

**DRAFT WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR. PIERRE FROGIER  
PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NEW CALEDONIA**

On behalf of the Government of New Caledonia, its Provinces and myself, I would like to wish you a warm welcome from the New Caledonia community on the occasion of this Second Pacific Community Conference.

New Caledonia is the Pacific Community's host country and it is in this role that the Conference is being held here this year.

Founded in 1947, the South Pacific Commission took up residence in Noumea in 1949 in the complex that had served as the military headquarters of the American Army during the Second World War.

In March 1992, the decision was made to rebuild the South Pacific Commission Headquarters on the site where we now stand, through funding provided by France and New Caledonia and contributions from Australia. Construction of the new Headquarters took place from 1992 to 1995. On 25 October 1995, I had the honour, as the then President of the Congress of New Caledonia, to inaugurate this magnificent complex together with the Australian Minister Mr. Gordon Bilney and the French Minister Mme Nicole Ameline.

In 1997, on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference in Canberra, the South Pacific Commission changed its name to the Pacific Community. At the First Pacific Community Conference in Papeete in late 1999, this change was accompanied by a declaration, which is, so to speak, the Organisation's charter. The structural changes have been in line with the institutional changes brought about by the CRGA and Conference.

New Caledonia, SPC's host country for more than a half-century, wanted to contribute to renewal of the framework of the Community, to which you, Madam Director General, and your team devote your energy and talents. This is why the government which I preside responded favourably to the SPC Secretariat's request to revise and up-date the Agreement on Rights and Privileges so as to take into account statutory changes in New Caledonia and the transfer of powers which accompanied them. This revision has given rise to a large number of contacts and should lead to the formulation of a final document in 2002.

The theme chosen for this Conference, "The Pacific Islands Challenge: Human Resources Development" is a current concern for most Pacific Island countries and territories. New Caledonia has not escaped this challenge. Nearly 2000 young people leave school each year and enter the job market. New Caledonia and the three Provinces it comprises, all of which have representatives at my side as part of our delegation, must adapt their training policies to meet the ever-changing needs of a small-scale market. The economic development prospects which the signing of the Noumea Accord on 5 May 1998 opened to New Caledonia are fortunately very varied, e.g. nickel mining and metallurgy, fisheries, agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, the service sector.

The political and institutional authorities here all want to see these prospects benefit our young people in particular, which is why in New Caledonia, training policies must be adapted to the needs of new businesses. This theme of training men and women is at the very heart of our concerns and I am sure that the presentations which will be made on this topic should provide insights of mutual interest.

I would like to take advantage of the opportunity I have been given to address you, the Representatives of the Pacific Island countries and territories, to say that Noumea increasingly feels like a full member of this large family.

New Caledonia, which invites you to take a closer look, is today a country at peace with itself, a dynamic country under development, rich in hope and in potential.

Over the past few months, particularly during the Melanesian Spearhead Countries Summit or the Pacific Islands Forum Meeting, we have had a very strong impression that the countries of our region are very attentive to the process underway in New Caledonia and wish to contribute to its success.

There is clearly an universal desire to ensure that New Caledonia is integrated into and closely associated with the lives of regional organisations and that it develops a wide range of relationships with them. I want to reiterate that this is a priority for the government I preside.

We will, then, be more attentive than ever to the life and activities of the Pacific Community.

I hope that your stay among us will be as pleasant as possible and that the Conference's work will bear fruit for all the peoples of the Pacific Islands countries and territories.