

Charting a Shared Course: Enhancing Maritime Security Coordination in the Pacific

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Introduction – Guardians of the Blue Pacific

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished leaders and colleagues, thank you for the honour of addressing this Pacific Maritime Security Coordination Workshop. As Vice Chancellor of the Solomon Islands National University – and as a son of our oceanic region – I speak with both gravitas and great optimism about our shared voyage ahead. Our theme, *“Charting a Shared Course: Enhancing Maritime Security Coordination in the Pacific,”* invokes the image of a vaka (canoe) on the vast Pacific. It reminds us that **the ocean connects us rather than divides us**, bonding the fates of our islands into one “Blue Pacific Continent” of shared stewardship. We Pacific Islanders may be custodians of small land masses, but we are also guardians of immense ocean spaces; indeed, Pacific Island countries collectively manage over 30 million square kilometres of ocean – more than 10% of the Earth’s oceans. In the words of a Pacific proverb, *“we do not measure our islands by their smallness, but by the greatness of our ocean.”* Our ocean defines our identity, sustains our livelihoods, and carries the stories of our ancestors. It is not a barrier that isolates us, **it is a bridge that unites us and a resource that empowers us.**

Yet today, that same ocean is under unprecedented strain. As we gather to chart a shared course, we must confront the reality that no single island or agency can navigate these challenges alone. **Unity has always been our strength in the Pacific.** We see further when we stand on each other’s shoulders, and we speak louder when we raise one voice. This morning, I invite us all to harness the wisdom of our ancestors – who saw our world as a “sea of islands” not islands in a sea – and summon the spirit of Pacific solidarity. Together, we will tackle the pressing maritime security threats, uphold our sovereignty over the Blue Pacific, and steer our canoe towards a future of peace and prosperity for all our peoples.

The Solomon Islands Perspective in a Shared Ocean

I address you from the perspective of the Solomon Islands, a nation of hundreds of islands spread across 1.5 million square kilometers of ocean. Like all Pacific nations, **our security and well-being are inseparable from the security of our waters.** Our fishermen, seafarers, and coastal communities know that a disturbance beyond the horizon – be it illegal fishing or a brewing cyclone – can swiftly reach our shores. Thus, even as I speak for Solomon Islanders, I know our experiences echo across the Pacific. We are large ocean states bound by common opportunities and threats. We all cherish the bounty of the sea that feeds our people and the seaways that connect our markets. We each feel the vulnerabilities of limited resources and capacity in patrolling vast Exclusive Economic Zones. And we

each carry the responsibility to be stewards of an ocean that is both our heritage and our legacy to future generations.

From Honiara's perspective, we have embarked on an ambitious path to strengthen our maritime security governance. **Earlier this year, the Solomon Islands launched its first comprehensive National Maritime Security Strategy (2024–2027)** – a transformative roadmap to safeguard our marine domain and sovereignty. This Strategy is built on our conviction that Solomon Islands must transition from fragmented, reactive measures to a cohesive, technology-driven approach that integrates real-time surveillance, intelligence analysis, and coordinated enforcement. At its heart is the creation of a **National Maritime Surveillance Center (NMSC)** – a state-of-the-art facility to centralize all maritime monitoring, intelligence-sharing and enforcement coordination activities. The NMSC will fuse data from vessel tracking systems, satellites, and patrol assets to give us real-time Maritime Domain Awareness and early warning of illicit activities. It will serve as the nerve center for coordinating joint operations among our agencies – police, navy, customs, fisheries – and crucially, it will link with regional networks like the Forum Fisheries Agency's surveillance centre and the Pacific Fusion Centre for regional intelligence-sharing.

To ensure this high-tech hub is guided by sound policy and multi-agency cooperation, we are also establishing a **National Maritime Security Coordination Council (NMSCC)**. This new body will unite all relevant ministries and stakeholders to oversee the NMSC's operations, align our national efforts with regional and international maritime security frameworks, and evaluate our performance in keeping our seas safe. In short, the NMSCC will make sure that **all oars are rowing in the same direction** – that our Navy, Police, Fisheries, Border Force, and partners work in unison from one integrated game plan. We see this as vital: maritime security is by nature inter-sectoral and international, so only a **whole-of-government, whole-of-region** approach will suffice.

Our Solomon Islands strategy is boldly forward-looking. Over the next three years we will invest in aerial drones, coastal radar, and **AI-powered surveillance tools** to detect illicit vessels in real time. We aim to achieve tangible results by 2027 – such as reducing illegal fishing incidents by 30%, increasing joint maritime patrols by 50%, and extending real-time monitoring to 85% of our EEZ. These are ambitious targets, but they provide clear yardsticks for success. In implementing this strategy, we will rely not only on national will but on our **regional family and international friends** – and I will speak more on those partnerships shortly. What I wish to underscore from the Solomon Islands perspective is that we are taking ownership of our security challenges. We are determined to **stand our ground as guardians of our own waters**, harnessing innovation and cooperation to overcome our constraints. In doing so, we reinforce not only our national security but contribute to the collective security of the Pacific, because a threat to one island's waters can imperil all of us.

Navigating the Challenges – From IUU Fishing to Climate Change

Before we talk about solutions, let us candidly acknowledge the **rough seas we must navigate**. Maritime security in our region is confronted by a daunting array of challenges – some age-old, others new and emerging. Allow me to chart the key threats that demand our coordinated response:

- **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing:** Our fisheries are the lifeblood of Pacific economies and diets, yet they are under siege from illegal fishing fleets and unscrupulous operators. Every year, billions of dollars worth of tuna and other fish are harvested from our waters. When foreign vessels evade licensing or under-report their catch, they are stealing food from our tables and revenue from our treasuries. Pacific nations have become increasingly alarmed by this scourge of IUU fishing, which has **devastated**

ecosystems and livelihoods, costing up to an estimated \$500 million in lost revenue in recent years. Beyond the economic loss, illegal fishing undermines the sustainability of our stocks and the rights of our people to benefit from resources in their own EEZs. It is, in essence, an assault on our sovereignty. This is why regional surveillance operations and enforcement initiatives – like the **FFA’s Operation Kurukuru** and the use of satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems – are so critical. We have made great strides by working together through the Niue Treaty and the **FFA Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre in Honiara**, which provides real-time tracking and intelligence on fishing vessels across the Pacific. But as illegal operators get more sophisticated, so too must our cooperation. We need to share data seamlessly, prosecute offenders vigorously, and **leave no dark corner in our ocean where plunderers can hide.**

- **Transnational Crime and Maritime Border Security:** The Pacific’s waters, unfortunately, are attractive not only to fishermen but also to criminals exploiting our vast blue spaces. We have seen a sharp rise in **maritime drug trafficking and smuggling.** Our islands are being used as transit points for narcotics bound for other markets, and we have intercepted cocaine and methamphetamine consignments in our region that shock the imagination. Human trafficking, money laundering, and contraband smuggling via sea routes also pose growing dangers. These illicit activities are often intertwined with international networks that see the Pacific as a soft transit zone. We must prove them wrong. Coordinated patrols and information-sharing are our best weapons. Initiatives like the **Pacific Transnational Crime Network and the Pacific Fusion Centre** are equipping us to fuse intelligence and identify threats early. With the help of partners like the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** – which assists Pacific states in strengthening legal frameworks and law enforcement against maritime crime – we are tightening the net on traffickers. Yet gaps remain. Many of our ports lack adequate scanning and our maritime agencies stretch thin across huge distances. I stress the need for continued capacity-building: more joint training, more ship-rider agreements, and more investment in technologies like aerial surveillance, so that **no lawless element can exploit our oceanic borders with impunity.**
- **Geopolitical Pressures and Strategic Vulnerabilities:** Our Blue Pacific has become an arena of intensifying geostrategic interest. **Major powers are increasingly looking to the Pacific,** seeing not just our fisheries or minerals but our strategic position astride vital trade routes. This can bring opportunities – new partnerships, infrastructure, and aid – but also significant risks if not managed astutely. We have witnessed how great-power rivalry between the United States and China is playing out across the region, raising concerns about militarization and the Pacific becoming a chessboard for others’ strategic ambitions. Pacific nations, including my own, have felt the weight of diplomatic pressure and competing offers of security assistance. The Solomon Islands’ decision to sign a security cooperation agreement with the People’s Republic of China in 2022, for example, **“introduced new dynamics”** into our security landscape. This agreement – controversial to some – underscored the shifting terrain in which Pacific states must assert their sovereignty. It is our responsibility to ensure that **external engagements serve our interests and values, and do not compromise the Pacific’s stability or unity.** We must guard against becoming pawns in anyone’s great game. This calls for a delicate balancing act and above all a strong, unified Pacific voice about our security priorities. Our region has a proud tradition of declaring what we *do not* want – from the 1985 Rarotonga Treaty making the South Pacific a nuclear-free zone, to our leaders today calling for the Pacific to remain free of military competition. It is in

this context that Fiji's Prime Minister, Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka, has championed the notion of the Pacific as an "**Ocean of Peace**," urging us as Forum members to unite and declare that "*there is no place for military buildup in the Pacific*". I will return to this visionary idea of an "**Oceans of Peace**" zone in a moment, as it offers a positive Pacific-led narrative to counterbalance external pressures. The bottom line is that in the face of geopolitical currents, we Pacific Islanders must steer our own waka – maintaining our solidarity and insisting that **the Pacific's security architecture be shaped by Pacific hands, not by external ambitions**.

- **Climate Change and Environmental Security:** Finally, and perhaps most gravely, we confront the overarching threat multiplier of **climate change**. Our maritime security is inseparable from the health of the ocean and climate. Intensifying cyclones, sea-level rise, coral bleaching, and changing fish migration patterns all present security challenges. More frequent natural disasters mean more search-and-rescue operations and humanitarian emergencies at sea. Diminishing fisheries due to warming waters and ocean acidification could fuel resource conflicts or drive people from their home islands. Coastal erosion and king tides are already swallowing ancestral lands in low-lying atolls, posing existential questions about statehood and maritime boundaries. It is no exaggeration to say, as Pacific Islands Forum Leaders did in the Boe Declaration of 2018, that **climate change is "the single greatest threat" to the livelihoods and security of Pacific peoples**. We who produce negligible greenhouse emissions suffer first and worst from this crisis. Therefore, when we speak of enhancing maritime security, we must also speak of climate action and resilience. This means strengthening our capacity for **disaster response**, securing early warning systems, and adapting infrastructure for extreme weather. It also means using our collective voice to demand global climate accountability – because no amount of patrol boats or radar systems can secure our future if entire islands are lost to the rising seas. In our traditional mindset, security was holistic – it was about harmony between people, land, sea, and sky. We must revive that wisdom and ensure that our maritime security strategy champions environmental stewardship and sustainable development. Only then can we truly preserve an ocean of peace and abundance for generations to come.

Each of these challenges – IUU fishing, transnational crime, great-power rivalry, and climate change – is formidable in its own right. **Interwoven, they form a complex knot that no nation can untangle alone**. This is why our theme of "*Enhancing Maritime Security Coordination*" is so critical. We have to respond **collectively and coherently**, as a Blue Pacific family, matching the scale of threats with the scale of our unity. The next part of my address will highlight how we are already coming together through innovative Pacific-led initiatives and partnerships to confront these challenges, and how we can build on those efforts moving forward.

Pacific Solidarity and the "Oceans of Peace" Vision

In confronting the challenges I've outlined, the Pacific is not sitting passively. **We are charting our own course, guided by our shared values and vision**. One embodiment of that vision is the emerging "*Oceans of Peace*" proposal – a bold Pacific-led initiative that envisions our region as a zone of peace, free from military conflict and coercion. This concept, initially put forward by Prime Minister Rabuka of Fiji, is gaining momentum as a rallying call for Pacific solidarity. Its essence is simple yet profound: just as our forebears declared the Pacific off-limits to nuclear weapons decades ago, so now should we declare to the world that our ocean will not be a venue for rivalry or war. In Rabuka's words, "*it is my hope that Pacific Islands Forum members will unite to declare our Ocean of Peace to the world, making the region and its peoples the very emblems of peace*". This means

saying clearly that we reject any future of militarization in the Pacific. We want development, not devastation; cooperation, not confrontation.

The **Oceans of Peace** initiative is visionary because it flips the script – it is the Pacific taking charge of its narrative and security destiny. Rather than being seen as small states to be protected or competed over by others, we present ourselves as **a zone of peace led by Pacific peoples**, drawing on our deeply held cultural ethos of dialogue, respect, and harmony with nature. It aligns with long-standing Pacific ideals – what we often call the “Pacific Way” – of resolving issues through consensus and collective good. Practically, an Oceans of Peace declaration would commit our governments to transparency and consultation on any security arrangements that could affect regional stability. It would reinforce mechanisms like the **Boe Declaration**, which already broadened our security concept to include human, environmental, and cyber dimensions. It could build on institutions such as the **South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (Rarotonga Treaty)** and expand them to address contemporary issues like militarization and new weapons technologies.

Crucially, Oceans of Peace is *Pacific-driven*. It says **we will not wait for external powers to set the agenda; we will articulate the rules and norms that we want for our region**. I am pleased to note that supporters of this initiative are working towards a formal **Ocean of Peace Declaration at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in September 2025 in Solomon Islands**. What more fitting venue than Solomon Islands – a place that still bears the scars of the Second World War’s Pacific theater – to declare that *never again* should our islands be torn by the conflicts of others. As Solomon Islanders, we know the horrors and aftermath of war; we also know the value of peace. Let Honiara’s 2025 Forum be remembered as the moment the Pacific drew a clear line in the sand and charted a course for its own peace and security, on its own terms.

Cultural values and indigenous wisdom will be key in giving life to the Oceans of Peace vision. Across the Pacific, we have concepts of the ocean as a nurturing mother and of our nations as being in the same vaka (canoe). There is a beautiful Maori proverb: “*He waka eke noa*” – **we are all in the canoe together, without exception**. This speaks to the heart of collective responsibility. Whether the issue is an illegal fishing fleet in our waters, a transnational crime syndicate exploiting our borders, or the creeping threat of a rising sea, we must face it together, paddling in unison. The Pacific has shown time and again that when united, we can punch far above our weight. We forged groundbreaking frameworks like the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) to control our tuna and command better value from global markets. We stood shoulder to shoulder to advocate the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C climate target, amplifying our voice through moral authority. And when one of our family faces crisis – a cyclone in Vanuatu, an oil spill in the Solomon Sea – the rest of the Pacific family is among the first to offer help.

Today, **regional solidarity is not just a lofty ideal; it is a practical necessity**. In maritime security, this means more **coordinated operations, shared assets, and integrated policies**. We have promising examples: the **Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (the “Quad”) of Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States** has long combined resources for aerial and naval surveillance across our region. Their joint patrols and information-sharing, often in cooperation with our local officers via shiprider programs, have extended our enforcement reach. We welcome these contributions, especially when they operate under our regional frameworks. Another example is the nascent **Pacific Fusion Centre**, an outcome of the Boe Declaration, which is enhancing how we pool intelligence on issues from illegal fishing to broader geopolitical trends. The Fusion Centre, alongside the **Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre**, helps ensure that no piece of critical information falls through the cracks between our national agencies.

However, solidarity is tested when external influences seek to divide us. We have seen instances of “*cheque-book diplomacy*” and moves to set up rival spheres of influence in the Pacific. Here, the role of **Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)** as our premier political body, and sub-regional groups like the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and Polynesian Leaders Group, become ever more important to maintain unity and resolve differences internally. It encourages me greatly that our Forum Leaders have recently healed internal rifts and recommitted to cohesion – this sends a message that **our Blue Pacific Continent cannot be easily split or bought off**. We have a *collective identity* and common purpose, reinforced by our Blue Pacific strategy for 2050. That collective identity, as the Forum Secretariat puts it, underlines “*our ownership of our ocean space – Pacific people taking control of our domain*”. Let those words ring out: **We, the people of the Pacific, own our ocean and will decide its fate.**

In summary, the Oceans of Peace initiative, grounded in Pacific solidarity, is both a beacon and a rallying cry. It reminds us that **peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice, security, and stewardship in our ocean**. It challenges us to strengthen our regional norms – for example, by agreeing that any foreign security agreement involving a Pacific country should be transparently discussed with neighbors, or that any militarization that could threaten another’s sovereignty is categorically unacceptable. These are discussions we must have as a family. This workshop itself is an example of *talanoa* – open and inclusive dialogue – in action. And so, as we strengthen technical coordination, let us also nurture the *mana* (spiritual strength) of Pacific unity, which ultimately is our greatest source of security.

Ongoing Efforts – Partnerships and Progress on Maritime Security

Having painted the big picture of our vision, I want to highlight some of the **concrete efforts already underway** at both national and regional levels to enhance maritime security coordination. These efforts form the building blocks upon which our shared course will be charted. They also exemplify the spirit of partnership – among Pacific nations ourselves, and with our external allies and donors who support our aspirations. In the Solomon Islands and across the region, **there is positive momentum we can build on:**

- **Solomon Islands Maritime Security Strategy 2024–2027:** I have already outlined our new national strategy and its key components like the NMSC and NMSCC. Let me add that this Strategy was developed in alignment with broader regional frameworks. It echoes the Pacific’s **expanded concept of security** under the Boe Declaration, encompassing environmental, resource, and human security alongside traditional defense. Our Strategy also complements the objectives of the **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**, which aspires to safeguard our ocean resources and maintain the Pacific as a zone of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity. In implementing our Strategy, we are sequencing our initiatives in phases: first establishing coordination mechanisms and securing funding (2024), then deploying advanced surveillance technology and training personnel (2025), and finally achieving full operational capability of our NMSC by 2026–27. I am pleased to report that Solomon Islands has **secured initial funding commitments** for this plan, thanks to support from friends like Australia (through its Solomon Islands-Pacific Security Cooperation), New Zealand, and the Asian Development Bank. Furthermore, we are drafting legislation to formalize the NMSCC, ensuring it has the mandate to cut through bureaucratic silos. Our hope is that by 2027, the Solomon Islands will serve as a model for integrated maritime security governance – a national system that is plugged into regional networks and capable of responding swiftly to the dynamic threats we face.

- Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC):** In the realm of fisheries – often the frontline of our maritime security – Pacific coordination is well advanced. The Honiara-based **FFA has been a lynchpin of regional fisheries surveillance and enforcement since 1979**. Through the FFA’s Regional Surveillance Centre and the Niue Treaty, our countries conduct combined surveillance operations each year, pooling our patrol boats and aircraft with the assistance of Australia, New Zealand, the US, and France. These efforts have **proven that working together, we can “punch above our weight” in protecting our tuna stocks**. The eight Parties to the Nauru Agreement (including Solomon Islands) also set powerful conservation and management measures for tuna – such as the Vessel Day Scheme – that foreign fleets must abide by. Meanwhile, at the international level, the **WCPFC** remains a cornerstone for conserving highly migratory fish. We Pacific members form a strong bloc in the WCPFC negotiations, asserting our rights against distant-water fishing nations. We have secured important WCPFC measures on curbing overfishing of bigeye tuna, regulating fish-aggregating devices (FADs), and mandating that all fishing vessels be uniquely identified and tracked. These achievements reinforce a truth: **when we coordinate policy and speak with one voice, we safeguard both our resources and our sovereignty**. Looking ahead, the challenge is to extend that same robust coordination to emerging issues like high-seas fishing in the holes of the donut (areas just outside our EEZs) and to coastal fisheries that sustain our village communities. The FFA and SPC are now focusing on these fronts, including the impact of climate change shifting tuna eastward and potentially out of our zones. Rest assured, Solomon Islands will continue to champion collective fisheries security, because for us fish are not just commodities – they are our culture and sustenance.
- Regional Law-Enforcement Coordination:** Beyond fisheries, our police and border forces are linking up more closely than ever. The **Pacific Transnational Crime Network**, coordinated via hubs in Samoa and Guam, connects national police intelligence units across our region. Solomon Islands, through its Transnational Crime Unit, is an active member, feeding information on illicit activities and receiving alerts when suspicious vessels or persons may be headed our way. We have also been increasing **joint training exercises**. For example, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) regularly trains with counterparts from Australia and NZ under bilateral security programs. Just last year, we hosted a successful **joint maritime surveillance exercise** in our western waters, involving patrol boats from Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and PNG, with aerial support from Australia. Such exercises build invaluable interoperability – common radio procedures, boarding protocols, and the experience of working side by side. Under the Boe Declaration Action Plan, a concept of **“collective security in the Pacific”** is taking shape, which encourages our national security services to plan together for contingencies. We are exploring the idea of a **regional coastguard or guardian network**, whereby Pacific nations could call on each other’s assets in times of need. For instance, if a Solomon Islands patrol boat is down for maintenance and we spot suspicious activity, we might request a nearby Pacific neighbor’s vessel to intervene under agreed protocols. This kind of **asset-sharing and trust** is the next level of coordination we need to strive for.
- Key Partnerships – Australia, New Zealand, United States, China, EU, and Others:** Our Pacific family’s efforts are generously bolstered by partnerships with both traditional allies and new friends. I want to acknowledge some of the contributions that are making a difference on the water:

- **Australia** has long been a principal partner in Pacific maritime security. Through the **Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP)**, Australia has provided modern *Guardian-class patrol boats* to 12 Pacific nations, including two vessels to Solomon Islands. These patrol boats are the workhorses of our maritime surveillance, crucial for fisheries patrols and intercepting illicit vessels. Australia also helps sustain these assets with maintenance, training, and dedicated Royal Australian Air Force surveillance flights that periodically monitor our vast EEZs. Just weeks ago, Australia's Pacific Minister announced a further increase in funding for aerial surveillance to double the number of hours their aircraft will patrol Pacific waters – a most welcome boost in our fight against illegal fishing. Additionally, Australia supports our police with advisory teams and is helping us establish a new police maritime training wing in Honiara. We thank Australia for this steadfast commitment, which truly reflects the mantra that “we are stronger together”.
- **New Zealand** likewise has been a stalwart friend in building our maritime security capacity. New Zealand's support focuses heavily on **capacity-building and training** – and we have benefited immensely from it. Kiwi defense and police advisors have trained our patrol boat crews, fisheries officers, and boarding teams. They've helped our institutions improve everything from maintenance of vessels to prosecution of fisheries violations. New Zealand also provides valuable **intelligence-sharing** – their P-3 Orion and now P-8 Poseidon aircraft patrol our waters and immediately share surveillance data with us. This real-time information has led to successful interceptions of illegal fishing boats that we simply would have missed on our own. Moreover, New Zealand has been instrumental in supporting the **Solomon Islands Maritime Police** through joint operations – we have conducted combined patrols, and joint exercises that enhance interoperability. Such initiatives ensure that whether it's a search-and-rescue mission or a law enforcement task, our officers can work seamlessly with counterparts from NZ and other Pacific nations. New Zealand's approach exemplifies true partnership – helping us to help ourselves, side by side.
- **United States and France** have contributed through what we might call “over-the-horizon” security support. The US Coast Guard runs an excellent **Shiprider Program** in the Pacific, wherein Solomon Islands officers embark on US vessels to patrol our EEZ together. This has extended our enforcement reach deep into the high seas where US cutters can go, and it builds our officers' skills. The US is also increasingly active in regional exercises and recently, under the Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative, has been looking to invest more in Pacific maritime domain awareness (for example, providing satellite data and technology). France, for its part, leverages its territories' presence – with naval assets based in New Caledonia and Polynesia – to help monitor the Eastern and Western Pacific. **French naval and air patrols** regularly join multilateral surveillance operations and exercises with Pacific states. We should note that the French Navy played a key role in a major drift-net fishing bust not long ago, coordinating with FFA. So, while the US and France are not always in our headlines, their tangible contributions in surveillance and enforcement are highly valued. They remind us that multiple like-minded partners are willing to sail with us in securing our ocean.
- **China** has emerged as a new player in Pacific maritime security cooperation. As mentioned, Solomon Islands has a security cooperation agreement with China. While

still in early stages, we have begun to see some fruits – for instance, China has provided some maritime policing equipment and training workshops, and there are plans for infrastructure support like wharf upgrades for our patrol boats. We are also exploring how Chinese satellite technology and coast guard cooperation might assist with tasks like search-and-rescue and anti-trafficking efforts. It is no secret that China’s involvement has raised geopolitical eyebrows. But from the Solomon Islands perspective, we welcome *any* partner’s contribution so long as it **respects our sovereignty and the Pacific’s collective protocols**. We encourage China, as we do all partners, to coordinate through regional mechanisms (for example, sharing any maritime surveillance data via the FFA or Pacific Fusion Centre) and to be transparent about its intentions. The ideal outcome is that China becomes a responsible contributor to regional public goods – such as fisheries protection and disaster response – working alongside Australia, NZ, the US, and others in a complementary way. The worst outcome, which we must avoid, would be if major powers start working at cross-purposes or establishing exclusive spheres in our region. The Solomon Islands will do its part to encourage **inclusive cooperation**, where all partners, old and new, plug into Pacific-led schemes rather than create parallel ones.

- **European Union, Japan, and Other Partners:** I would be remiss not to mention the support of multilateral and other bilateral partners. The **EU** has funded important programs on maritime security and climate resilience (such as the PEUMP – Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership – which helps combat IUU fishing). Japan has provided coastal radar systems and training to several PICs and is very active in tsunami warning and maritime safety projects. **Multilateral development banks** like the ADB, as noted earlier, invest in port infrastructure and marine transport safety which indirectly bolster security. The **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** supports our countries in meeting international ship and port security standards, such as the ISPS Code that keeps our ports safe from sabotage or terrorism. And the **United Nations** bodies like UNODC, as I mentioned, help strengthen our legal and judicial capacity to fight maritime crime. Each of these contributions – whether a new patrol craft, a training program, or a tech transfer – is like another sturdy fibre in the rope of Pacific security. We acknowledge with gratitude the donors and friends who respect our priorities and work within our framework. Indeed, an old Pacific saying is “*iloa i tuaoga e tausia ai*” – the strength of a woven mat comes from all the strands working together.

In sum, the tapestry of Pacific maritime security coordination is growing richer and stronger. **We have in place many of the right institutions, partnerships, and plans** – from the national strategies like ours in Solomon Islands, to regional agencies like FFA and multilateral efforts. The challenge now is to weave these strands tighter, fill the gaps, and ensure sustainability. We must avoid duplication and ensure information flows to everyone who needs it. We must also avoid complacency – threats evolve, so must we. But when I survey the initiatives underway, I am encouraged. The Pacific is not starting from scratch; we are building on decades of cooperative mechanisms that have shown results. The task ahead is to elevate that cooperation to a new level, befitting the fast-changing environment we operate in.

The Way Forward – Knowledge, Leadership, and Collective Action

As I approach the conclusion of this keynote, I ask us to reflect on **what it will take to truly enhance maritime security coordination in the Pacific** and secure our sovereign ocean future. The phrase “*charting a shared course*” implies a journey – one that requires good navigation, a capable crew, and steady leadership. In practical terms, I believe there are several key ingredients for success going forward:

First, **we need to invest in our people and knowledge**. Technology and assets are vital, but it is **human capacity and leadership** that will ultimately drive coordination. This is where institutions of learning, like my own Solomon Islands National University, play a pivotal role. We are committed to building Pacific expertise from the ground up. A shining example is SINU’s new **Postgraduate Diploma in Security Studies (PGDipSS)** program, launching this year. This course – the first of its kind in our country – is specially designed to produce the next generation of Pacific security leaders, analysts, and coordination experts. It blends academic rigor with practical skills, focusing on our unique regional security challenges from maritime law to climate adaptation. The **PGDipSS will be a strategic milestone for SINU**, positioning our university as a regional leader in security education aligned with Pacific frameworks like the Boe Declaration. Graduates of this program will have cutting-edge knowledge in areas like maritime security policy, intelligence analysis, and crisis management, honed within a Pacific context. They will return to their agencies – be it police, navy, fisheries, foreign affairs, or regional organizations – as more effective planners and coordinators. Over time, as more Pacific officials gain such specialized training, the network of professionals driving our maritime security will be stronger and more cohesive. I cannot overstate the importance of **education and research** in undergirding our security architecture. It is the universities and think-tanks that develop home-grown strategies (indeed, our maritime security strategy was formulated with input from local researchers and SINU experts). It is they who will document lessons learned from operations, innovate new solutions (such as applying AI in surveillance or legal tools against maritime crimes), and sustain informed dialogue through forums like this. I urge donors and governments alike to support capacity-building programs and scholarships in maritime and security studies. **Let us nurture a cadre of Pacific specialists** who will carry forward the work when current leaders pass the baton. In line with this, I proudly announce that SINU’s **Centre for Pacific Security Studies** – newly established – will be actively seeking collaborations with regional universities and organizations to research issues like IUU fishing economics, climate security impacts, and legal frameworks for coordination. Together, we will ensure the **intellectual sovereignty** of the Pacific on security matters, not just the physical sovereignty.

Second, **we must institutionalize our coordination mechanisms** so they endure beyond individuals and politics. That means formalizing agreements and councils that bring all actors to the table. The National Maritime Security Coordination Council we are setting up in Solomon Islands is one national example. At the regional level, we might consider establishing a **Pacific Maritime Security Coordination Forum** under the auspices of the PIF or as a sub-group of the Forum Regional Security Committee. Such a forum could convene heads of maritime agencies across all Pacific states on a regular basis, ensuring continuous alignment of efforts. We already have annual gatherings like the **Pacific Islands Maritime Security Summit** and the **Pacific Rescue and Surveillance Workshop** – we should empower these to not just share information but to make collective decisions (for example, agreeing on joint targets for surveillance coverage, standardizing protocols, etc.). Additionally, integrating our efforts with emerging architectures like the **Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)** can bring resources without ceding control – the key is we shape these tools to our needs. To sustain political buy-in, our leaders must see that these mechanisms deliver results. Regular reporting of successes – say, an increase in illegal fishing vessels detained through a

joint effort – will help. The NMSCC in Solomon Islands will report annually on our maritime security performance; perhaps a similar Pacific-wide report card could be tabled at PIF Leaders’ Meetings, to keep maritime security on the high agenda. In short, let’s **build strong institutions and processes** that make coordination our new normal, not an ad-hoc reaction.

Third, **securing sustainable funding and resources** is indispensable. All our plans will falter if not backed by financing for patrol hours, analysts’ salaries, fuel, maintenance, and modern equipment. We must be strategic in mobilizing funds. One approach is to channel a portion of the economic benefits of our ocean back into security – for example, allocating a slice of fisheries licensing fees or maritime tourism revenue into a **Maritime Security Trust Fund**. Solomon Islands is exploring this idea, essentially reinvesting some of the tuna dollars into protecting tuna for the future. At a regional level, the proposed **Pacific Resilience Facility** could potentially include a window for maritime security capacity funding, given the link between climate resilience and security. We also encourage creative **public-private partnerships**, such as involving tech companies in improving our surveillance data analysis, or working with insurance firms on initiatives like lowering premiums for ships if they use approved secure ports. And of course, donor aid remains vital – but we should guide it to ensure it fills gaps and builds self-reliance rather than creating dependency. This may mean pivoting from donors buying hardware (we now have enough patrol boats in many cases) towards supporting the software – training, maintenance, and next-gen technology adoption like drones and satellite analytics. The **funding issue is a shared responsibility**: Pacific governments must prioritize budgets for maritime security (after all, there is no security more directly tied to our survival), and international partners must view support as a long-term investment in global peace and sustainable development, not charity. When every nation in the Pacific can reliably monitor its waters and enforce its laws, everyone benefits – fish stocks regenerate, criminal networks shrink, and the rule of law prevails at sea.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, **we must foster a continued spirit of collective action and Pacific ownership**. All the frameworks and resources in the world will not succeed without *trust* and *political will* among us. We have to continue reinforcing the mindset that **we are one Blue Pacific family** navigating the same ocean. In practical terms, this means always consulting each other on issues that affect the group, honoring regional agreements, and not leaving anyone behind. Larger countries like mine in Melanesia must ensure we support our smaller atoll neighbors who have huge EEZs but limited capacity. Conversely, when any one of us faces undue external pressure, we should be prepared to stand in solidarity. Let us remember the proverb: “*Olputa rein te gawor*” – “**when spiders unite, they can tie up a lion.**” Our collective strength can manage any external challenge if we stay united. We have done it before: banishing nuclear weapons from our region, holding superpowers to account on climate, and negotiating powerful control over our ocean resources. We can do it again for the next generation of security challenges.

In thinking of the future, I am inspired by the image of a **lagoon**. In a lagoon, many different species of fish, coral, and plants coexist, each contributing to the health of the whole. The coral provides shelter, the mangroves nurse the young fish, the tides bring nourishment. Our Pacific community is like that – diverse yet interdependent, protected when all parts thrive together. Maritime security coordination is the process of tending this lagoon of cooperation – clearing away the crown-of-thorns starfish of crime and conflict, and ensuring the waters remain clear for all.

Conclusion – Our Voyage Ahead

To conclude, I return to the central idea: *Charting a Shared Course*. The Pacific has set its navigational star by the principles of **solidarity, sovereignty, and peace**. We have surveyed the

waters – acknowledging the perils that confront us – and we have prepared our canoe – through strategies, partnerships, and institutions – to meet them. What remains is for us to **paddle forward together**, with courage and clarity of purpose.

As we leave this workshop and return to our respective roles – be it in government, academia, security forces, or community leadership – let us carry forth a few key commitments:

- **We will champion Pacific-led solutions**, like the Oceans of Peace proposal, to keep our region free of militarized conflict and external domination. Our ocean homes must never again be battlefields – we owe that to our forebears and our children.
- **We will strengthen every link in our chain of coordination** – from local village watch committees alerting authorities about strange vessels, all the way to ministerial roundtables aligning national policies. No link is too small, and none too large; security is everyone’s business.
- **We will support one another**. In times of crisis, we will not hesitate to reach out and to respond. The success of one Pacific nation in securing its waters is a success for all; a lapse by one is a risk to all. Thus, we move up together. **“All in one canoe,”** as our voyaging ancestors taught.
- **We will invest in our future** – building the capacity of our youth, empowering our institutions of learning (like SINU and others) to be hubs of innovation and training, and embracing technologies that give us better awareness of our ocean.

If we do these things, I am confident that in ten years, in thirty years, the Pacific will stand as a global exemplar of regional maritime cooperation. We will have healthy fisheries feeding prosperous economies, secure sea lanes supporting trade and travel, minimal illicit activity, and above all, **an ocean environment that is at peace** – where our grandchildren can sail, fish, and live without fear.

In Solomon Islands we say “*Tagio tumas*” – thank you very much – as a deep expression of gratitude. I say *tagio tumas* to all of you here: for your dedication to this cause, for the solidarity you have shown, and for the wisdom you have shared. Let this keynote not be just words that drift away with the tide, but a call that echoes in actions we each take after. The university I represent pledges to do its part, including through the PGDipSS and research, to support the voyage we embark on collectively.

It has been said that “*we are not passengers on this canoe, we are the crew.*” Each of us has a paddle in hand. The direction is set – **a secure, sovereign, and peaceful Pacific**. Now, with God’s grace and our ancestors’ guidance, let us paddle together with all our strength. The horizon is bright, and our shared course is true.

Tagio tumas, vinaka vakalevu, fakaaue lahi, and thank you. Together, may we always ensure the Pacific Ocean remains an ocean of peace and prosperity for all our peoples. **Fa’afetai tele lava.**

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