

# DECLARING THE PACIFIC AN OCEAN OF PEACE

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FROM INITIAL CONCEPT TO DRAFT DECLARATION (2023-2025)

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## Executive Summary

This brief provides a short overview of the development of the concept of the Pacific as an Ocean of Peace from its inception in 2023 through to August 2025. It is intended to be informative and to complement ongoing public and policy awareness and discussions in the lead-up to the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Solomon Islands in September.

The brief consists of a background note, details of a Fiji-UK Policy Research Project undertaken in early 2024 that included 20 listening sessions with 100 Pacific Islanders based in Suva, a summary of subsequent policy and engagement developments across the region and internationally, and some thoughts on future challenges and opportunities for advancing the concept.

Annex 1 includes a poem about the Ocean of Peace that reflects the diverse perspectives of participants from the Fiji-UK Policy Research Project in 2024. The poem is available in English in this brief and has been translated into several Pacific languages.

All information has been drawn from publicly accessible sources and research conducted in 2024. A list of references and further reading is provided in Annex 2.

## Background: Introducing the Ocean of Peace

The Pacific has long projected itself as a zone of peace. Over time, Pacific peoples have consistently returned to the idea that peace is central to their collective identity and future, including through formal agreements like the signing of the Rarotonga Treaty in 1985, which established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone.

In 2023, Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka introduced the concept of an 'Ocean of Peace' (OoP), sometimes also referred to as a 'Zone of Peace', at the UN General Assembly. Since then, the idea has gained traction as both a response to external geopolitical developments and a proactive way to frame regional security through Pacific values. For PM Rabuka, the OoP champions the region's own vision for the future by drawing on the strengths of the 'Pacific Way', so that a culture of dialogue, consensus-building, and mutual respect can guide collective action.

The OoP comes at a time of growing uncertainty. Climate change continues to pose an existential threat to Pacific lives, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. Development assistance is declining. New security arrangements, including those with military and nuclear components, have raised concerns about Pacific sovereignty and coercive diplomacy. Across the region, communities face widening economic and gender-based inequalities, rising drug use, social unrest, and an increasing exodus of skilled and unskilled workers, including Pacific youth, in search of better opportunities. These overlapping pressures have sharpened calls for a renewed vision of peace and security for the Blue Pacific based on societal wellbeing, strong governance, regional cooperation, and self-determination.

Therefore, the OoP is not only a vision but also a practical tool: a shared commitment to shape regional security through Pacific-led priorities and partnerships. It builds on existing frameworks, such as the Biketawa Declaration (2000), Boe Declaration (2018), the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2022), and the Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) (2023). Discussions on the OoP are currently being led by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat, following direction from Forum Leaders at their 2023 and 2024 meetings. A draft declaration on the OoP is expected to be discussed at the next Forum Leaders Meeting in the Solomon Islands in September 2025.

While the concept has broad appeal, it is still taking shape. Different stakeholders bring different interpretations of what 'peace' should look like in practice. For some, demilitarisation is central. For others, the priority should be strengthening regional autonomy or fostering reconciliation and social cohesion. Civil society groups have stressed the need to address structural drivers of insecurity and the legacies of colonialism and nuclear testing.

This brief contributes to ongoing discussions on the OoP by bringing together insights from diverse voices across the region. It draws on perspectives shared during a series of listening sessions held in Suva, Fiji, in April 2024 by a group of UK-based academics, including the authors of this brief, alongside more recent developments and reflections from Pacific stakeholders in policy, academia, and civil society. It aims to support the policy process by reflecting on how the concept has evolved over the past two years and the questions it has raised among these stakeholders. Based on these perspectives, it offers some thoughts on key principles and priorities that might guide the future development of the OoP.

## What We Did: Fiji-UK Policy Research Project

In April 2024, a UK-based academic team led by Professor Sue Farran of Newcastle University conducted over 20 listening sessions in Suva, Fiji, at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with support from the British High Commission in Suva. The team, specialising in peace, transitional justice, and Pacific studies, was asked to gather and share perspectives from across society on what an OoP could mean in practice. The purpose was to contribute to the policy conversation by listening to and documenting local views, not to prescribe solutions.

The team met with a broad and diverse range of over 100 Pacific stakeholders, including faith leaders, youth groups, women's organisations, chiefs, civil servants, civil society actors, members of the security sector, scholars, artists, media workers, and representatives of international and regional bodies. These dialogues used traditional and arts-based approaches and were guided by a simple, open-ended question: 'An Ocean of Peace is...?' Participants were invited to reflect freely on the meaning and potential of the concept, drawing on their own lived experiences, professional expertise, and visions for the future.

While responses varied, several common themes emerged. Many participants mentioned that the OoP evoked aspirations rooted in the Pacific Way and long-standing Pacific values and identitarian markers, including coexistence, kinship, dialogue, and collective resilience. Climate change was identified as a key threat to individual and collective security. Respect for and preservation of the environment were discussed as essential for realising an OoP. Others described the concept as a way to renew regional solidarity and resist the pressures of militarisation and geopolitical competition. Participants emphasised the need for peace to be more than a symbolic rhetorical device, calling for action on local insecurity, political instability, economic precarity, and the lasting effects of colonialism and nuclear testing. Several saw the OoP as an opportunity to reimagine regional security on Pacific terms.

Concerns were also raised. Some participants questioned whether the initiative could take meaningful shape amid persistent inequality and exclusion. Many stressed the importance of including women, youth, and other marginalised groups in the development of the OoP. Others reflected on the difficulty of envisioning peace without first addressing unresolved historical grievances. While the OoP looks to the future, participants emphasised its potential to address past harms and promote healing. Some also warned of the risk that the concept could be co-opted or diluted by regional or international actors. Across the sessions, there was a clear call for any declaration or framework to reflect the lived realities and needs of Pacific peoples, and not just the language of high-level diplomacy.

Two outputs were produced from this process and given to the Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs: a short policy brief summarising key themes, principles, and potential action steps, and a spoken-word poem that documents the views shared during the sessions using arts-based approaches. These resources honoured and reflected the diversity of contributions, and sought to help inform the next stages of regional discussions. A copy of the poem is included in Annex 1 of this brief.

Since the visit, the team has remained engaged in follow-up conversations, including meetings with senior government officials and continued academic collaboration. These efforts have been oriented towards supporting an inclusive, Pacific-led vision of peace grounded in Pacific peoples' lived experiences and shaped through collective dialogue.

# What Has Happened Since: Policy Development

Since the 2024 consultations in Suva, momentum around the OoP has continued to build. What began as a vision has moved towards formalisation through diplomatic and policy channels. At the 2024 PIF Leaders Meeting in Tonga, member states endorsed the concept and tasked the Forum Secretariat to develop a draft declaration. A Technical Working Group, composed of foreign ministry officials from across the region, is now leading consultations and drafting efforts. The aim is to table a declaration at the 2025 Leaders Meeting in the Solomon Islands. This sub-section of the brief highlights key developments in the OoP policy process, focusing on government and Forum activities, global partners, and contributions from civil society and academia. It is not intended as an exhaustive account, but rather as a summary of key events and themes that have helped shape discussions so far.

## Ocean of Peace Policy Development: Timeline of Key Events

*September 2023 - UNGA in New York:* Fiji PM introduces the OoP idea in his address to the General Assembly.

*November 2023 - PIF Leaders Meeting in the Cook Islands:* Fiji introduces the OoP concept and receives regional backing to develop it further over the next year.

*July 2024 - PIF Leaders Meeting in Tonga:* Fiji presents OoP concept note and draft principles and gains unanimous support to develop a formal declaration.

*September 2024 - UNGA in New York:* Tonga PM and Fiji President invoke the OoP in their country statements linking peace, climate change, de-escalation, and respect for international law.

*September 2024 - Fiji Foreign Policy White Paper:* Fiji issues its first Foreign Policy White Paper, spotlighting the OoP as a key regional and international foreign policy objective and outlining ten principles for the OoP.

*December 2024 - Pacific Dialogue at USP in Fiji:* Government, civil society, and academic leaders engage in track two diplomacy to discuss the OoP and propose recommendations to advance it. An outcomes document and youth-led discussion paper are published in January and July 2025.

*March 2025 - PIF Talanoas on the OoP in Fiji and New York:* Members discuss the OoP principles and future declaration, noting the importance of inclusive peace.

*June 2025 - PIF Technical Working Group CSO Session in Fiji:* Pacific civil society representatives are convened in Suva to gather input on a draft Declaration.

*July 2025 - Pacific Regional and National Security Conference in Fiji:* Senior diplomats, academics, and state officials discussed the OoP's relevance to justice, security, participation, and long-term regional futures.

*July 2025 - PIF Women Leaders Meeting Ocean of Peace Talanoa in Fiji:* Government and civil society leaders met to discuss how gender equality and social inclusion are essential to regional peacebuilding.

*August 2025 - PIF Foreign Ministers Meeting in Fiji:* Pacific Foreign Ministers unanimously endorsed the OoP proposal and recommended its inclusion in the PIF Leaders Meeting agenda.

*September 2025 - PIF Leaders Meeting in Solomon Islands:* PIF Members scheduled to table an OoP Declaration.

## *Governments and the Pacific Islands Forum*

Inter-governmental support for the OoP has expanded since the Tonga Leaders Meeting. Several Pacific leaders invoked the concept at the 2024 UN General Assembly, linking it to global calls for climate justice and de-escalation. That same month, Fiji issued its first Foreign Policy White Paper, placing the OoP at the centre of its peace and security strategy and articulating ten core principles to guide its development.

Forum-led dialogues have continued into 2025, with Talanoa sessions in Suva and New York City focusing on inclusive peacebuilding and Pacific-led security. Civil society actors have been brought into the process, most recently through a June 2025 consultation convened by the Forum's Technical Working Group. PM Rabuka has also referred to the OoP in economic diplomacy contexts to highlight the concept's relevance beyond traditional security concerns.

Representatives from several PIF members and sub-regional groups have expressed interest or support for the initiative and its ongoing development. These include but are not limited to the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Niue, Tonga, Nauru, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, as well as the Melanesian Spearhead Group, Polynesian Leaders' Group, and Micronesian Presidents' Summit. The government of New Zealand noted in August 2024 the important role the OoP could play in advancing Pacific-led collective security, and has since taken on an active role by chairing the Technical Working Group. Australia, too, has affirmed its commitment to advancing the OoP, including by strengthening Pacific-led disaster preparedness, policing efforts, and defence arrangements.

## *Global perspectives*

The initiative has also drawn wider international attention, including from global actors with strategic interests in Pacific security such as India, Japan, China, Indonesia, France, and the US. In April 2024, China publicly endorsed the OoP, celebrating its alignment with the Chinese vision of multilateral cooperation and peaceful development. While the US has not released a formal position, the concept featured prominently in high-level discussions during PM Rabuka's February 2025 visit to Washington. The UK has proactively engaged with and fostered regional dialogue around the concept, and the EU has also expressed support for Fiji's peacebuilding aims, even if not specifically referencing the OoP. While some in the region have welcomed external support, others have stressed the importance of maintaining the initiative's Pacific-led character, cautioning against narrative capture by global powers.

## *Civil society and academia*

The OoP has sparked diverse responses across civil society and academia. Track two diplomacy forums such as the Pacific Dialogue have brought together scholars, activists, civil society representatives, and officials to reflect on the concept and offer guidance to the Forum Secretariat. Recommendations have included revitalising regional commitments to demilitarisation and non-proliferation, developing a regional code of conduct to help prevent and address regional conflict, meaningfully incorporating youth and justice-focused perspectives, and supporting self-determination movements.

Civil society responses have ranged from cautious optimism to critical reflection. While many see the OoP as an opportunity to reassert Pacific values and regional solidarity, others have warned of potential risks, such as symbolic commitments without structural change, or the appropriation of the concept by external powers. They have warned that it could perpetuate an oppressive status quo by defining peace narrowly through state-centric or militarised frameworks. Concerns have also been expressed about the implications of regional security proposals, including recent policing partnerships and defence agreements, and whether these align with the spirit of the OoP.

Scholars, journalists, and public figures have also contributed to the conversation. Many commentators see the initiative as a chance to reconnect with Pacific values and revitalise regional solidarity. Some argue it could offer a shared agenda to align overlapping frameworks such as the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy. More critical voices caution against vague or empty commitments and highlight the risk of external appropriation, particularly amid rising geopolitical competition and the expansion of foreign military arrangements such as AUKUS. Others stress that, without clearer accountability mechanisms or attention to enduring power asymmetries - including colonial and nuclear legacies - the vision might lose its transformative potential. Contributions have often called for leadership that prioritises the perspectives of historically marginalised communities, including women, youth, and those still living under colonial rule.

Against this backdrop, the principles and aspirations gathered in the 2024 Fiji-UK project listening sessions remain resonant. Stakeholders did not view peace as a destination, but as a process and a way of relating to each other through humility, dialogue, collective care, and an ethos of listening. These values continue to inform discussions as the OoP moves from idea to policy, and eventually, to practice.

## What Next? Declaration and Policy into Practice

As the OoP advances toward possible formal endorsement at the PIF Leaders Meeting in September, attention is turning to what will be required to give substance to the vision. If adopted, the Declaration could mark an important step in redefining the region's long-term security framework. It could give greater clarity and momentum to the concept, and anchor it in an agreed set of values and priorities. Yet, a Declaration would only be the beginning of a longer process - one that requires sustained dialogue, inclusive participation, resources, and a serious commitment to ground-level implementation across the region.

Analysis of the 2024 Fiji-UK Policy Research Project findings from 20 listening sessions and over 100 Pacific Islander stakeholders reveal five key reflections relevant for moving the OoP process forward.

**A clear priority in this process would be to ensure that the OoP remains tied to the values and aspirations of Pacific peoples.** The listening sessions revealed a shared desire for peace that is rooted in close-knit cultural relationships and a strong sense of regional belonging. Stakeholders spoke of peace as more than the absence of violence; it is described as trust in institutions, care for land and ocean, a collective Pacific identity, and the ability to resolve tensions without coercion or fear. These ideas must remain central as policy frameworks take shape. A key step would be working with and supporting existing local peace expertise and networks in the region - particularly women and youth. The OoP is an opportunity to engage with and strengthen Pacific-based peacebuilding knowledge and practice architecture across government, civil society, and academia.

**A second consideration involves maintaining the initiative's Pacific-led character.** The context in which the OoP is unfolding is increasingly complex and volatile. As external powers deepen their presence and partnerships in the region, Forum members will face ongoing pressures - both political and economic - that may test the coherence and independence of a shared security vision. Ensuring that the OoP does not become a tool to fulfil external agendas, or is used selectively to legitimise contradictory practices, will require transparency and careful but assertive navigation.

**There is also scope to clarify how the OoP will relate to existing frameworks.** The Boe Declaration, the 2050 Strategy, and the Revitalised PLGED all provide important reference points. Aligning the OoP with these processes, without duplicating or displacing them, would help reinforce its coherence and legitimacy. Some technical questions will also need to be addressed. These include how peace is to be defined and measured; what forms of accountability might be established; and how regional security priorities, such as climate security, oceanic governance, and disinformation, could be peacefully addressed. This work could benefit from increased coordination with sub-regional groups, including the Melanesian Spearhead Group, Polynesian Leaders' Group, and Micronesian Presidents' Summit. Additionally, considering how the OoP relates to or impacts regional programmes, such as the Pacific Policing Initiative, and national ones, such as Fiji's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, may help avoid duplicating efforts, siloing of peace and security work, and reinforce a coordinated and collaborative approach across levels of action.

**The ongoing development and potential implementation of the OoP may benefit from further community-led engagement that centres the voices and experiences of all sectors of society - particularly women, youth, and historically marginalised groups.** At present, many across the Pacific remain unfamiliar with the initiative, echoing the need for broader public engagement to build understanding and legitimacy. Grounding the OoP in grassroots dialogue and participation, for example by using educational initiatives, cultural and faith-based practices, arts-based approaches, and community exchange platforms, can ensure it resonates with the lived realities and aspirations of Pacific peoples, rather than remaining a high-level diplomatic vision. Civil society organisations and faith-based institutions, with their deep local networks and peacebuilding expertise, are well placed to lead and support this effort. Prioritising youth leadership can also help promote a compelling, intergenerational vision of peace that inspires hope and ongoing engagement.

**Finally, there is the question of what the OoP might become.** For some, it is a diplomatic gesture; for others, a new framework for security. But for many who spoke during the Suva consultations, it is also an ethical commitment - an invitation to think differently about peace and stability in a deeply challenging moment for the region and the world. What comes next will not only depend on what is declared in the Solomon Islands in September, but on what is woven together in its name by institutions and communities across the Blue Pacific.

## Authors' Note

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# Annex 1: A Poetic Vision for an Ocean of Peace

This poem reflects the voices of over 100 Pacific Islanders living in Fiji. During the 2024 Fiji-UK Policy Research Project, participants were asked to complete the sentence: 'An Ocean of Peace is...' Their responses were woven together to form the poem below, reflecting diverse hopes, concerns, and ideas for peace in the region. A special thank you to all the participants for their insightful and inspiring contributions that created this collective poem.

The text has also been translated into Fijian, Kiribati, Bislama, Tongan, Fiji Hindi, Marshallese, and Solomon Islands Pijin. Thanks to project translators Liah Carlot, Tanana Bakoa Luti, James Rabuatoka, Brittany Nawaqatabu, Sonia Soakai, Jasbant Kaur, Jason Gagame, Wilmer Renie Joel, and to Dr Milla Vaha for her support in coordination. Additional Pacific language translations will be available in the future.

## An Ocean of Peace is...

An Ocean of Peace is  
A refuge from conflict  
A calming of the seas

An Ocean of Peace is  
A response to a world in pain  
Climate in crisis  
Geopolitical strife  
Gender-based violence  
And a need for change

An Ocean of Peace is  
A bridge of understanding  
Bringing peoples and nations together  
Beyond borders and boundaries

An Ocean of Peace is  
Listening to youth voices and  
Leaving no one behind  
No matter how small the island may be  
Or how wide the gaps in between

An Ocean of Peace is  
Taking care of the planet  
And Pacific people's needs  
It is food  
Water  
And land

An Ocean of Peace is  
Livelihoods and sustainability  
It is open seas  
Tourism  
Sovereignty  
And self sufficiency

But an Ocean of Peace can't  
Just be economics  
It can't just be transactional  
A political distraction  
Or all about profits

An Ocean of Peace must be  
Talanoa and human values  
A reconciling of the past  
And looking forward to the future  
It is elder wisdom and youth vision  
Singing in harmony

An Ocean of Peace is  
Faith  
And hope  
And love  
And family  
And respect  
And reverence  
And reciprocity

An Ocean of Peace is  
Pacific women in the lead  
From the grassroots to the Council of Chiefs  
Because an Ocean of Peace is women  
And women are Oceans of Peace

An Ocean of Peace is  
An opportunity for a paradigm shift  
A long shot risk at  
Decolonised  
Denuclearised  
De-escalated  
Friend to all  
Enemy to none  
Dialogue and diplomacy

An Ocean of Peace is  
Humility  
Not weakness  
It is peace  
Not capitulation

But an Ocean of Peace is  
Also still unknown  
It is an idea not yet written in stone  
A story of tomorrow still being drafted and defined

Because an Ocean of Peace is  
In the eye of the beholder  
It is contested and complex  
Local and global  
Demilitarised and securitised

An Ocean of Peace is  
Not going to mean the same thing to all  
But an Ocean of Peace is not going to happen  
Until it applies equally to all

So an Ocean of Peace can't  
Just be rhetoric  
Or more of the status quo  
Can't be bound by siloes  
And false hope

An Ocean of Peace has to be  
Principled  
Not politics  
It must be the Pacific way  
And Pacific owned

Because an Ocean of Peace is  
Our survival  
It is about existence  
And legacy  
And history  
It is knowing that change is only possible when it  
starts from within

An Ocean of Peace is  
A process not an end  
A continuum of possibilities  
A mat still being woven  
A future generation's dreams yet to come

An Ocean of Peace is  
Everything

Because time is out of our hands  
It feels like there are only seconds left  
And the ocean is both  
Our lifeline  
And the last front  
Our duty and destiny  
Protector and ancestry

So an Ocean of Peace is  
Not just an idea  
It is a promise  
A divine peace  
A dialogue beyond words

An Ocean of Peace is  
Spiritual  
It is the aroma of love  
The rhythmic sound of the waves  
And the taste of salt in the wind

An Ocean of Peace is  
The bonds of our people  
It is the things we carry through culture  
And the binding traditions of the sea

An Ocean of Peace is  
Peace done the Pacific way  
A choir of Oceanic voices  
Person to person  
Nation to nation  
Harmony spilling over an endless horizon  
Into the great Blue Pacific

An Ocean of Peace is  
Our future  
Today.

## Annex 2: Further Reading

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