



PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF MINISTERS
9th CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT



COOK
ISLANDS
2023
52nd Pacific Islands Forum
Leaders Meeting



Summary Report

Participation of H.E. Mr Agio Pereira, Minister of
the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, in the

52ND PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS MEETING

November 6th to 10th, 2023

Cook Islands



P R E S I D E N C Y
O F T H E C O U N C I L
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9th C O N S T I T U T I O N A L G O V E R N M E N T



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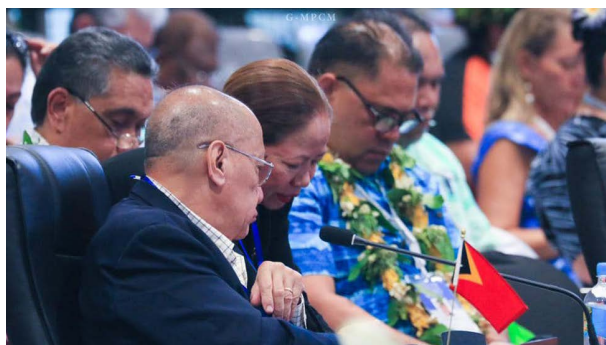
Cook Islands

Together with the esteemed delegates and on the recommendation of H.E. the Prime Minister, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, I represented Timor-Leste at the **52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting¹** in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, which took place between November 6th and 10th this year, with the theme **“Our Voices, Our Choices, Our Pacific Way: Promote, Partner, Prosper”**. It was an honour to take part in the high-level forum. The final round table debate was attended by 18 members of the Pacific Islands Forum: Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, French Polynesia, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The Pacific Islands Forum is the regional organisation that brings together political leaders from various Pacific island nations and territories to promote cooperation and dialogue between Pacific countries and territories on issues of common interest, including political, economic, social and environmental problems. Timor-Leste participated in the Pacific Islands Forum as a special observer.

A. Participation in the meeting of Pacific leaders of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States

I had the opportunity to take part in the meeting of the Pacific members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), which took place on November 7th on the sidelines of the 52nd Leaders’ Meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The Pacific ACP Leaders’ Meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Mark Brown.

OACPS is a multilateral organisation comprising 79 countries from Africa, the Caribbe-



¹ Government Portal news on the 52nd PIFLM: <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=34975&n=1&lang=en>



an and the Pacific with cooperation relations with the European Union (EU). The organisation was created in 1975 and aims to promote economic development, regional integration and political cooperation between its member states and the EU. The current framework agreement for this partnership is the Cotonou Agreement², and it is currently being transitioned into the Samoa Agreement, marking a new era of regional cooperation and shared aspirations. Timor-Leste joined the Cotonou Agreement in 2007.

The Samoa Agreement, to be signed on November 15th, aims to strengthen cooperation between the EU and OACPS member states, emphasising priorities such as human rights, democracy, peace, human development, sustainable growth, environmental sustainability, migration and mobility. The agreement consists of a common basis and three additional regional protocols designed to meet the specific needs of the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. In my speech at the meeting, I reiterated Timor-Leste's commitment to the Pacific Islands Forum. I urged the PIF leaders to reach a consensus to move forward quickly with the priorities of the Pacific region.

On behalf of Timor-Leste, I stressed the commitment to strengthen relations with the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States. I highlighted the importance of this meeting, as it preceded the signing of the Samoa Agreement and created the space to discuss the priorities of the Pacific region and the challenges in the run-up to the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP28, which will take place in Dubai between November 30th and December 12th. Mark Brown also emphasised that "climate change remains the greatest threat to our security, and we must seize every opportunity and every forum to discuss it".

² Cotonou Agreement: [20130605ATT67340EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/default/files/20130605ATT67340EN.pdf)

B. Bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting³

On November 8th, 2023, I held three bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting on bilateral commitments to strengthen bilateral cooperation with OACPS, Italy and Australia.

1. Meeting with the Secretary General of OACPS⁴ - At the first meeting, I had a productive discussion with Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, Secretary General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States. During the meeting, we discussed the work of this organisation. Timor-Leste is a member and is part of the OACPS Bureau. The OACPS Secretary-General mentioned that Timor-Leste would chair the OACPS Council of Ministers and co-chair the joint ministerial session between OACPS and the European Union (EU), which will take place in Samoa on November 14th and 15th. The new Partnership Agreement between the EU and OACPS will be signed on that occasion. The Samoa Agreement, as it is called, will succeed the previous Cotonou Agreement. The agreement consists of a common basis and three regional protocols designed to meet the specific needs of the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions.



³ Government Portal news on the bilateral meetings: <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=35038&n=1&lang=en>

⁴ RTTL news on the meeting with the OACPS Secretary General: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRvyXVCVY6U



2. *Meeting with the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Government of Italy, Giorgio Silli*⁵ – During the meeting with the Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Government of Italy, we discussed the bonds of friendship that unite Italy and Timor-Leste and issues related to bilateral cooperation. We mentioned that Timor-Leste is predominantly Catholic, just like Italy, which is another reason for the two countries to strengthen bilateral relations further in the future.

At the last meeting of the day, I had a productive reunion with Pat Conroy, the Australian Government's Minister for International Development and the Pacific. During the meeting, we discussed Pat Conroy's long-standing emotional connection as an activist for the Timorese cause during the struggle for national liberation.

3. *Meeting with the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Pat Conroy MP*⁶ – Given that Pat Conroy is the Australian Government's head of the Pacific and Australian Labour Mobility Program (PALM) and the seasonal work program, one of the main topics of the meeting was labour mobility and the possibility of increasing the number of Timorese workers participating in this programme, as well as the desire to broaden the scope of the Labour Mobility Programmes to include technical and skilled areas, such as hospitality. Labour mobility is covered by the bilateral agreement between the two countries. The Memorandum

⁵ RTTL news on the meeting with the Italian Undersecretary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D6J_YQKOfM

⁶ RTTL report on the meeting with the Australian Government: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eKyftT5cvQ>

dum of Understanding was signed in 2022 (by the then-Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Adaljiza Magno and Marise Payne). Currently, there are 4,466 Timorese (this figure was provided by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, DEWR, updated to September 30th, 2023) working in various sectors, such as horticulture, the meat industry, hospitality and a small number in the aged care sector. Also discussed was the situation of Timorese workers currently working in Australia, who have raised concerns about the high cost of accommodation and transport. Workers pay between 50 and 70 US dollars a week to share a minibus or car to take them to work, and the distances are short. Some agencies seem to be scrupulous when deducting these high costs and are causing workers to break their contracts to look for other employment opportunities, or what is commonly known as ‘absconding’.

I also had the opportunity to mention the ASEAN Summit in Melbourne, which will occur from March 3rd to 5th, 2024. I mentioned the confirmation of H.E. Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão’s presence, given H.E. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s invitation in Jakarta. During the productive meeting, the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Pat Conroy, noted that Australia has frequently emphasised that it supports Timor-Leste’s ambition to join ASEAN to facilitate its economic development alongside Southeast Asia. Australia is Timor-Leste’s leading economic partner and is focused on helping Timor-Leste diversify its economy and grow its private sector through development cooperation and labour mobility.





The visit to the Cook Islands also coincided with the presence of the Portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs, João Cravinho.

4. *A brief conversation with the Portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs, João Gomes Cravinho*⁷. The discussion covered, among other issues, the impact of the crisis on Portugal and bilateral relations and Portugal's perspective on the importance of the sea in its national context. RTTL and GMN interviewed Minister João Cravinho. During the interview, he said that the ocean is an integral part of Portugal's DNA, emphasising the fact that Portugal faces the ocean. He reaffirmed that Portugal will continue to work in Samoa at the OACPS meeting within the framework of the Pacific partnership, emphasising the importance for Portugal of maintaining relations with island nations and close ties with nations united by the oceans.

In all the bilateral meetings, I also presented the main Programme priorities of the 9th Constitutional Government for its term of office.

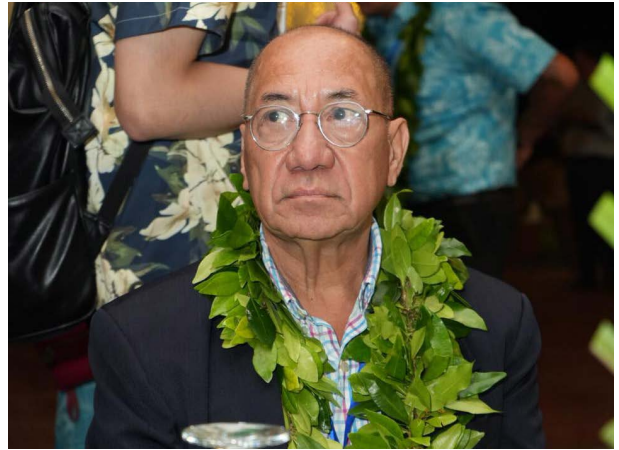
⁷ RTTL interview with the Portuguese Minister: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ukxvny9IE0

C. High-Level Thematic Dialogue on Pacific Prosperity in 2050

Timor-Leste also participated in the High-Level Thematic Dialogue on Pacific Prosperity in 2050. The PIF remains steadfast in its commitment to realising the ambitious 2050 Strategy for the Pacific Blue Continent (2050 Strategy), the blueprint for the region’s future.

The main objectives of the PIF Leaders’ Dialogue Session were as follows:

- Involving civil society, the private sector, forum observers and forum dialogue partners in substantive discussions on the main thematic areas of Strategy 2050, with a specific focus on “resource mobilisation”;
- Establish “commitment agreements” with partners to be discussed at the Leaders’ Meeting, outlining their points of view, concrete actions, assigned responsibilities, deadlines and resource contributions directed towards the “means of implementation” of the Strategy; and
- Create a reporting mechanism for Forum Leaders to review, discuss and approve the commitment agreement on an annual cycle to ensure alignment and coordination in executing the Strategy 2050 implementation plan, promoting partnerships and genuine commitments.





D. Challenges

This is how we have contributed to Timor-Leste's prestige as a sovereign and independent State, strengthening our image as an independent nation that walks together with the entire Pacific, African and Caribbean region. Also, bear in mind that all the actions of the Government of Timor-Leste have the potential to impact the Timorese people significantly.

Thus, the current challenges for Timor-Leste include how the Government of Timor-Leste can best follow up on ongoing issues. For example, Timor-Leste's Ambassador to New Zealand could also be accredited to the Cook Islands and Samoa. We should provide the Ambassador with full institutional support so that he can bring good results and concrete benefits to Timor-Leste.

E. Results and Next Steps

During the 52nd PIFLM, the presence of Timor-Leste was very productive, not only in representing H.E. the Prime Minister, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão but also in our proactive action in all the debates and sessions. Timor-Leste also organised some parallel meetings with the Secretary General of OACPS, Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Government of Italy, Giorgio Silli, and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific of the Government of Australia, Pat Conroy.

F. Meetings in Darwin with officials from Parliament and the Government of the Northern Territory of Australia

On his return from the Cook Islands, the Minister for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Agio Pereira, was on an official visit to Darwin, Australia. On November 16th, 2023, he had two meetings in the Northern Territory (NT) Parliament of Australia, with Mark Monaghan, Speaker of the NT Legislative Assembly and Nicole Manison, Deputy Chief Minister of the NT Government, to discuss the ongoing strategic partnership between Timor-Leste and the NT Government.

The agreement covers various strategic sectors such as labour mobility, trade, business, agriculture, tourism, oil and mining, among other areas.

Given that this strategic partnership agreement also serves as an extension for the management of the Pacific-Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) programme, and following the meeting between Minister Agio Pereira and Pat Conroy, Minister for International Development and the Pacific of the Australian Government, one of the main issues discussed at these meetings was labour mobility and the possibility of increasing the number of Timorese workers participating in this programme. The desire to expand the Labour Mobility Program to include technical and skilled areas, such as hospitality, was also expressed.

The strengthening of the partnership between the National Parliament of Timor-Leste and the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory of Australia was also discussed.



G. Conclusion and suggestions

In conclusion, the speeches and meetings at the 52nd Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting 2023 will have an extraordinary impact on Timor-Leste in several areas. It will also contribute to improving some issues directly related to the Timorese abroad.

The OACPS meetings added value to our presence at the 52nd PIFLM because of their political impact, as Timor-Leste is also part of the OACPS Bureau. During these meetings, the conclusion of the Samoa Agreement, a new agreement to follow from the Cotonou Agreement, was discussed. This agreement is crucial for our State, which has been an adhering member of the Cotonou Agreement since 2007 and has been a member of the ACP Pacific group of countries since 2004.

The 9th Constitutional Government, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, H.E. Bendito Freitas, is travelling to Apia, Samoa, to lead the meeting of the OACPS Council of Ministers and also to co-chair the joint ministerial session between OACPS and the European Union.

Strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation through the Timorese Embassies in New Zealand and Australia so that they are accredited, and their work covers the Cook Islands, Samoa and the Fiji Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, respectively. Strengthen a section within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide support with human resources, namely experienced ambassadors. Attend meetings in the Pacific region, especially next year in Tonga.

Ensure the support of the national media in disseminating information about all these activities that impact the Southeast Asian region. Ensure more educational news coverage to inform the public, with solid coverage of the main activities.

It is geopolitically crucial for Timor-Leste to be a full permanent member of the Pacific Islands Forum, and Timor-Leste's top representatives must be experienced diplomats capable of representing the country at the highest level to deliver concrete results.



H. News and stories on Timor-Leste's participation in the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting

Government portal:

Timor-Leste to Participate in the 52nd Leaders' Meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum

<http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=34975&n=1&lang=en>



Minister Agio Pereira strengthens bilateral co-operation with OACPS, Italy and Australia on the sidelines of the Pacific Islands Forum

<http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=35038&n=1&lang=en>

Minister Agio Pereira meets with parliamentary and government officials from the Northern Territory of Australia to discuss strategic partnership

<http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=35133&n=1&lang=en>



EIN News

Timor-Leste participates in Pacific ACP Leaders Meeting

https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/667314040/timor-leste-participates-in-pacific-acp-leaders-meeting



RTTL News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRvyXVCVY6U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Da5stg1smM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ukxv9lE0>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6D6J_YQKOfM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyLJbadhanM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eKyftT5cvQ>



GMN News

<https://www.youtube.com/live/rP7nlJ0B3fo?si=IHT-jWibPpwMV-l2>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSoGjr367sg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6r54lQJtX0>

<https://www.youtube.com/live/64s655OGN-Q8?si=fK33rDC2kUtrqv0L>

<https://www.youtube.com/live/tQLMyaOY-RKA?si=ysRdkDOmpsk96F1H>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RB9GG4nvRg>

I. National delegation at the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting

The national delegation, led by H.E. **Agio Pereira**, Minister for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, was also comprised:

- **Felicidade Guterres**, Timor-Leste's Ambassador to New Zealand;
- **Ika Moniz**, National Policy and Public Relations Advisor to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers;
- **Widia Santos**, Executive Secretary to the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers;
- **Nerio Ribeiro**, Photographer for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers;
- **Jeremias Madeira**, RTTL National Journalist; and
- **Tito Miguel Silva**, GMN National Journalist.





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