1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The rationale of this concept note is largely influenced by key trends affecting the region together with the concerns of the churches in Oceania. Fundamental to the concerns of the churches are issues surrounding the key values upon which the people of Oceania identify, converse, communicate and relate to one another. The envisaged goals of the Pacific Plan, as noted below, are indeed worth striving for, and the churches, for their part, will also contribute toward their realisation.

- Governance and leadership
- Development in the Pacific
- Peace and Security
- Climate Change and Resettlement of Populations
- Cultural and social cohesion

1.2 However, while these goals or the expected returns on our countries’ investment into the Pacific Plan are not contested, it is rather the fundamental shifts occasioned by how these key issues are framed and portrayed within the Plan, in the region and internationally that is of grave concern. Consequently, the key values of sufficiency and solidarity, inclusiveness and participation are contested as to their validity to how the people of Oceania ought to live and develop today, as envisaged by those outside of the region. This concept note therefore looks at the key shifts and proposes an alternative Pacific Plan framework. It tables 5 key proposals for consideration in a new form of Pacific regionalism.

2.0 MANDATE

2.1 The mandate for this concept note derives from the Pacific Conference of Churches Executive Committee. At its 2010 meeting, the Executive Committee, expressing the wish of the churches and their constituencies, took note of the developmental challenges facing their people. This resulted in the church leaders’ decision to revisit the issue of Pacific identity and regionalism. The PCC member churches and their constituencies comprise about 6.5 million people of a total of approximately 8.5 million people in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand. This, in effect, makes PCC the largest religious and social network in the region, and by implication, has the greatest potential to influence national and regional issues and policies.

3.1 SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 This section is a summary analysis of key trends in the region as Oceania churches see them. It highlights a combination of five key issues which are fundamental to our life as Pacific people. These are as follows: (i) governance and leadership; (ii) development in the Pacific; (iii) peace and security; (iv) climate change and resettlement of populations; (v) cultural and social cohesion.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

3.1.1 Over the past decade, Oceania region has been compared to the Sub-Sahara countries in Northern Africa. This is exemplified in concepts like “failed states” and “Arc of instability” advanced by academics and aid officials of the developed countries in the region. While a certain degree of veracity cannot be argued, there is much that the indicators of governance and leadership in the
current Pacific Plan do not account for. The notions of sufficiency and solidarity, the accommodation of “strangers”, and inclusiveness and participation inherent in most Pacific societies are not apparently noted. Despite the fact that many of our island states fall short of these fundamental values in the times we live in, due largely to the encroachment of the 18th century enlightenment idea of “individuality”, these remain central to most of our Pacific cultures and identities.

3.1.2 Nevertheless, there are experiences of corruption, mismanagement and lack of transparency in some of our island states, most notably in natural resource extraction such as mining, logging and fishing. There are charges of uneven and inequitable development, where rural and poor urban areas receive less assistance than urban areas in general. There is no denying the fact that poverty and inequality is increasing in most Pacific countries. This is partly the consequence of bad governance and leadership in the management of our respective countries’ resources, and the lack of foresight and understanding of development. But it is largely due to our over reliance on the neo-liberal economic ideology of “endless growth” to booster what we are told to be development to the detriment of the well-being of our ecology, the peace and security of our Pacific communities, and the bonds of solidarity that held our communities together over centuries.

3.1.3 One of the key challenges, therefore, is to revisit and re-articulate the forms of leadership and governance in the current Pacific Plan that will, in the long term, give rise to a developmental model that is premised on sufficiency and solidarity, inclusiveness and participation; one that is no longer fuelled by the “race to the bottom” and the “endless growth” rationale for development. A further challenge to governance and leadership in Oceania is how to cater for the rising aspirations of citizens for greater recognition of their human rights and expressions of individuality, and economic and political participation. The pressure on existing resources and infrastructure due to population growth, and the impacts of climate change add to the need for a review of the current definitions of governance and leadership.

3.1.4 At the same time, strengthening democracy and its key institutions in most of our Pacific countries is a vital task. This is because our people’s exercise of their freedoms and responsibilities, and their participation in social and economic development will depend much on how well these institutions function. But it is task that has to be done by our Pacific people themselves and not prescribed to us on how it should be done. Oceania house of freedom and responsibility in the next 2 decades will be different from an Australian or New Zealand house. But space and freedom must be allowed for us to make our own mistakes in the process, provided always that the essential moral principles of human dignity, rights and responsibilities, and our values of sufficiency, solidarity, inclusiveness and participation are observed.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC

3.1.5 One of the unsettling issues in the region is what is called the “manufacturing of consumer desires”. True that democracy and issues of governance in some of our Pacific island states is far from the ideal expectations of the western world, we, nevertheless, still preserve our oral and cultural traditions and our religion that remind us that we are more than what we consume. However, the neo-liberal economic ethic, which drives much of our economic thinking and policies today, is the direct opposite of our ideal value of sufficiency. But which of the two will make our people happier – the consumerist idea of “more and more” or the idea of sufficiency? This is a question for all of us to seriously ponder.

3.1.6 The question “when is enough, enough?” then becomes a fundamental issue in the type of governance and leadership models in operation in most of our island states. In fact, it is hard not to be sceptical and hence, believe that current governance and leadership models and their indicators adopted in our region are far removed from the basic needs and developmental frameworks of our people. Consequently, developmental indicators in most of our island states are showing worsening levels of poverty and inequality. This is partly due to the exponential growth developmental model that most of our island states adopted over the past 40 years, and partly due to the economic ideology that accompanied it: development means more and more economic growth. The end result is that most of our Pacific island states are told to undertake political and economic reforms in the mistaken
belief that what we had and which served our countries and islands for centuries in terms of political
governing systems, community developmental models and social security processes cannot deliver
the required “growth”; there is simply no room for alternative thinking.

3.1.8 Evidence regarding the state of our island economies and their performances in addressing poverty
and inequality are well documented. What has not been highlighted nor mainstreamed are the local
economic and ecological initiatives that are developed from within the local communities such as
environmental conservation projects by villages, “green” developmental projects by churches, as well
as an alternative financial system such as the kastom ikonomi of Vanuatu.

3.1.9 It needs to be recognised that “more is better” is contingent on mainstreaming the idea of
“individualism” and reducing or marginalising the idea of “community”. This is particularly
revealing in the current negotiations that some of our island countries are having with the EU on free
trade which involved the privatisation of land. Evidently, not only land but also water and food
sources are either negotiated away or items for negotiation. Needless to say, that fundamental to any
development of economic alternative is the question of sufficiency in regards to the fulfilment of basic
needs and healthy regard of the ecology, and solidarity as it relates to sustaining community life and
relationships.

PEACE AND SECURITY

3.1.10 In examining the crisis of development in the region, it is important to understand that most of our
Oceanic economies, in subsistence times, know when development has reached its limits or simply
know when enough is enough. This is based on an understanding of the human person: the human
person (defined as communal) is limited and finite, and a “maximiser” of social and political
relationships.

3.1.11 Seen in this perspective, poverty and inequality in our Pacific island states is more than the lack of
basic needs. It is essentially about the lack of social and political relationships - the poor person is
one who has no relatives and friends, and who does not have the connections to the distribution and
services networks of the community. This does not imply the absence of poverty in material terms
and inequality as in access to opportunities. These do exist but this view of the human person is
precisely to put limits to our human ambitions (that what we can do, we should do) and equally
important, to provide for those who lack the basic necessities of life. This is predicated on the
strength and vibrancy of the community which our Pacific societies have maintained over centuries.
Community living and its strengthening is vital to the security of our people as well as to the
eradication of poverty. Hence, investing in and fostering social and political relationships between
our island states and our people is investing in the peace and security of our region.

3.1.12 But today, this view of the human person has been deemed irrelevant at best and detrimental to
economic growth at worst. The investment into building social and political relationships in the
interest of peace and security for our Pacific communities and island countries by our people is
suddenly abandoned. Instead, the peace and security of the region is vested in the protection of
property, and individuals’ personal security and not so much in relationships. Current basis for peace
and security as reasoned in the Pacific Plan is the strengthening of the democratic institutions, and the
governance and leadership components. But these are premised on the idea of the human person as
maximiser of material goods and the sum total of all his/her wants. This is grossly inadequate to
achieving the kind of peace and security Pacific people know and wish for. We are much more than
simply consumers of goods and services.

3.1.13 There are interests that need to be protected such as equitable development and the peace and
security of our respective Pacific communities. But these interests need to be based on the principles
of sufficiency and solidarity and not on the “more is better” or “growth means more” principle of
neo-liberal economics. We need an alternative framework and process that take into account
Oceania’s view of the human person.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESETTLEMENT OF POPULATIONS
3.1.14 Climate change and its impacts, fuelled by a view of development that pays no regard to the health and well-being of both our human economy and our natural ecology, is the clearest evidence of how unsustainable the neo-liberal economic model that we adopted for our development. This economic growth model, which is the premise of the Pacific Plan, clearly does not work to the betterment of our people and the environment. Consequently, our atoll nations and coastal areas on our larger island states are feeling the worst effects of climate change. Even more so, the potential to wipe an entire ecosystem is very real and with it the notion of human community and common identity. There are fundamental principles that speak to, and remind us of our humanity, and some of these are the sense of continuity and permanency.

3.1.15 The lack of policy strength to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally is a huge stumbling block in the effort to slow down the adverse effects of climate change. Our region, let alone the world, is not doing enough to combat global warming which could trigger a mass movement of people and have serious consequences for security. In fact, resettlement of populations, particularly from the atoll nations of our Pacific, is a real possibility. Experts, citing the examples of such countries as Bangladesh and parts of China, Indonesia and Vietnam, have said that millions of people in densely populated, low-lying, developing countries might be forced to move by rising sea levels. For some of our atoll nations, it is not only the loss of land and infrastructure as well as impacts on health but most disturbingly, the loss of identity, self-determination, and the social networks that give meaning to who they are as a people.

3.1.16 The sad reality is that this has already begun to occur in some of our atoll nation states. What is indeed poignant to point out from the perspective of Oceania churches is that with all the scientific evidence in the past 10 years, our Pacific Island Forum leaders chose to ignore this life-threatening issue and instead presented a weak statement on climate change to the COP15 meeting in 2009. Oceania island states must do their part in investing much more than we currently do into “green” energy, and development and infrastructure projects. One of the key challenges to our Pacific island states in 5 to 10 years time is the resettlement of populations due to sea level rise. The solution to this impending issue lies with us in Oceania and it is imperative that regional discussions on this should urgently begin among our Pacific leaders.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL COHESION

3.1.17 Cultural and social development are key components of a new form of regionalism. The current Pacific Plan envisaged exchanges and research into cultural themes. But it is not known whether the results of these initiatives are factored into economic and developmental policies of each of the island states or in regional organisations such as the SPC or the Forum Secretariat. It (Pacific Plan) also avoids the issue of accommodation, although reference is made to it in relation to the security interest of Australia and New Zealand. It is ironic that Pacific island people need visas to enter these countries yet those from Europe and the US do not, which negates the idea of regionalism promoted by the Pacific Plan.

3.1.18 Oceania region is neither uniform nor homogenous. In fact, as we all know, the region is full of contradictions and similarities, beautifully diverse yet share similar linguistic roots among countries in the north, those in the east and those in the west. The point is that the idea of regionalism is much more than our economic and political interests. More importantly, it is about our value of accommodation, based on our experiences of our diversity, and the ease with which Pacific people welcome strangers into our homes, lands and countries. The lesson here is that our cultural and social cohesion in the times we live in is dependent on the strength and ability to accommodate and invest in it. This is an antithesis to the neo-liberal view to reducing or eliminating the diversities of cultures and social relationships to a single market of commodities. Sadly, the Pacific Plan has become the vehicle for this.

3.1.19 It is for this reason that Oceania church leaders came together in Fiji in 2004 where they deliberated and produced a document titled “Island of Hope”. It is largely a document that is cognizant of the current realities (as noted above) in Oceania, and that is gravely concerned about the fundamental influences and negative impacts of economic globalisation that is driven by the neo-liberal economic
principle of “endless growth”. Yet, it has a hopeful message. In order to avoid “the race to the bottom” among Pacific people, the messages of sufficiency and solidarity, inclusiveness and participation that are inherent in our Pacific cultures must be reaffirmed. The key pillars as envisaged by Oceania churches are: *family life; relationships; environment; spirituality and traditional economy*. None of these feature prominently in the current Pacific Plan but if they are, they are regarded as possible unexpected outcomes at best.

4.0 RESOURCES REQUIRED

4.1 There are 3 important resources in this endeavour:
- Oceania Island Leaders’ political mandate required to implement the above proposals;
- the civil, religious and traditional networks in our Pacific island countries;
- the financial resources to be invested into the background work that needs to be carried out in the next 2 years.

4.2 These will require visionary leaders who believe that an alternative future is indeed possible for our people. The 1970s provided us with similar leadership, which gave us the concept of the “Pacific Way”. Today, Oceania region requires no less visionary and pragmatic leaders. In view of the work proposed above, we recommend that a mandate of 2 years is given to the Pacific Conference of Churches to return with more substantial feedback on the proposals above.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 As noted in the introduction, this concept note is about envisaging a new form of Oceanic regionalism; one that is marked by politics and economics of sufficiency and solidarity. The key goals in such an undertaking are to strengthen family life, our traditional economies, the principle of “maximising social and political relationships”, and the respect and holistic perspective our Pacific people have for our environment. In essence, this proposed concept is about creating the space for Oceania people to claim it as their own.

5.2 Our political leaders must lead the way. It is about a new form of regionalism, one that gives legitimate meaning to the notion of self-determination; that the course of our Pacific history will be one that is chartered by our people and their descendents.

Pacifically Yours

Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi
General Secretary
Only 52 per cent of children are enrolled in education and even fewer complete their education. 30 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. 53 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 12 per cent of the rural population has access to adequate sanitation.

Poverty Line. 40 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 58 per cent of children are enrolled in education. PNG is facing the threat of an HIV and AIDS epidemic. 61 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Vanuatu: 40 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. 40 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 58 per cent of children are enrolled in education. Fiji: 25 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. 53 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 12 per cent of the rural population has access to adequate sanitation. Samoa: 20 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. Lack of employment for young people is a critical issue. Many young people must travel overseas to find work. Solomon Islands: Only 52 per cent of children are enrolled in education and even fewer complete their education. 30 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 77 per cent of adults are literate.

Poverty is understood, at least by the churches in the Pacific, to mean having enough for our needs. This includes social needs, materials needs, spiritual needs and psychological needs. However, used in this context, it means the having enough for a human community’s material needs in respect to the state of the ecology and its capacity to provide these needs. Solidarity means, not merely to understand the other’s difficulties but more deeply about the stance, which in this case, Pacific communities make on agreed moral principles such as human dignity, social justice, human equality and compassion.

In 2005, it was estimated that 20% of the population in the Pacific island countries is aged 15 – 24 (UNICEF, SPC and United Nations Population Fund, “The State of Pacific Youth, 2005” (Suva, Fiji, 2005), pg11)

Timothy Garton Ash made similar observations in relation to the “imposition” of democracy worldwide and in particular, China. He says, “The wiser conclusion, surely, is that it’s not for us to say in what order others should do things... it’s up to them to decide. They should know best what is best for them. And if they don’t, they must have the right to make their own mistakes.” (Free World, Penguin Books, 2004, pg246)

Every year, the magazine The Economist publishes a detailed report known as, “The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index”, is an attempt to measure democracy and classify and rank the nations of the world accordingly. In 2006, a list of 167 nations was published with an index of democracy by regime type. Out of 167 nations, 28 nations have been classified as full democracies; 54 nation states (including Papua New Guinea) as flawed democracies; 30 nation States (including Fiji) as hybrid regimes. Hybrid regimes describe governance models that include partial customary institutions, partial state institutions and civil society institutions. Of the Pacific Island nations, only Papua New Guinea (rank 59/overall score 6.54) and Fiji (rank 91/score 5.66) are included in the list of 167 nations. This is one reason that the churches will work towards finding suitable democratic models that serve the needs and interests of Pacific people.

Papua New Guinea: 38 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. According to education enrolment rates, only 41 per cent of children are receiving an education. PNG is facing the threat of an HIV and AIDS epidemic. 61 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Vanuatu: 40 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. 40 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 58 per cent of children are enrolled in education. Fiji: 25 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. 53 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 12 per cent of the rural population has access to adequate sanitation. Samoa: 20 per cent of the population lives below the National Basic Needs Poverty Line. Lack of employment for young people is a critical issue. Many young people must travel overseas to find work. Solomon Islands: Only 52 per cent of children are enrolled in education and even fewer complete their education. 30 per cent of the population does not have access to safe water. Only 77 per cent of adults are literate.

As Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, said during the COP15 meeting in Copenhagen in 2009 in an interview Reuters, that climate warming and sea level rise could cause the possibility of climate refugees and the huge disruption to peace and security, and to economies (REUTERS NEWS SERVICE http://www.planetark.org/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/38588/story.htm) He further added that if global warming trends continue at the moment, and the models suggest that they are and maybe doing so more rapidly, they will have significant impact on where people can live, grow food and whether people will have to leave... "We will have disease spreading and it will have implications in terms of global trade, perhaps... The potential for conflict arising from the consequences of global warming are major trends that we now see".

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted that by the turn of the century, temperatures would have risen by up to 4 degrees centigrade and sea levels would have rose by up to 60 centimetres. World sea levels rose 3.1 mm per
year from 1993 to 2003, according to IPCC. According to some other predictions, the oceans may rise by at least 18cm by 2100.