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Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue

28th August, 2023, Port Moresby

**"Smart Pacific, One Voice" - Creating a Digital Future
Together for the Pacific"**

CONCEPT NOTE

1.0 Purpose

This Concept Note introduces the Pacific Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Ministerial Dialogue (The Dialogue).

2.0 Introduction

The Pacific Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Ministerial Dialogue is an initiative that aims to revive collaboration and cooperation among the Pacific ICT Ministers to:

- collectively pursue ICT and digital transformation initiatives, leading towards a new era of innovation, connectivity, and transformative change; and
- have a collective voice at regional and internal fora on issues and needs that are unique to the Pacific region.

In today's digitally interconnected world, emerging technologies, new trends and practices in the ICT space are causing major transformative changes in public administration, businesses, commercial activities, and social interactions. This presents an opportunity for the Pacific Island Nations and Territories to leverage transformation for betterment of all.

Each Pacific Island Nation and Territory has its own challenges, weaknesses and strengths. However, by collaborating together, we can leverage on each others strengths, address our weaknesses and challenges, and speak with a unified voice in the region. This one voice will allow us to better lobby, solicit support, and resources from our development partners to address our unique issues and challenges in the Pacific.

The upcoming Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue provides a platform for collaboration and an opportunity for Pacific ICT Ministers to identify and adopt digital solutions that address common needs in the Pacific. The Dialogue offers an opportunity for Pacific countries and territories to strategise and collectively push issues and needs specific to the Pacific from international and regional donors and at regional conferences and events. The Dialogue is guided by the spirit of Inclusivity – a spirit that underpins our commitment to leaving no Pacific Islander behind.

3.0 Background

The last Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting was held in Nukualofa, Tonga in June 2015. Since then, significant advances have been made in digital technology but challenges continue to emerge including the COVID-19 pandemic, disasters and climate change.

3.1 Genesis of Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue

The need for unity, collaboration, and a harmonised voice for the Pacific, became glaringly apparent at the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference held in Bucharest, Romania in November 2022 (PP-2022). While other regions stood united and were able to push through their common proposals, the Pacific Island countries and territories found themselves lacking a collective voice to push issues and challenges that are unique to the Pacific.

At the PP-2022 several Pacific Island Ministers and senior officials met and decided that Pacific Countries and Territories need to speak with a united voice. The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Government through its ICT Minister took up the challenge and the initiative to unite all of

the Pacific on these matters. A vision emerged – one that sought to unite the Pacific under the banner of "Smart Pacific, One Voice."

3.2 Pacific ICT Senior Officials Meeting

As a prelude to the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue, the Government of Papua New Guinea through the Ministry of ICT organized a Senior ICT Officials meeting that was held on 27th February 2023, in Kokopo, East New Britain Province in PNG.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and prepare necessary documents that the Ministers will deliberate on during the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue.

The meeting was attended by representatives from 14 Pacific Island countries and territories and development partners including the Global Forum for Cybersecurity Expertise (*GFCE*). *Hon. Vaimu'a Muliava*, ICT Minister for New Caledonia and *Hon. Timothy Masiu*, ICT Minister for Papua New Guinea, were present to witness the Senior Officials meeting. The meeting was officially closed by *Hon. James Marape*, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.

A 'Correspondence Group' was created during the Senior Officials meeting, to prepare necessary documents for the Ministerial meeting. Among the key documents being prepared are the 'Ministerial Declaration' and a Communique that will pave a way forward for continued collaboration and cooperation among the Ministers.

It was agreed at the Senior Officials meeting that PNG will provide the interim secretariat to facilitate meetings and the work of the 'Correspondence Group'. Mr Kila Gulo-Vui, the Chief Executive Officer of NICTA, Papua New Guinea's ICT Regulator, was elected by the Senior Officials as the Chair of the Interim Secretariat.

3.3 Our Common Challenges

The February Senior Officials meeting identified on a number of priorities that were common challenges across the Pacific. These were later grouped into six Strategic priorities.

Connectivity has always been a challenge for many Pacific Island countries and territories as many still have huge areas that are not connected or served. As Small Island Developing States (SIDS), many Pacific Islands and Territories are limited by our financial resources, human capital and expertise to embrace and harness the benefits of emerging technologies and digital services.

Furthermore, large disparities in digital skills levels among our citizens hinder full participation in the digital economy and digital society. We need to empower our micro, small and medium enterprises to grow and prosper. Additionally, we are vulnerable to cyber threats and attacks due to inadequate cybersecurity measures and out-dated or non-existent policies and regulations. Many Pacific Island Countries and Territories also lack some of the fundamental policies needed in this new digital economy.

Similar to all SIDS countries and territories, climate change and natural disasters continue to affect the livelihood of people in the Pacific. The incidence and severity of natural disasters is increasing.

Through collaboration and cooperation, we can collectively embrace ICT and the digital technologies as tools to enable us to overcome these challenges and deliver on our respective national development priorities.

3.4 Our Focus

We can leverage each other's strengths to address our weaknesses and challenges, and form a formidable voice that, together, can more effectively lobby and solicit resources to address our unique challenges in the Pacific.

Potential areas of collaboration, among others include:

- improved access and affordability of ICT services in remote islands and rural areas;
- protecting our cyber space from cyber threats and attacks;
- Encouraging all countries to accede to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and its two protocols.
- Improving collaboration with development partners to roll out targeted digital literacy programs, ICT Projects and initiatives, and enhanced capacity building to empower individuals and communities;
- developing digital infrastructure, including IXPs, community networks, and disaster-resilient networks;
- harmonising and developing policies and regulations to take advantage of the digital economy and creating an enabling environment for digital innovation;
- integrating ICT solutions to address climate change challenges and enhance resilience during natural disasters;
- building platforms that will enhance the productivity of our MSMEs and businesses, among others.

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue will present an opportunity for political and senior officials to review the progress of ICT development, to be informed about current issues, and afford them the opportunity to engage and set the course for a bright digital future for the Pacific.

4.0 Objectives of the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue 2023

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue is aimed to *inter-alia*:

- revive Pacific ICT Ministers' engagement and dialogue;
- review the progress of ICT development;
- strengthen and deepen partnerships and cooperation among PICTs, regional and international organisations and development partners; and
- set the path for ICT development and digital transformation through the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration as a vital first step.

5.0 Priority Areas for the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue 2023

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue will focus on:

5.1 Ministerial Declaration

The Ministers will declare their commitment to work together to leverage ICT and digital technologies for the good of our people.

The Dialogue will focus on six priority areas: Digital Transformation, Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Digital Infrastructure, Digital Security and Trust, Digital Capacity Building and Skills Development, and Regional Cooperation and Representation. Additionally, they will call on the ITU and other regional organisations to strengthen their understanding of, and engagement and presence in, the Pacific region.

By addressing these common areas, the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue seeks to forge a path forward to an inclusive, secure, and prosperous Pacific in a digitally connected era.

5.2 Forward Looking

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue will take into account the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and build on the Pacific Leaders vision for a well-connected region that ensures inclusive, affordable and accessible service under the thematic areas of focus on Technology and Connectivity.

The Dialogue will be a basis for collaboration, innovation, and knowledge-sharing. The Dialogue revives earlier initiatives by ICT Ministers under the Pacific Island Forum and expands upon them.

It will also call for the development of a Pacific ICT and Digital Transformation Action Plan, that will provide concrete actions in all six themes highlighted in the Dialogue. The Action Plan would be supported by a dedicated Secretariat who will monitor progress and implementation. The Plan will be reviewed at the next Pacific ICT Ministers Dialogue in 2025.

6.0 Expected outcomes of the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue 2023

It is expected that outcomes of the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue will include:

- a) Pacific Minister's Statements affirming the need to address key and prominent ICT development issues and challenges, and recognition of the digital opportunities brought by advances in digital technologies;
- b) Adoption of ICT Ministerial Declaration for digital transformation of the Pacific; that
 - a. Sets the course for Pacific's Digital journey;
 - b. Set directions for the development of Pacific ICT and Digital Transformation Action Plan for the Pacific;
- c) Better and Improved understanding of the unique development challenges of the Pacific by development partners, regional and international organisations.

7.0 Dates and Venue

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue is scheduled to be held on 28-29th August 2023 at the APEC Haus, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

The Ministerial Dialogue will be followed by the 16th Asia-Pacific Telecommunity Policy and Regulation Forum for the Pacific (APT PRFP-16) from 29 August to 1 September 2023

Mon 28 Aug	Tue 29 Aug	Wed 30 Aug	31 Aug	1 Sep
Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue		APT Policy & Regulatory Forum for Pacific		

8.0 Target Countries, Territories and Audience

Target countries and territories to be participating in the Ministerial Dialogue are administrations of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) including Pacific Islands Forum members, ITU Leadership, APT Members and South Pacific Community Membership.

9.0 Organisations and Partners

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue is hosted by the Government of Papua New Guinea through the Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology.

The Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue is supported by the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity, and the local ICT industry.