

Honiara at the helm: Pacific unity in a climate of uncertainty

by Transform Aqorau

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The leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) will gather in Honiara, Solomon Islands, from 8-12 September 2025 for the **54th annual summit** of the region's premier political body. This year's meeting carries extra significance: it is the first time in decades that Solomon Islands has hosted the Forum. For the host, it is both a moment of national pride and an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the Pacific family. The theme — lumi Tugeda: Act Now for an Integrated Blue Pacific Continent (the initial phrase is Pijin for “we together”) — reflects a collective urgency around issues that go to the heart of Pacific survival: climate change, ocean health, peace and security, people's wellbeing and digital connectivity.

Climate change is the defining concern for Forum members. Rising sea levels, intensifying cyclones and saltwater intrusion already threaten lives and livelihoods. In Honiara, leaders will sign the **Pacific Resilience Facility treaty**, relating to a home-grown financing mechanism that allows countries rapid access to funds after disasters. This marks a significant step toward self-reliance, with the facility expected to be operational by 2026.

Beyond finance, leaders will push to keep the Pacific's voice strong in global climate diplomacy. They will reaffirm **support for Australia's bid** to co-host COP31 in 2026 as the first “Pacific COP”, and welcome the **International Court of Justice advisory opinion** on climate change obligations, a product of Pacific leadership.

Another focus is climate mobility. **A regional framework** adopted last year guides how communities forced to relocate due to climate impacts can do so with dignity and cultural preservation. Leaders are expected to reaffirm that adaptation includes not just protecting islands but also protecting people when staying is no longer possible.

Security discussions will be framed by the **Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration**, a regional compact designed to keep the Pacific a zone of trust and dialogue in an era of growing militarisation. The declaration builds on the **2018 Boe Declaration**, which broadened security to include climate and human dimensions, and connects

to the 40th anniversary of the Rarotonga Treaty that made the Pacific nuclear-free.

The declaration commits the region to proactive conflict prevention and to maintaining sovereignty in the face of external pressures. For Solomon Islands, once a recipient of a Pacific-led peacekeeping mission, endorsing this vision is deeply symbolic: it signals the capacity of Pacific nations to manage their own peace and security on Pacific terms.

At its heart, the Forum is about regional unity. Leaders will discuss reforms to the Pacific regional architecture to ensure institutions deliver on the [2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#), adopted in 2022 as the long-term roadmap. This review is expected to shape how the Forum engages with partners, balances sub-regional interests and handles sensitive issues like self-determination in New Caledonia and in the [Indonesian provinces](#) often referred to collectively as West Papua.

A distinctive feature this year is the [absence of Dialogue Partners](#). The Forum agreed to defer the annual partners' dialogue until 2026, allowing leaders to focus inward while reviewing engagement rules. In practice, this signals a determination to avoid external distraction and to reaffirm that Pacific priorities must be set by Pacific nations themselves. It also reflects the desire to insulate the Forum from tensions among larger powers, particularly around Taiwan and China.

As stewards of one of the world's largest ocean spaces, Pacific leaders will highlight sustainable management of marine resources and ocean conservation. Tuna fisheries are vital economic assets, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing remains a concern. Leaders are expected to push for stronger regional mechanisms to protect these resources.

Environmental issues also feature prominently. Plastic pollution, waste management and the environmental impacts of deep-sea mining will be debated. Nuclear concerns remain sensitive, with ongoing worries about legacy contamination and new risks such as the discharge of [treated nuclear wastewater](#). Leaders are expected to restate their nuclear-free commitment and demand that activities with transboundary environmental consequences be handled with the utmost caution.

The discussions reinforce the "Blue Pacific" identity, where the ocean is central not only to economies and food security but also to culture and regional solidarity.

Improving the lives of Pacific peoples is a core objective of the Forum. Leaders will discuss progress in education, health and gender equality. Many Pacific states are still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism and trade, so [economic resilience](#) and diversification will be prominent.

There is emphasis on inclusive growth — expanding [opportunities for women](#), youth and marginalised groups. Regional cooperation in education and health remains essential, given the small populations and limited resources of many island states. Leaders are likely to stress the need for stronger collective approaches, whether through [regional universities](#), shared procurement of medicines or cross-border recognition of qualifications.

By focusing on social development alongside climate and security, the Forum underscores that the wellbeing of communities is inseparable from the region's long-term resilience.

The digital divide remains stark in the Pacific, with many communities lacking reliable internet access. Leaders will discuss strategies to expand connectivity through submarine cables, satellites and mobile networks. [A regional digital strategy](#) is emerging, prioritising affordable access, cybersecurity, digital literacy and e-government.

Connectivity is not just about infrastructure — it underpins education, health, disaster response and economic opportunity. Leaders see digital inclusion as critical to ensuring Pacific societies are not left behind. Coordinated regional approaches could help reduce costs, build resilience and give Pacific nations greater bargaining power with external providers.

For Solomon Islands, hosting the 54th Forum is a moment of national affirmation. As one of the Pacific's least-developed countries and a nation that emerged from internal conflict only two decades ago, successfully bringing together all Forum leaders is a demonstration of capability and unity.

The event strengthens national pride and provides a unifying moment in a country often marked by internal divisions. For the government, it is also an opportunity to shift focus from domestic politics to regional leadership, projecting Solomon Islands as a confident and constructive player in the Pacific community.

Hosting the Forum also has diplomatic weight. Since switching recognition from Taiwan to China in 2019, Solomon Islands has faced questions about its alignments. By chairing the Forum and facilitating consensus, it demonstrates commitment to the Pacific Way of dialogue and solidarity. The summit allows Honiara to present itself not just as a participant in but as a convener of discussion on regional priorities.

The Forum in Honiara comes at a pivotal time. Pacific leaders will gather not only to address pressing issues — climate change, peace and security, sustainable development, ocean protection and digital inclusion — but also to reaffirm their unity

as a Blue Pacific Continent.

For Solomon Islands, the summit represents both a test and an opportunity: a test of its capacity to host and lead, and an opportunity to showcase its role in advancing regional solidarity. For the wider Pacific, the Forum is a reminder that small states, when acting together, can shape global debates on climate justice, peace and sustainable development.

At a moment of global uncertainty, the message from Honiara is clear: the Pacific will set its own course, grounded in solidarity and resilience, charting a future where Pacific voices are heard.

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