**Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development (PRC4ECD) Ministers Meeting**

**10am – 12 noon, February 24th, 2023**

**Sofitel Resort**

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**Outcomes**

The 2023 Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development (PRC4ECD) Ministers meeting was convened at the Sofitel Resort & Spa on 24 February, 2023. The meeting was chaired by the Honourable Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molioo, Minister of Finance of Samoa, and the Honorable Lynda Tabuya, the Minister of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Fiji, supported by the Representative of UNICEF Pacific, Mr. Jonathan Veitch, as the Council Secretariat. The programme agenda is in Annex A.

2. The meeting was attended at Ministerial level by Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Tonga, Niue and Vanuatu. Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea were represented at Officials level. Government representatives were from the various ministries of education, finance, health, planning, internal affairs, women and children.

3. In attendance as observers were representatives of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and UNICEF Pacific. The full list of Participants is at Annex B.

4. The 3rd meeting of Ministers had two objectives; To understand current status of PRC4ECD and agree on priorities for 2023 – 2025; To determine ways of strengthening PRC4ECD, including mobilization of resources, sustainability and election of co-chairs.

# Opening Remarks

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5. Hon. Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molioo (Minister of Finance, Samoa), and Hon. Lynda Tabuya Acting Minister of Health & Minister of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Fiji (Co-Chairs of PRC4ECD)welcomed the participants and invited the Minister of Education from Samoa to offer a word of prayer after which they formallyopened the meeting. The Co-Chairs reminded the meeting of the purpose of the Council and outlined the objectives of the meeting.

**AGENDA 1: Review of Minutes from 2020 PRC4ECD Meeting**

6. **Jonathan Veitch, UNICEF Pacific Representative /PRC4ECD Secretariat** provided a brief update on the minutes of the 2nd meeting of PRC4ECD. The minutes were noted and accepted by the Ministers

**AGENDA 2: Status of PRC4ECD Work plan**

7. Steering Committee Co-Chair, Danielle Cochrane briefed the Ministers on the status of the implementation of the work plan and the meeting of the Steering Committee that had taken place on Day 1 of the ECD Forum. Cochrane acknowledged the work of the previous Co-Chairs and the Secretariat, reaffirming the Ministers of the extensive work that has been done on ECD at a national and regional level.

8. The Ministers were advised of the considerable support provided to the work on ECD in the region that has contributed to building the momentum of the work. This included the strengthened visibility through the PRC4ECD website. The Ministers were also advised of the progress made in terms of monitoring of work on ECD in the region with an update on this provided during the Forum

9. The Ministers were also made aware of some pending items particularly around the financing of the ECD work going forward with a partners roundtable scheduled for the afternoon. The updates were endorsed by the Ministers and the Co-Chairs moved the discussion to agenda item 3

**AGENDA 3: PRC4ECD Priorities for 2023-2025**

10. The Co-Chairs invited the Steering Committee to recommend priority actions for 2023 – 2025. Steering Committee Co-Chair Danielle Cochrane outlined the following recommendations to the Ministers

* + **Recommendation 1**: For a practical technical brief to operationalize Action Point 10 that has been endorsed by the Forum. The technical brief to outline what this will look like on the ground for the work on ECD. What partnerships need to be formed and what strategies can be implemented to increase collaboration with partners.
  + **Recommendation 2:** Strengthen regional collaboration and ulitise the regional structure and Ministerial sector meetings to ensure that ECD is front and center of these sectoral meetings. Utilize the meeting structures to ensure that leaders are presented with papers on ECD at these meetings. Make the PRC4ECD part of the regional infrastructure
  + **Recommendation 3:** Ministers to call for sustained financing for the work on ECD for the next 3 years. This to be raised at the Partners Roundtable
  + **Recommendation 4:** Ministers to mandate the Steering Committee to develop a costed 2 year work plan for the Council and Secretariat to better support the work in countries.

**Discussions and Deliberations**

*11.* In the discussions around Action Point 10 focusing on resilience building activities that ECD brings about the Honorable Esa Mona Faitala Ainu’u, the Minister for Natural Resources from Niue highlighted how working with Education and Climate Change has been a great challenge for them with issues with finance and budget constraints and also dealing with donors. In Niue, they are trying to integrate these issues into policy while also doing work on the ground. The Honorable Minister recommended that there be some consideration given to simplifying finance processes available through Climate Change and Natural resources with strong robust solutions needed to undertake this work, particularly in consideration of fundraising work going forward.

14. The Minister of Health from Vanuatu recommended that countries should receive funding to operationalize Action Point 10, but prior to this, pathways need to be created to access funds like the GCF Funds with UNICEF to assist with this. The Ministers supported this as an additional recommendation.

15. In relation to strengthening PRC4ECD and supporting its sustainability, the Co- Chair advised the Ministers on a pending item from the 2019 Pacific ECD Forum is clear action on a **reporting pathway for the council to the Pacific Leaders Forum**. This is in line with the mandate from the Leaders in their meeting in Nauru for a whole-of-government approach in addressing ECD. .

16. The Ministers deliberated over the pathways that ECD should take and also the competing priorities within countries especially in relation to the remoteness of communities and the challenges of reaching remote island communities. The Co-Chair recommended that the challenge for all of the Ministers was to ensure that the issues that concern ECD remain on the agenda and are financed adequately

17. The Co-Chair invited the Ministers to consider a recommendation of the Steering Committee to promote the **bi-annual Pacific ECD Forum as a regular standing meeting for the region** and invited PIFS to recommend concrete actions by which ECD meetings/forum can be part of the regional standing meetings.

18. A representative from PIFS, provided advice to the Ministers on the process of ensuring the work on ECD was being reflected in the regional sectoral priorities with a key consideration the need for alignment with the leaders agenda. This was done through the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, working with the secretariat to ensure it was reflected in the communiqué. The leaders vision needs to be reflected at the centre of the Outcomes Document from the Forum and this can be operationalized through the People Centered Development pillar with an update on how this rolls out to be provided to the Ministers later in the year. The Ministers were advised that in the policy coordination space, there was good regional coordination with UNICEF/SPC and PIFS working collaboratively together.

19. The Minister for Education from the Cook Islands noted the need for Ministers to push harder for a regular PIFS meeting for children.

20. The Co-Chair drew the Ministers attention to the need to collectively mobilize even more funds for the remainder of the council workplan, to continue to support regional initiatives with a specific call from the council to partners to mobilise even more resources for regional and national initiatives on ECD, including funding, south-south cooperation, capacity-building, and advocacy on ECD.

21. The Ministers were also invited to mandate the Steering Committee and UNICEF to **draft 2-year costed workplan for the council**, informed by national consultations across the Pacific on how regional initiatives of the council can better support in-country progress on ECD. The Ministers were advised that following the partners roundtable, the work plan would be updated with ongoing discussions with partners to finalise a sustained level of support.

**AGENDA 5: Election of Co-Chairs**

*22.* The Co-Chair invited the Ministers to deliberate over the next agenda item noting that the Ministers are to elect two Co-Chairs if council as per the Council’s ToR. The Ministers were updated on the new Co-Chairs for the Steering Committee following the recent meeting with the Co-Chair thanking Secretary Danielle Cochrane of Cook Islands and Secretary James Fong of Fiji – for their support and welcome the new Chairs of the Steering Committee the CEO of the Ministry of Community Development in Samoa and the Secretary from the Ministry of Finance in RMI.

23. The Ministers were advised that the only nominations for consideration had been submitted to UNICEF prior to the meeting. UNICEF advised the Ministers of the nominees noting the requirement in the ToR for one Co-Chair from the Finance Sector and one Co-Chair from the Social Sector.

24. The Ministers agreed to openly discuss the nominees in the Pacific way and not to conduct a secret ballot. The Vice President from Kiribati acknowledged the nomination but respectfully withdrew. The Minister from RMI proposed that the two current Co-Chairs continue in the roles for the next 2 years as they had both just assumed the roles and respectfully withdrew his nomination.

25. The Ministers agreed to endorse the two current Co-Chairs to lead for the next two years. The Ministers then deliberated around the possibility of the Co-Chairs being rotated amongst the member countries represented on the Council and also the rotation of the host country.

26. The Ministers were advised that the rotation of Co-Chairs was outlined in the ToR for the Council. The Council agreed on the proposal for rotation of Co-Chair and host country and agreed on the next meeting to be held in February 2025, with the dates to be confirmed.

27. The Minister for Education Samoa proposed to the meeting that the Co-Chair was also to host the next meeting and proposed that Samoa host the next meeting in February 2025.

28. The Ministers agreed with this proposal with Samoa to host the next ECD meeting in 2025.

29. The Co-Chairs thanked the Ministers for their faith in them and reaffirmed their commitment to the Council and to the highlighting the issues faced by children over the next two years.

30. The Co-Chairs thanked the Ministers for their participation in the meeting and closed the meeting