the extent possible, of their legislation, case law and other relevant legal materials to PaCLII in an appropriate electronic format.