PACNEWS

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PAC - CSW: PACNEWS PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Pacific calls for action on gender equality at UN Women's Commission

NEW YORK, 11 MARCH 2026 (PACNEWS) --- Pacific Islands Forum members have called for stronger action to advance gender equality and protect women and girls during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York.

Delivering a statement on behalf of Pacific members at the 70th session of the global meeting, Cathy Nori Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs from Solomon Island said the region remains committed to advancing gender equality and social inclusion.

Nori said the theme of CSW70 is central to the Pacific's development priorities.

"The CSW70 theme is integral to realizing gender equality and social inclusion, a commitment our Forum Leaders continue to reaffirm as central to the region's collective progress in pursuing a resilient, inclusive and peaceful Pacific."

She said Pacific leaders endorsed the mainstreaming of gender equality across regional priorities at their 2025 meeting.

"At their 54th Meeting in 2025, Forum Leaders endorsed the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion in all key regional policy priorities across all areas."

Nori said the region's work is guided by key regional frameworks including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

"This is underpinned by the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights."

Nori said ensuring justice for women and girls remains fundamental.

"Access to justice for women and girls is fundamental to gender equality and empowerment."

She said Pacific governments have strengthened legal protections and improved access to justice.

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"Across the Pacific Islands region, governments have taken important steps to strengthen legal protections for women and girls and improve access to justice, through participatory legislative, policy and practice reforms."

However, she noted that unique regional challenges require tailored approaches.

"For us, access to justice is determined by unique structural realities, including geographic isolation, dispersed populations, limited legal services, linguistic and cultural diversity, and the interaction between formal and customary justice systems further necessitate approaches that are context specific, culturally grounded and respectful of customs."

She said gender-responsive policies are especially important for women and girls in remote communities.

"This is why gender transformative and socially inclusive approaches are essential especially for women and girls in rural, remote and maritime areas."

Nori also highlighted a new initiative in Solomon Islands.

"It is within this context that my country Solomon Islands is embarking on piloting Gender Responsive Budgeting as a transformative approach and strategy to analysing and reorienting budgetary allocations and policies that is responsive to the needs of our people particularly of those most vulnerable."

Nori said gender-based violence remains a major challenge across the region.

"Gender Based Violence prevalence rate remains high in our region. We are determined to change this status quo."

She said Pacific governments are strengthening survivor support services and justice systems.

"We recognise the rights-based response, includes support to victims. As a region we continue to strengthen survivor-centred services, drawing on lessons learned from experiences of response and referral systems such as in the Solomon Islands and Kiribati."

She said governments are also expanding specialised police and judicial units.

"As well as establishing specialized police and judicial units to address gender-based violence and expanded legal aid and community-based paralegal initiatives."

Nori said the region is taking a long-term approach to prevention.

"As a region, we are committed to taking a whole-of-life approach to preventing gender-based violence including investment in early childhood development, actively engaging men and boys as partners and agents of meaningful change and recognizing the vital role of families and communities."

Nori said climate change continues to threaten Pacific communities.

"Pacific Islands Forum Members recognise the threats of adverse impacts of Climate change as the defining issue that imperils the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of our people and communities."

She said the impacts are compounded by other social and health challenges.

"This reality is further compounded by multiple and intersecting social and health issues including gender-based violence, and social impacts of the illicit drug trade."

Nori said women play a vital role in peacebuilding and resilience across the Pacific.

"The Pacific also places importance on the critical role of women and girls in all their diversity in peacebuilding, resilience, and creating safe communities."

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She added that women's leadership is increasingly recognised in regional peace and security efforts. "Because of this, women's leadership in peacebuilding, mediation, and conflict prevention is increasingly embedded in Pacific peace and security processes."

Nori stressed the need for more funding to address the region's challenges.

"We underscore the need for adequate financing to address these multifaceted issues."

She highlighted the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) as a key regional effort.

"The Pacific Resilience Facility is our home-grown initiative, to ensure equitable access to climate finance for Pacific people, including women, children, persons with disabilities and youth."

Nori also noted progress in Pacific engagement with international human rights bodies.

"In 2025, the Pacific convened the first ever Pacific Technical Cooperation Session of the CEDAW Committee."

However, she said Pacific representation in UN treaty bodies remains limited.

"Currently, amongst the 172 treaty body experts, there are no Pacific Islanders."

Despite the challenges, Nori said the Pacific remains united.

"Despite the complex and multidimensional challenges, we are confronted with, the Pacific continues to draw on our collective strength, solidarity, and shared values."

She urged stronger action through the UN platform.

"For 70 years this platform has fostered dialogue, partnership and advanced commitments, however, more remains to be done. We must shift from dialogue to action – action that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of women and girls in all their diversity," said Nori.... PACNEWS

PAC - DIPLOMACY: PMN PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

French Polynesia urges Pacific to unite amid rising global tensions

PAPE'ETE, 11 MARCH 2026 (PMN) --- French Polynesia's President Moetai Brotherson says growing global instability is a reminder that Pacific nations must strengthen cooperation within the region.

Speaking to *PMN News* in an exclusive interview, Brotherson said the Pacific must focus on deeper partnerships with neighbours such as New Zealand to build resilience against external shocks.

"When we see the turmoil in the world, it's a reminder to us, as all the Pacific Island nations, that our first and foremost vicinity is our region," Brotherson says.

"We have to increase cooperation between ourselves to make us more resilient to outside crises."

Brotherson has held the presidency since 2023 and previously represented French Polynesia's third constituency in the French National Assembly from 2017.

He made the comments following discussions with New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters during Peters' visit to French Polynesia.

Peters described the meeting as a unique opportunity to strengthen ties between Pacific neighbours. "We had a very good, quite unique discussion," he says.

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“Where in the world would you sit down like that, with a President, and have a friendly New Zealand-type discussion, or Pacific-type discussion? It’s pretty special.”

Peters says New Zealand must place greater importance on its relationships in the region.

“We underrate the value of this. Because when we talk about the Pacific, it’s not our backyard like we used to say decades ago,” he says. “It’s our front yard. And the sooner we understand that the better.”

Brotherson says the historical, cultural, and genealogical ties between the two nations provide a foundation for closer cooperation.

He said collaboration could cover areas such as climate adaptation, maritime and air connectivity, digital infrastructure, and economic development.

“We have many areas of cooperation that needed to be discussed, and these were the topics that were addressed during our meeting,” he said.

The French Polynesian leader also raised concerns about the growing geopolitical competition in the Pacific, particularly between the United States and China.

“We don't want to align with anyone. I mean, either China or the U.S,” he said. “We want to be able to discuss with everyone and to have relationships, be it cultural or economic relationships with everyone.”

The Pacific has become an increasingly contested strategic region in recent years, with China expanding its economic and infrastructure partnerships with several island nations.

The United States and its allies have also increased diplomatic engagement, development funding, and security cooperation.

Climate change remains another major concern, particularly for the low-lying atolls of the Tuamotu archipelago - the world's largest chain of coral atolls, located in French Polynesia northeast of Tahiti.

The French territory consists of 118 volcanic islands and coral atolls across five archipelagos in the South Pacific. Comprising 78 low-lying atolls (like Rangiroa and Fakarava) spread over 1.2 million square miles, this destination is renowned for its remote, pristine lagoons, world-class scuba diving, and black pearl farming

“They are facing the same issues as Tuvalu or other Pacific island nations that are at the forefront of climate change and the sea level rise,” Brotherson said.

“What we are seeing currently is a salination of the water lentils on those atolls, rendering life very hard. It's not impossible.

“So, water management is going to be a real issue in the upcoming years related to climate change, but you also have the coastal erosion that we have to tackle.”

For communities on these low-lying atolls, the impacts of climate change are already being felt through declining freshwater supplies, erosion, and pressure on traditional food sources.

Brotherson also reiterated his support for greater political sovereignty for French Polynesia. He said economic development and resilience must come first.

French Polynesia enjoys a high degree of autonomy under France, which retains control over defence, currency, and aspects of foreign policy.

Brotherson says the pathway toward greater sovereignty must be gradual and carefully managed.

He adds that economic resilience will be key before any move toward full independence and says the territory could achieve political sovereignty within the next 10 to 15 years.

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"It's all about interdependencies, that's how we're going to build independence. When it comes to strengthening our economy, you know, we still have a lot of work to do on food security, on energy transition, and then we'll be able to be more confident as a nation," said Brotherson.... PACNEWS

COOKS - DIPLOMACY: COOK ISLANDS NEWS PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Cook Islands PM Mark Brown set for first major New Zealand visit since diplomatic row

RAROTONGA, 11 MARCH 2026 (COOK ISLANDS NEWS) --- Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown will travel to New Zealand next week for a series of engagements - his first major visit since the diplomatic fallout between the two nations over the Cook Islands-China agreements.

According to a statement from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the visit includes direct engagement with diaspora groups in Auckland, and a "keynote address in Wellington".

The programme also includes engagement with diplomatic partners, academia and the private sector to "share the Cook Islands' forward direction and opportunities for continued collaboration".

Cook Islands News asked whether government-level engagement with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and/or Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters would be part of the visit.

"The Cook Islands has consistently sought constructive engagement with New Zealand at all levels. Officials remain in regular contact, and we welcome opportunities for dialogue. As with all partners, discussions often take place privately," the Office of the PM said.

"We will not comment on programme details beyond what has been announced"

The visit comes amid ongoing official-level engagement with New Zealand to resolve an impasse between the two governments, which led Wellington to pause approximately $30 million (US$17.78 million) in grants to the Cook Islands.

Diplomatic tensions began brewing in late 2024 and became public after the Cook Islands signed a comprehensive strategic partnership and other agreements with China in February last year.

New Zealand cited a lack of consultation regarding the deals with China and subsequently suspended NZ$29.8m (US$17.66 million) in funding.

According to the statement, Brown will travel to New Zealand for a programme of engagements focused on strengthening ties with our people and "reinforcing the enduring relationship between the Cook Islands and Aotearoa New Zealand".

The visit comes as the Cook Islands marks 60 years of self-governance and continues to strengthen its national direction at home and abroad, it said.

"This visit is centred on one clear priority: reconnecting with our people," Brown said. "Over the past sixty years, our nation has grown well beyond our shores. Today, more than 90,000 people of Cook Islands heritage live in New Zealand. They are raising families, building businesses, serving in frontline roles, leading in sport, education, health and the arts. They contribute every day to the communities they are part of, while remaining deeply connected to their homeland"

The statement noted that the Cook Islands community in New Zealand is young, growing and increasingly multi-generational, and it reflects a confident Pacific identity - one grounded in culture and active in both civic and economic life.

"When Cook Islanders pursue opportunity abroad, they do not leave the nation behind. They extend it," Brown said.

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"This visit is about listening to our people, sharing our national direction, and strengthening the ties that bind Cook Islands community to home.

"It also allows us an invaluable opportunity to connect with our diplomatic partners resident in New Zealand as well as academic and private sector interests to provide insight into the Cook Islands forward development priorities and opportunities for continued collaboration."

In Wellington, the Prime Minister will deliver a keynote address reflecting on 60 years of self-governance and outlining the next chapter of national development.

"The address will focus on identity, economic resilience, and the role of our global Cook Islands community in shaping the future."

In Auckland, the programme will prioritise direct engagement with Cook Islands community groups and diaspora representatives. These sessions will provide an opportunity to share updates on national priorities and to hear directly from Cook Islanders living abroad.

"This visit is about walking forward together, strengthening the connection between our homeland and our communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. The next chapter of the Cook Islands story will be written by all of us. *Kua kite au i toku turanga, e Avaiki toku*," Brown said.

Meanwhile, late last month, a spokesperson for Minister Peters said discussions with the Cook Islands Government are continuing.

In response to questions *Cook Islands News*, the spokesperson reaffirmed New Zealand's long-stated position on its relationship with the Cook Islands, describing it as a priority for the Government.

"The New Zealand government, including Minister Peters, has repeatedly made clear over the past two years how important we consider the special constitutional relationship with the Cook Islands," the spokesperson said.... PACNEWS

FIJI - IRAN CRISIS/DIPLOMACY: PACNEWS PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Fiji urges citizens to avoid Middle East travel amid security escalation

SUVA, 11 MARCH 2026 (PACNEWS) --- The Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade has advised Fijian nationals to avoid travelling to the Middle East following the recent escalation of hostilities in the region.

In a travel advisory issued Tuesday, the ministry said Fijians should closely follow developments as tensions rise.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade advises Fijian nationals to closely monitor developments in the Middle East following the recent escalation of hostilities in the region."

"Fijians are strongly advised to avoid all travel to, or transit through, the Middle East region at this time."

The advisory includes travel to or transit through Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, *Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Yemen, Oman, and Cyprus.

Fijian nationals currently in the region have been urged to leave if it is safe to do so.

"Fijian nationals who are currently visiting or travelling in the region are advised to leave as soon as it is safe to do so, including by using available commercial flight services as they gradually resume in some countries."

Travellers are encouraged to confirm their flight status before heading to airports.

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"Travellers should contact their airline or travel provider to confirm the status of flights before departing for the airport."

The ministry said alternative travel routes should be considered if direct flights are unavailable.

"Where the most direct route is unavailable, travellers are encouraged to consider alternative travel routes where possible."

Fijians in the region have also been asked to register with Fiji diplomatic missions.

"Fijian nationals currently in the region are also encouraged to register with the Fiji Embassy in Abu Dhabi or the Fiji Embassy in Jerusalem to ensure they can be contacted and assisted if necessary."

Those in areas where travel is not possible have been told to remain in safe locations.

"If you are in a location where airspace remains closed or where the security situation makes it unsafe to travel, you are advised to shelter in place and follow the instructions of local authorities at all times."

The ministry said it is continuing to monitor the situation and coordinate support for Fijian nationals.

"The Ministry's joint emergency Operations Centre continues to closely monitor developments and is exploring all available options to support Fijian nationals who may be affected by the situation."

"The Ministry will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide updates as necessary, said the travel advisory.... PACNEWS

PAC - HEALTH: TVNZ PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Jacinda Ardern fund targets cervical cancer in Pacific

AUCKLAND, 11 MARCH 2026 (TVNZ) --- A Jacinda Ardern-backed fund will spend millions in the Pacific bolstering programmes to diagnose and treat cervical cancer.

The cancer, which was largely preventable, was a leading cause of cancer death among Pacific women.

Incidence rates were up to nine times higher than in Australia and New Zealand in parts of the blue continent, according to the University of Auckland.

The former New Zealand prime minister was using NZ$5.1 million (US$3 million) of funding originally granted in 2024 by Melinda French Gates' Pivotal foundation towards the cause.

The university's Centre for Pacific and Global Health Professor Collin Tukuitonga, said the funding would be a "gamechanger" for collaboration.

"Cervical cancer is preventable, yet too many Pacific women continue to die from it," he said.

"This investment allows Pacific countries to work together, sharing expertise, strengthening systems and supporting women leaders, to achieve elimination."

The effort aligns with World Health Organisation goals to see 90 percent of girls receiving the HPV vaccine, 70 percent of women screened during middle age, and 90 percent of cancers treated.

Each year, around 600 New Zealanders are diagnosed with cancer linked to Human Papillomavirus, including cervical and throat cancer.

At those levels — which WHO wants to reach by 2030 — elimination of the cancer becomes possible.

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Dame Jacinda said she wanted to ensure Pacific island women were not missing out on basic treatments available in developed nations.

"This funding is simply about supporting them to save lives with solutions that should be available to everyone," she said.

The University of Auckland is the lead agency for the programme, which will begin in the New Zealand Realm nations of Cook Islands and Niue and collaborate with other regional programmes.

Dame Jacinda has spent the previous three years based in the U.S and UK and is currently calling Australia home.

The 45-year-old was recently spotted house hunting in Sydney's northern beach suburbs.

Since leaving politics in 2023, Dame Jacinda has joined a number of boards and taken on various advocacy roles.

She announced a fresh role this week, joining the global advisory council of LawZero, a non-profit which aims to eliminate dangerous autonomous behaviours in AI.... PACNEWS

FIJI - DRUGS FIGHT: FIJI SUN PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

War on drugs must go beyond punishment, Fiji Justice Minister says

SUVA, 11 MARCH 2026 (FIJI SUN) --- Fiji's fight against drugs must go beyond punishment and include balanced and evidence-based strategies, Acting Attorney-General Siromi Turaga told Parliament.

Turaga said enforcement alone would not solve the growing drug crisis.

"While strong enforcement remains essential, punishment alone cannot be our only strategy."

He said international discussions had highlighted the need for broader approaches.

"Experiences from other jurisdictions demonstrate that rigid approaches alone do not always produce just or effective outcomes."

Turaga said the country was facing a wider social crisis linked to drugs.

"Our response must therefore address the full reality of the crisis. The war we face is not simply a war on offenders. It is a war against drugs, addiction, exploitation and the criminal networks that profit from our vulnerabilities."

He said drug abuse was also contributing to other national challenges.

"Drugs are also fuelling wider public health challenges, including the rise in HIV infections."

He said responses such as rehabilitation and harm-reduction initiatives could help reduce the spread of disease while supporting recovery.

"Innovative and pragmatic responses, including harm-reduction initiatives and rehabilitation programs, can play an important role in reducing the spread of disease while creating pathways for treatment, counselling and reintegration into society," said Turaga.... PACNEWS

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Climate wins eyed in diesel tax credit demise

SYDNEY, 11 MARCH 2026 (AAP) --- Winding back the Australian federal fuel tax credit scheme has attracted support from the independent body advising on climate change in the most populous state.

NSW Net Zero Commissioner Katerina Kimmorley says electrification of the state's mining sector is a priority held back by exemptions on diesel tax.

Kimmorley identified reforms to the fuel tax credit for the mining industry – agriculture excluded – as her top opportunity to underpin faster decarbonisation.

"We need to see our mining sector electrified," she said at the Climate Innovation & Investment Summit in Sydney.

It would take more than repealing the fuel tax credit to drive mining sector decarbonisation, she said, but winding them back would improve the business case for electric trucks and other green alternatives.

NSW is not on track to meet its carbon neutrality goals, according to the state's independent net zero commission.

All sectors are trailing behind, Kimmorley said, including industry, energy and transport.

Federal fuel tax credits have come under renewed scrutiny as the Commonwealth pursues budget savings and faster emissions cuts in line with its climate targets.

Costing roughly $11 billion (US$7.7 billion) a year and no longer tied to the costs of maintaining roads, critics argue it is too big a fiscal burden and is keeping users hooked on a fuel that's emissions-intensive and vulnerable to supply chain shocks, as exposed by the Middle East conflict.

Under a model put forward by Climate Energy Finance, diesel tax exemptions could be capped at $50 million (US$35.66 million) but businesses could still claim rebates beyond the cap if they reinvested the funds into electrification.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Labor Environmental Action Network have signalled support for a less-generous scheme, as has Andrew Forrest's mining company Fortescue.

The iron ore miner is presently a beneficiary of the credits but has set itself a target to eliminate fossil fuels from its operations by 2030, a goal the company claims is on track.

Federal Resources Minister Madeleine King has said the government is not considering changes to the fuel credits in the 2026 budget and defended its use by farmers, miners and tourism operators not using public roads.... PACNEWS

PAC - DEFENCE: USNI NEWS PACNEWS 1: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Marines, soldiers practice anti-ship missile deployments in Hawaii

HONOLULU, 11 MARCH 2026 (USNI NEWS) --- U.S Marines and soldiers rehearsed inserting mobile missile launchers capable of long-range precision strike and anti-shipping missions across the Hawaiian Islands last month ahead of Western Pacific deployments.

The drills come as both branches hone their abilities to deploy and disperse missile units that could help blunt Chinese forces in a variety of regional contingencies, including an invasion of Taiwan.

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In recent years, Washington has increasingly viewed the archipelagos of its regional partners as key terrain crucial to denying Beijing access beyond the first island chain. The newest Marine Corps and Army units stood up under U.S Indo-Pacific Command are designed around these new missile systems.

Last month, the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR) conducted its combat readiness evaluation in Hawaii, according to a news release from the service. The trials were carried out to certify the formation's capacity to operationally deploy to the Indo-Pacific.

A release from the regiment highlighted the unit littoral combat team's (LCT) ability to insert Navy/Marine Corps Expeditionary Ship Interdiction Systems – unmanned launchers that field a pair of low-observable naval strike missiles (NSM) – and sustain those systems in a simulated contested environment.

"By far the most impressive aspect of 3rd LCT's performance was their insertion of a naval surface fires task element through contested battlespace into [the] Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai, receiving a near-simultaneous resupply of NSM via littoral surface connector, executing multiple fire missions against threat groups, and then basically disappearing into the operating environment," Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Anderson, a future operations planning officer with 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment and evaluation exercise director, said in the release covering last month's activity.

With missiles capable of striking targets out to 115 nautical miles, the Marine Corps considers the unmanned mobile launchers a key part of their Force Design plans to deny maritime areas to China's naval forces. The service has procured narco-submarine type drones with specifications to ferry missile reloads to forward-based MLRs in contested environments. Regiments will also disperse and deploy these launchers on the future McClung-class landing ship mediums (LSM).

"The employment of the NMESIS during the [combat readiness evaluation] validates the way 3rd LCT views its role in denying key maritime terrain to a potential adversary by demonstrating that we can conduct distributed operations across multiple islands with little oversight from higher," 2nd Lt. Joseph Young, a platoon commander with 3rd LCT, said in the release.

Marine Corps NMESIS batteries are deployed with 18 systems each, which are then organized across two platoons operating three sections of three launchers. The 3rd MLR received their first anti-ship launchers in late 2024.

High mobility rocket artillery systems (HIMARS) – a ubiquitous launcher capable of fielding a variety of munitions including upcoming long-range anti-ship missiles – rolled off the Army's new watercraft in Hawaii last month during a demonstration that the service said validated its capability to deploy precision fires from the sea.

Hawaii and West Coast-based Army units have traded tracked vehicles for the latest in drones, squad mobility vehicles, specialized aviation complements and missile launchers organic to the division in a shift to better operate in the archipelagos of the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

The Army's efforts to contribute to the joint force in the region also include multi-domain task forces – specialised missile, sensing, cyber and electronic warfare formations – that have deployed new intermediate and hypersonic systems.

The 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii deployed its new HIMARS launchers from USAV SSG Elroy F. Wells (MSVL-01) to demonstrate fielding long-range precision fires via maritime means. The trial was under the Lightning Surge exercise and tested how a next-generation command and control system could increase the efficiency of the division's long-range artillery and missile units.

With its modularity and mobility in difficult environments, the demand for HIMARS has increased as a maritime strike system by the joint force and countries across the Indo-Pacific. American forces have fielded the system at key areas across the Philippines and Japan in coastal defence drills. Australia and Taiwan have also procured the system amid their respective arms build-ups.

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In the coming years, HIMARS will be reinforced with the new Precision Strike Missile. A successor to the Cold War-era Army Tactical Missile System, the new ballistic missiles are set to come in increments that support anti-ship capabilities. The service's increment four plans to procure a variant capable of striking maritime targets out to 1,000 kilometres, potentially turning any HIMARS equipped with the system into a significant threat to adversary warships.

Early operational capability Precision Strike Missiles were in the process of being delivered to the Army last year. The system debuted in combat last week during the opening days of Operation Epic Fury against Iranian targets across the Middle East. U.S. Central Command described the new missiles as "an unrivalled deep strike capability.... PACNEWS

PACNEWS BIZ

FIJI - BANK: FIJI TIMES PACNEWS BIZ: Wed 11 Mar 2026

Fiji Parliament approves $220m Government guarantee for FDB borrowing

SUVA, 11 MARCH 2026 (FIJI TIMES) --- The Fiji Parliament has approved a motion allowing the Government to guarantee borrowings by the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) for the next 12 months.

Under the motion passed yesterday, the Government will guarantee FDB borrowings through the issuance of short and long-term bonds, promissory notes, term deposits, Reserve Bank of Fiji financing facilities and other short-term borrowings for the period 01 March 2026 to 28 February 2027.

The motion also increases the Government guarantee limit for FDB borrowings from $190 million to $220 million (US$110 million), an increase of $30 million (US$15 million) for the same period.

Speaking during the debate, Opposition Leader Inia Seruiratu said the main challenge facing FDB remains the high cost of funds compared to commercial banks.

Seruiratu said the bank's lending rate averages around 6 percent, while it borrows funds at around four to five percent, leaving it with a very thin margin.

"The cost of funding is still high when it comes to FDB. The average lending rate is around six percent, and the margin is thin, yet they continue to strive to finance development," he said.

He suggested that one possible solution would be to allow FDB to accept savings deposits, similar to commercial banks.

Seruiratu noted that the proposal had been discussed previously between FDB and the Reserve Bank of Fiji in 2024.

"If FDB is allowed to accept savings deposits at rates between 0.05 percent and 1.5 percent, it would reduce the cost of funds and allow the bank to lend more competitively," he said.

He added that such a move would help the bank finance more development projects and potentially offer lower interest rates to its customers, particularly in high-risk sectors.

Seruiratu said any change would require the support of the Reserve Bank.... PACNEWS

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Airlines flag higher ticket prices as fuel costs take toll

SYDNEY, 11 MARCH 2026 (REUTERS) --- Australia's Qantas Airways and Air New Zealand said on Tuesday they are hiking fares due to the Middle East conflict, underscoring how global airlines are struggling to cope with the sudden and soaring costs of fuel.

Jet fuel prices, which were around US$85 to US$90 per barrel prior to the conflict, have increased sharply to between US$150 and US$200 per barrel in recent days, New Zealand's flag carrier said as it suspended its financial outlook for 2026 due to uncertainty over the conflict.

The U.S-Israeli war on Iran has sent oil prices surging, upending global travel, pushing airline tickets on some routes sky-high, sparking fears of a deep travel slump and the potential for the widespread grounding of planes.

Highlighting the chaos around Middle Eastern airspace, planes arriving into Dubai were briefly placed in a holding pattern on Tuesday morning due to a potential missile attack, flight tracking service Flightradar24 said on X. The planes eventually landed.

Qantas said that in addition to increasing international fares, it was exploring options to redeploy capacity to Europe as airlines and passengers seek to evade disruptions in the Middle East, where drone and missile fire have curtailed flights.

The Australian airline said its flights to Europe are more than 90 percent full in March, compared to the usual 75 percent at this time of year.

Airfares have soared on Asia-Europe routes due to airspace closures and capacity constraints, and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways said on Tuesday it was adding extra flights to London and Zurich in March.

Air New Zealand said it had raised one-way economy fares by NZ$10 (US$6) on domestic routes, NZ$20 (US$11.86) on short-haul international services and NZ$90 (US$53.40) on long-haul flights, with further price, network and schedule changes possible if jet fuel costs remain elevated.

Hong Kong Airlines said on its website it would raise its fuel surcharges by up to 35.2 percent from Thursday, with the sharpest increase on flights between Hong Kong and the Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal where charges will rise to HK$384 (US$49) from HK$284(US$36).

Cathay Pacific said it reviewed its fuel surcharges on a monthly basis. It kept them flat last month at US$72.90 each way on flights between Hong Kong and Europe and North America before the conflict began.

Vietnam Airlines has asked local authorities to remove an environmental tax on jet fuel to help it maintain operations. The Southeast Asian nation's government said Vietnamese airlines' operating costs have risen 60 percent to 70 percent due to the rise in jet fuel prices and fuel suppliers were facing difficulties in meeting airline demand.

In a move that lifted some airline stocks, U.S President Donald Trump said on Monday the war could be over soon, sending oil prices down to around US$90 a barrel on Tuesday from a high of US$119 on Monday.

In Asia, airline shares showed signs of stabilising, with Qantas up 0.5 percent, Korean Air Lines rising nearly 9 percent and Cathay Pacific up more than 4 percent. All had recorded sharp drops on Monday.

Fuel is the second-largest expense for air carriers after labour, typically accounting for a fifth to a quarter of operating expenses. Some major Asian and European airlines have oil hedging in place, but U.S airlines largely stopped the practice over the last two decades.

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High fuel prices could have severe implications for the global travel industry, with airlines already navigating tight airspace as pilots reroute to avoid the Middle East conflict and capacity on popular routes fills up.

Combined, Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad normally fly about one-third of the passengers from Europe to Asia and more than half of all passengers from Europe to Australia, New Zealand and nearby Pacific Islands, according to Cirium.

South Korea's HanaTour Service said it has been cancelling group tours that include flights to the Middle East, and it is waiving cancellation fees for affected customers. All Middle East-related tours for March will be suspended, it added.

In Thailand, the Ministry of Tourism forecast that if the conflict drags on for more than eight weeks, the country will lose a total of 595,974 tourists and 40.9 billion baht (US$1.29 billion) in tourism revenue.... PACNEWS

PACNEWS *In Focus*

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Pacific nations combine infrastructure, parametric insurance and digital systems

UN analysis highlights how small states are integrating adaptation, finance and technology to manage rising climate risk

By Roxanne Libatique

SUVA, 11 MARCH 2026 (BUSINESS INSURANCE) --- Pacific Island countries are increasingly adopting integrated climate-risk strategies that combine physical adaptation projects, parametric insurance and digital social-protection systems, according to analysis from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Centre.

The approach focuses on linking coastal protection, land reclamation, risk transfer and social protection delivery into a coordinated portfolio model, rather than treating them as isolated climate-response measures. Under the framework, different funding sources and financial instruments are pre-arranged and tied to climate events of varying severity, allowing governments to respond more quickly to disasters and manage fiscal pressure.

The findings were detailed in the report Resilient by Design: Pacific Solutions for an Integrated Climate Future, which examines how climate-vulnerable countries across the region are developing structured risk-financing strategies.

Climate vulnerability far exceeds emissions

Pacific Island states contribute less than 0.03 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet they account for around one sixth of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, according to rankings from the Notre-Dame Global Adaptation Initiative index.

The scale of the exposure is illustrated by events in Vanuatu, where two intense cyclones made landfall within 48 hours in 2023, affecting roughly 80 percent of the population - around 250,000 people - and causing economic losses equivalent to about 20 percent of GDP.

In response, development agencies and governments in the region have been shifting away from disaster financing based largely on post-event appeals and toward rules-based preparedness systems, with funding and recovery mechanisms triggered automatically when climate thresholds are met.

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UNDP is described as focusing on linking adaptation infrastructure, institutional capacity and policy frameworks into a coordinated system, while the UN Capital Development Fund has concentrated on developing innovative financial instruments to expand access to climate-risk financing in frontier markets.

Tuvalu case study highlights parametric insurance model

Tuvalu is presented as a practical example of how physical adaptation and financial risk transfer can be combined in a small island economy facing severe climate exposure.

The country's highest point sits around two metres above sea level, and its population of roughly 11,000 people lives largely within one kilometre of the coast, leaving homes and infrastructure vulnerable to high-tide flooding and storm surge.

To reduce that risk, Tuvalu has worked with UNDP, the Green Climate Fund and the governments of Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Tuvalu to develop 16.8 hectares of elevated reclaimed land.

The site is expected to accommodate housing, schools and health facilities and provide space for around 6,000 residents - roughly 60 percent of the population - to remain in their communities despite rising sea levels.

Alongside the infrastructure project, Tuvalu has introduced a parametric insurance scheme linked to high-tide events. The product was developed with the government, the Tuvalu Development Bank, UNCDF, UNDP and reinsurance partners.

Under the design, households receive automatic payments when sea-level indicators cross pre-defined thresholds, such as unusually high tides or coastal flooding. Because payouts are triggered by objective measurements rather than post-disaster loss assessments, funds can be delivered quickly to cover immediate needs such as basic consumption or minor repairs.

The programme's initial phase covers more than 400 households in coastal areas considered most exposed. With no domestic primary insurer in the market, the risk is carried directly by Papua New Guinea-based Pacific Reinsurance—an arrangement the report describes as a global first for underwriting this type of cover in a market without a local insurer.

Risk-layering concepts with potential relevance for New Zealand

The Pacific initiatives highlight how risk-layering frameworks - long discussed in catastrophe financing - are being implemented in practice in highly exposed markets.

Several design elements outlined in the analysis may have relevance for the disaster-risk landscape in New Zealand, particularly for flood and coastal hazards.

These include parametric triggers linked to rainfall, river levels or tidal heights operating alongside traditional indemnity flood insurance, national risk-financing strategies that combine public grants, concessional capital, domestic funds and private insurance capacity, and the integration of payout mechanisms with government social-protection systems to standardise and accelerate payments.

The report describes this as a portfolio approach, in which different layers of funding respond to climate events across the frequency-severity spectrum.

Flood exposure increasing across New Zealand

The Pacific findings arrive as new research highlights the scale of flood exposure in New Zealand.

Analysis by Earth Sciences New Zealand estimates that more than 750,000 people currently live in areas exposed to one-in-100-year rainfall-driven flooding.

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Under a scenario where global temperatures rise by an additional three degrees Celsius, the number of people in those zones could exceed 900,000.

The research also estimates that about US$235 billion in building stock is currently exposed to these flood levels, increasing to around US$288 billion under the higher-warming scenario.

Infrastructure exposure is similarly significant. The modelling indicates that approximately 26,800 kilometres of roads, 14,100 kilometres of stormwater pipes and 21 percent of national electricity grid sites, including substations, lie within current flood-risk zones. With further warming, those figures could rise to 30,800 kilometres of roads, 15,400 kilometres of stormwater pipes and 29% of grid sites.

The findings draw on a five-year collaboration involving research institutions, universities, local councils, government agencies and industry participants.

Exposure also varies widely by region. Around 8 percent of residents in Taranaki are currently located in areas exposed to one-in-100-year rainfall events, compared with about 34 percent on the West Coast, creating differing risk concentrations and affordability challenges for insurers.

Implications for insurers and policymakers

The Pacific case studies and New Zealand exposure data highlight the growing need for coordinated financial structures to manage climate-driven disaster losses.

Areas of focus include the potential role of parametric insurance in providing rapid post-disaster liquidity, the development of layered risk-financing systems that stabilise public finances after major events, and the role of regional reinsurance capacity in supporting coverage in smaller or highly exposed markets.

As international negotiations ahead of the next UN climate summit increase attention on adaptation finance and loss-and-damage mechanisms, the Pacific experience suggests that the design of financial systems - including triggers, governance and funding layers - will be central to managing future climate risk.

The initiatives underway in Tuvalu and across the wider Pacific region offer practical examples of how climate-risk finance structures could evolve as exposure to floods and coastal hazards continues to grow.... PACNEWS

PACNEWS DIGEST

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Give to Gain: When the tides rise, women rise first

PONPHEI, 11 MARCH 2026 (SPREP) --- The second of a three-part series that highlights Women in Micronesia this International Women's Day. It forms part of the Federated States of Micronesia National Adaptation Plan Project funded by the Green Climate Fund, implemented by SPREP in partnership with the Government of FSM and Haskoning New Zealand.

Meet Elinor Rollis, Elinor has lived her entire life in Losap, one of the outer islands of Micronesia. She is a caretaker — not as a title, but as a responsibility she has carried since she was a young girl.

Caring for family, for neighbours, and for the everyday needs of the community is simply part of life in the remote outer islands of Micronesia. When Elinor speaks about climate change, she does not speak in distant terms. She speaks about food, water, and preparedness, the foundations of daily survival.

In the past, people in her island grew food close to their homes. Trees, gardens, and small plots provided sustenance on the island itself. Today, that has changed. Farming near houses has largely stopped, and

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families depend on another island for food, on island that has been allocated for this purpose. When that island is affected — by king tides and saltwater — everyone feels it.

King tides worry her. They now arrive with nothing to stop them. There are no natural or built barriers to slow the water as it moves inland. Saltwater reaches places it never did before, damaging land and limiting what can grow.

Elinor is clear: yes, she is worried about climate change, because without food, there is nothing.

Water has become another quiet concern. Rain still comes, but the systems to capture it no longer work for everyone. Some households have tanks, but no proper catchments to fill them. Others miss out entirely. When tanks remain empty, families are left unprepared for dry periods, even when rainfall is heavy.

In times of disaster, Elinor describes women's roles as constant and expected. Before storms, women prepare homes and food, so families do not need to go outside. After storms, their work continues. When saltwater floods gardens or heavy rain threatens crops, women move quickly to harvest what they can before it spoils.

Einor speaks not only of climate impacts, but of what is missing. Reliable communication is one of the community's biggest challenges. When emergencies happen, there is no effective way to call for help, share information, or explain what her community needs.

Without communication, the island remains invisible, even when families are struggling.

She also raises concerns beyond climate alone. Power shortages leave many people living in darkness. Mosquito populations have increased dramatically in her experience, bringing health risks that compound existing vulnerabilities. These pressures overlap — climate change makes them harder to manage, and isolation makes them harder to solve.

When asked what she would want planners and leaders to understand, Elinor's answer is simple and firm: "Remember us. Without communication, how can anyone know what is happening here? Without practical support, how can people prepare?"

Elinor does not describe herself, or her community, as powerless. She describes what people already do — and what would help them do it better. Her message is about connection: planning that reaches the island, listens carefully, and supports the work that is already holding the community together.

Did you know?

Globally, disasters kill more women and children than men — especially where gender inequality is high. Source: UN Women 2024

This is part two of a three-part series profiling Women in Micronesia for the Give to Gain International Women's Day wave with SPREP. We'll be sharing one more profile this week as part of this series. This International Women's Day let's Give to Gain, together! .... PACNEWS

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