



## **SOUTH PACIFIC DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING**

**New Caledonia, France, 4-6 December 2023**

### **JOINT COMMUNIQUE**

Defence Ministers and senior civilian and military officials from Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, as well as observers from Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, gathered in New Caledonia for the annual South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) from 4 to 6 December 2023. This year marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of SPDMM and its 8<sup>th</sup> iteration.

The SPDMM is the premier ministerial dialogue for regional Defence Ministers to discuss defence and security cooperation in the South Pacific. Members work collectively to foster their prosperity, sovereignty and regional solidarity, by taking stock of regional security challenges, and identifying ways to improve cooperation and coordination on regional defence issues.

At this year's meeting, Members committed to deepen cooperation to jointly tackle the most acute of these challenges including climate-induced disasters, the increasing demand for rapid Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief responses, maritime security, and non-traditional security challenges, such as IUU fishing and transnational crime, as well as cyber threats.

Members also discussed the impact of strategic competition on the stability of the South Pacific.

#### **[Interoperability]**

Members noted that SPDMM celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023 and reflected on the significant interoperability gains made over the past decade. Members agreed to update the POVAI ENDEAVOUR Framework (a cooperative exercise framework), including amongst other activities, Exercise CROIX DU SUD and Regional Exercise LONGREACH. They thanked Papua New Guinea for hosting this year's Regional Exercise LONGREACH and accepted Australia's offers to host in 2024.

Recognising the lead role of national disaster management organisations, Members discussed mechanisms to increase and improve how South Pacific militaries work together in response to disasters. Member endorsed the SPDMM HADR Interoperability Guide (formally known as the Defence HADR Standard Operating Procedures), developed through Regional Exercise LONGREACH, as the backbone document that would support planning and participation in exercises and operations. They also welcomed the prominence of Women, Peace and Security considerations.

Because greater interoperability requires more consistent information sharing, Members committed to finalise a framework to facilitate greater information exchange by next year's meeting. They noted the value of agreeing information sharing norms and protocols between trusted partners.

Members supported the Pacific Response Group initiative proposed by Australia and asked Chiefs and Heads of Defence to work together to develop the initiative further for their consideration in 2024.

### **[Maritime security]**

Members committed to jointly combat regional maritime threats such as illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing and transnational crime in order to better protect resources in the vast Exclusive Economic Zones of the Blue Pacific Continent. They strongly agree to take the necessary steps to enhance shipridding operations according to each Members' requirements. They endorsed a joint declaration to enhance shipridding cooperation to this purpose.

### **[Training]**

Members committed to better coordinate their training offers and needs to strengthen our joint response to common security challenges. France proposed to develop a training framework within SPDMM, and Members tasked the Working Group to develop the concept by 2024. France used this opportunity to present its new Pacific Academy.

Following an initiative from Chile, Members committed to create a SPDMM academic network in order to build bridges between defence academic institutions to enhance the sharing of security analyses.

Members emphasised the need to broaden research sharing on technologies and innovation.

Australia offered to facilitate closer connections between the faith leaders and chaplains that support the defence forces in the South Pacific. Members accepted Australia's offer to host the 2025 edition of the SPDMM Young Leaders Forum, which New Zealand successfully organised this year.

### **[Resilience to climate change]**

Members supported France's proposed roadmap to operationalise the SPDMM 2019 study on the impact of climate change on defence and security infrastructure. Members agreed to stand up an officials-level intersessional Working Group to progress implementation of the growing SPDMM agenda throughout the year. France will chair the first working group with a focus on climate change.

New Zealand provided an update on the progress the SPDMM has made to address non-traditional security challenges for the consideration of SPDMM members and publication in 2024.

### **[Governance]**

Delegates thanked France for hosting SPDMM 2023 in New Caledonia and agreed that New Zealand would host SPDMM in 2024.

To ensure strong connections and close coordination with the region's architecture, Members agreed to share the SPDMM outcomes of the meeting with the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders.