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RESTRICTED

SPConf. 27/WP.11
5 October 1987

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-SEVENTH SOUTH PACIFIC CONFERENCE

(Noumea, New Caledonia, 10 - 14 October 1987)

THE FUTURE OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

1. During the Twenty-sixth South Pacific Conference held in Papeete, French Polynesia, 3-5 November 1986, Mr Francis Bugotu, the then Secretary-General presented a paper on this subject for discussion and consideration by that meeting. After listening to the views expressed by a number of delegations on the subject matter, the Conference decided to refer the issue to the May (1987) CRGA Meeting for consideration and for recommendations to the Twenty-seventh South Pacific Conference in Noumea, (paragraph 25, page 20, "Report of the Twenty-sixth South Pacific Conference, Papeete, French Polynesia, 3-5 November 1986).
2. At the Seventh Meeting of the CRGA held in Noumea, New Caledonia, 18-22 May 1987, the Secretariat, in accordance with the mandate received from the Twenty-sixth South Pacific Conference, reintroduced this item in a paper presented by the Secretary-General for the consideration of the meeting. Copies of the two discussion papers presented by the Secretary-General and his predecessor are appended hereto.
3. Whilst the Committee simply noted the paper presented by the Secretariat and did not develop recommendations for consideration by the Twenty-seventh South Pacific Conference, the fact that the Conference took note of the issue and directed that it be discussed by the CRGA and that it (Conference) specifically expected recommendations from the CRGA after that discussion, is evidence of its desire to attach importance to this issue. It is evidence of the Conference's desire to discuss this topic in 1987, on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the SPC, as it is an issue relevant in the social, cultural and economic development of the peoples of the Pacific. Of equal importance and concern is the role of the SPC itself in facilitating such developments.

4. Consideration by the Conference of the issues relating to the future of the SPC is timely and relevant. It is timely because the organisation is now celebrating its fortieth anniversary - a time not only for festivities but also to pause and to look at the future taking into consideration all the factors which might have contributed not only to the successes but also the frustrations of the past.
5. The relevancy of this issue to the ability of the SPC to respond effectively and on a timely basis to the basic needs of its member governments is clearly detailed in the Secretariat's paper to the CRGA Meeting in May 1987. The expertise within the SPC has been honed sharp as a result of forty years of hands on experience in the needs of the Pacific people in the fields of rural development, health education and nutrition, environment, agriculture and agronomic resources, youth and community development, advisory and clearing house services and others.
6. As the longest serving organisation in the region, the SPC has accumulated considerable experience enabling it to continue to serve as an effective catalyst of development in the countries of the South Pacific. It is envisaged therefore that the SPC will remain an "action-oriented" organisation whose aim and thrust will continue to be directed at the "grassroots" level, directing services into rural communities whose needs are greater, in "people-oriented projects".

RECOMMENDED ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

7. The Conference is invited to discuss the issue of the future of the SPC, noting the views expressed in this paper as well as those expressed in the attachments.

= ~~What time of day will the South Pacific
Conference be held by~~

15 May 1987

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

SEVENTH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS

(Noumea, New Caledonia, 18 - 22 May 1987)

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION?

Comments by the Secretary-General

1. On the eve of the SPC's fortieth anniversary my predecessor submitted thoughts on the subject of the future of the SPC to the Twenty-sixth Conference held in Papeete in November last year.
2. In addition, a number of delegations expressed views at that time on the same subject and it was the decision of the Conference to refer further consideration of this topic, including the views of my predecessor, to this year's CRGA. It is appropriate, as the Secretary-General during its fortieth anniversary year, that I address this issue as well.
3. Forty years is a significant milestone and you will forgive me, if in looking to the future, I pause to take stock of important developments and achievements of the past. We are all aware of the origins of the SPC, founded as it was by six metropolitan governments as an international organisation to provide technical assistance in the development of their dependent territories. The membership of the organisation since its inception in 1947 has increased in the first instance to include independent and self-governing Pacific states on an increasing scale from 1965 (Western Samoa) to 1980 (Niue and Cook Islands). In 1983 all 27 participants in the Conference became full and equal partners in the oldest and most comprehensive organisation in the region.
4. The most remarkable implication of this change in the physical body of the organisation is, of course, the assumption of the major role in the decision making process by Pacific governments and administrations, along with concomitant development and refinement of the mandate of the SPC. Herein lies the vitality of the organisation's role in the region, as its relevancy to the needs of the Pacific peoples is determined by the decisions made by the very same recipients of its assistance. This concept is given body through the direction of the work programme determined by the Conference to be in response to the expressed needs of Pacific Islands at the grassroots level.

5. One of the most amazing aspects of the SPC is the fact that in spite of its sensitivity to the changing times, it has continued to remain faithful to the underpinning philosophy of its charter, and that is to respond to the economic and social developmental needs and aspirations of all the peoples of the region. It has responded with demonstrated flexibility and efficiency.

6. It provides the only forum within which all island peoples and their governments can continue to express themselves on issues, problems, needs and ideas common to their economic and social development. It is very much in touch by its network of well established communications at all levels with its member countries, and is alert to changing needs and priorities of the people of the region.

7. As we turn to the future it is important to recognise that the changing nature of the region is not only characterised by the achievement of full sovereignty of some island groups. Perhaps there may be greater material for stimulating interest in the quiet efforts by some of our Pacific neighbours to create special consideration of their own unique situations. I refer specifically to efforts by some of our island brothers and sisters to retain their identity with practical consideration of their lack of natural resources for full scale economic development. As they forge ahead for greater autonomy in the conduct of their own internal affairs under the umbrella of their metropolitan associations, an incredible aspiration surfaces, and that is to achieve the greatest measure of self-sufficiency while assuring both identity and economic well being. This is a natural twist in the story of people under these types of circumstances and one that is just as real as living a day to day existence in a sovereign state.

8. This common need among all peoples of the region requires efficient and timely response at all levels. Quality action is particularly crucial during these transitional times when the Pacific has become the "region" of the 21st Century World. Political development has its own special brand of requirements. But it also means the opening up of our shores to the outside world, quite apart from the natural progression of time as people become more aware of other lives and other circumstances. The region, for example, has become smaller with the technological improvements in transportation and modes of communications. Our window of contact within and without the Pacific has become greatly enlarged. The "tastes and influences" of the outside world have infiltrated into our traditional societies. As a result of these and other phenomena the volume of change in the islands has become increasingly large. But perhaps more detrimental to our aspirations to develop while maintaining our own special brand of uniqueness, is the incredible rate with which these changes are occurring in our islands. These elements in our modern world of the Pacific know no boundaries, as they exist in any country irregardless of political status, and they require not only pragmatic but unrestricted attention.

9. The most important question therefore is not how much we are spending but whether our response to the needs of our people is efficient and timely.

10. The South Pacific Commission has demonstrated its capacity for sensitivity to these needs over the past forty years. It has, by its very nature bent with the winds of change in the continued implementation of its mandate. Because its activities and programmes depend on the grassroots level needs and desires of the member countries, the relevancy of the organisation is reassured each year in the practical ambiance of regional co-operation and consultation.

11. There is no limit to the vision of possibilities for assistance in assuring that the underpinning of island societies, the basic needs of our communities, are addressed so as to effect the greatest possible capacity building in our decision-making processes. The expertise of our organisation has been honed sharp as a result of forty years of hands on experience in the needs of our people in fields of rural development, population, migration and demography, fisheries and marine resources, health, health education and nutrition, environment, agriculture and agronomic resources, youth and community development, advisory and clearing-house services, and others. It is not surprising that the organisation represents an unusual concentration of expertise of extraordinary quality in a multitude of disciplines.

12. The length and clarity of our vision of the future is sometimes blurred by the pressures of financial and logistical constraints as our members become embroiled in the problems and issues relating to the capacity to pay. Indeed the SPC is at something of a crossroads in terms of our march forward. We are at a point of budget composition where extra-budgetary sources almost equal the core budget provisions supplied by member governments. It is regrettable that as expressed needs increase the wherewithal to respond diminishes.

13. But just as we must continue to provide the programmatic response to the needs of our island peoples, so must we continue to expand our efforts to acquire non-traditional sources for our activities. It also places a demand on our own members to consider the requirement to maintain the efficiency of our response to their needs and to view our requirements with a practical loosening of the budget belt.

14. As I mentioned earlier the SPC is the longest serving organisation in the region and enjoys the reputation of being an effective development agency in its area of mandate. These facts then place the onus on this organisation to continue in its mission to redouble its efforts to meet increasing requests and areas of assistance.

15. In saying this, I avail myself of this opportunity to earnestly encourage member governments and administrations to share the Secretariat's vision of a purposeful future and to inspire the Conference, the decision-making body of the SPC, to set agendas for greater developmental activities. We can take courage from past achievements but there is no room for complacency about the future, when we know that there is an enormous amount of work to be done before even the basic needs of all the peoples of the region are met.

RESTRICTED

SPC/CRGA 7/WP.15

14 May 1987

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

SEVENTH MEETING OF
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS

(Noumea, New Caledonia, 18 - 22 May 1987)

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION ?

A view of an Outgoing Secretary-General - Francis Bugotu

This paper was delivered by Mr Francis Bugotu at the Twenty-xith South Pacific Conference held in Papeete, French Polynesia from 3 to 5 November 1986. At that time the Conference agreed to transfer discussion on the subject to the May 1987 CRGA Meeting.

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION?

A View of an Outgoing Secretary-General - Francis Bugotu

In the 1965 Lae South Pacific Conference in the Australian Territory of Papua New Guinea, Ratu Mara (now Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara - Prime Minister of Fiji) said, "Unless island countries are asked to contribute to the work of the Commission, I feel that responsibility will be denied them; and they will never act with responsibility until they themselves are paying for what they want." These words were uttered I gathered, out of some disenchantment and frustration with the metropolitan dominated procedures and practices of the original South Pacific Commission, and thus I believe were sown the seeds from which the South Pacific Forum grew.

A similar message was echoed in the 1981 Vila South Pacific Conference by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, the Honourable Father Walter Lini, when he called for what he termed, "a change in international direction, away from dominance to one that will recognise the concept and reality of interdependence." To be achieved he said, "through what we are able to do for ourselves in a spirit of mutuality and co-operation, generating the will of the people to develop what they have, and freshly tune our services towards enhancing their social and economic conditions in their own environment."

The aspirations expressed above by the leaders of two island governments of today point strongly in the direction of self-reliance which form the basic philosophy and aim of modern SPC and provides the theme of this paper.

In the context of individual member countries of the SPC, it is a call to fight the dependency syndrome and to work for self-reliance and self-respect in our islands. To aim for self-sufficiency although we are aware of course that it would not be possible in the modern world for a country to be completely self-sufficient. The virtue of national and regional pride emanate from self-help and not from self-pity and acquired false comfort and dependency. A child who likes to be mothered all his life will never grow up, imprisoned in a world of dependency derived from paternalistic mentality. An attitude of the colonial past indeed but which is still evident amongst our Island countries today. Our countries need to develop new strategies of approach which could steer us into new directions away from false pride and dependent comfortable living.

On the eve of my departure as Secretary-General of the Commission I should like to feel that my staff and I have tried to set this concept of development as the guiding principle of the Commission's endeavours and we have laboured to inculcate it with practical assistance towards helping island countries to learn to look after themselves. It is my view that if the SPC ceases to be an effective catalyst of development in which

island countries learn to be self-reliant, then it has failed its mandate and should be disbanded.

In my first South Pacific Conference at Pago Pago in October 1982 as head of this organisation, I committed myself into looking closely at SPC's operations "with new and critical eyes". I saw the need for regular evaluation of our work programmes and to promote the use of aid money in assisting development programmes towards self-sufficiency rather than seeing it being used for propping up national luxurious lifestyles and consumption habits. I determined then to pursue the originally declared aim of the organisation, that the thrust of our programmes were to be directed at the 'grass-roots' level, directing services into rural communities whose needs are greater, in "people-oriented projects".

Thus a survey of our activities at SPC during the last 4½ years will show the emphasis placed on country programmes which respond to the specific needs as expressed by island peoples themselves. Our official duty visits have been directed towards this sector and I myself have made a point of visiting all our member countries big and small except Pitcairn. Regular self-evaluation through annual internal reviews of programmes and administrative procedures have been a feature of this period, beginning with the Secretary-General's Internal Review of 1983.

Member countries accepted in Saipan the concept of equal membership status of the Commission to be accorded to all

countries and territorial administrations participating in the South Pacific Conference. The Agreement underscored the acceptance of the self-help spirit as expressed above, and island countries appear to have gained new resolve and will to move forward towards achieving more self-reliance and become more independent in new functions hitherto being performed for them by metropolitan countries. We see for example the growing interest of countries in the development and protection of their fisheries and forest resources, and in the re-discovery of their living cultures and respect for traditional ways of life.

Island countries of the region are indeed looking more closely at themselves, examining and evaluating their own resources and opportunities, and setting their own national priorities and goals. There has been widespread appreciation of the 1983 Review itself. Prime Minister Jacques Chirac of France is the latest to comment and compliment its merit during his recent visit to the French Territory of New Caledonia at the end of last August. He said, "the successes of the South Pacific Commission in fostering Regional Development give us an idea of what can be achieved through trustful co-operation between States and Territories working together on an equal footing for their common prosperity".

"Equal footing" was indeed the case in point advanced in the Review argument which gained popular support. However the essence of the Review's successful outcome derives from the fact that, as a one time Papua New Guinea colleague once

said, the SPC is an "action-oriented" organisation, which concentrates its efforts on non-political/practical matters. As long as this distinction maintains, developmental assistance would continue to be implemented satisfactorily at SPC. However should Island countries aspire not only to have more say in their own affairs, but to direct and control them politically towards the achievement of greater self-reliance, then the concept of "equal footing" will be brought to question and countries will be drawn into discussions involving their own political status and international standing.

At the risk of being misunderstood to be a strong proponent of a single regional organisation (SRO), nevertheless in as much as the issue could affect SPC's future morale and effectiveness I would wish to briefly refer to it in this paper. In doing so, I do not intend to retrace the historial development of the concept during the last ten years and the stalemate situation that has ensued. However, contrary to what many of us might have wished to believe the subject is not dead, and indicates a number of very real differences of outlook apparent in the region between Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia in terms of political aspirations, cultural background practice and attitudes; land and population size and economic potential. The stalemate in resolving the SRO question has shown that any amount of talking about institutional structural re-organisation or merger; legal revision or financial re-allocation will not suffice nor give a satisfactory compromise. A new realistic approach is now needed and the option to pursue, in my view is to study and promote self-reliance at individual country level.

The difficulty with the SRO concept does not lie in the ability of the existing organisations to rationalise functions and carry out political commands and mandates, but in the vast differences which exist between countries as alluded to above, and especially in the essential difference between an independent nation and non-independent territories. It is the political leaders who are finding it difficult to make a decision on the issue because of the political sensitivity inherent in the big gap between what an independent nation can do and what a territorial administration is able or unable to do. I believe even the constitutional notion of 'self-government' in this context will be brought to question soon, because those who 'sit on the fence' make it harder for those who have decided to be inside and those countries who are content to remain outside independence to draw honest conclusions.

The vulnerability of our Island countries requires us to be realistic in our aspirations. Good living and foreign life-styles are perhaps one's rights when one can afford them. Flag-raising ceremonies may be attractive and morale boosting but when our small island economies cannot afford such luxuries we have to be realistic and try and do without them in order not to get hurt and feel let down when the aid supply dries up from our donors. You have already heard me relay this message to you elsewhere during this Conference as this reality affects our organisation at this time, striking some of our popular programmes out of our books.

In the light of the above scenario of events and issues what future role is there for SPC? In the Secretariat's paper,

SPCONF.26 (WP.9) in which the agenda contents for future SPC Conferences is discussed, we have traced the background evolution of the Conference to its present position and status. The full control of SPC by member countries is in fact very recent, and the emphasis has remained although greatly enhanced, in the area of practical assistance aimed at the grassroots level.

The increasing effectiveness and thoroughness of the work of the CRGA has meant that matters which were previously considered and debated in detail by the Conference have over recent years been dealt with by technical meetings and the CRGA. This has relieved the Conference of the tedium of details that it traditionally had to wade through. It appears thus paradoxical that the success of the Secretariat in enhancing the effectiveness of the CRGA so as to streamline the agenda of the Conference and further reduce its duration in order to attract attendance by political leaders who cannot afford to spend too much time in meetings, has now led to doubts about the future of the Conference.

Compared with its sister regional organisations, SPC is unique in being the only body which brings together on an annual and regular basis, representatives of all countries and territories within the region. The Conference is the supreme decision-making body of SPC whereas SPEC and FFA have the South Pacific Forum as their ultimate decision-making body. These facts have direct bearing on the levels of representation at the Conference on the one hand and at the Forum on the other. Since the South Pacific Forum is recognised as the foremost political authority within the region, comprising Heads of Governments of

independent and self-governing countries, SPC and FFA Secretariats would draw much prestige from their association with it. SPC would not enjoy such privilege, but at the same time it should not make prestige its concern.

The exclusion of political discussions in the Conference has given SPC the strength and freedom to be an effective technical assistance organisation unique in the region, attracting the best and most experienced and competent expertise available. It has already gained this reputation and should continue to develop this level of technical and practical assistance and not venture into the political arena which should be the preserve of the Forum. SPC will therefore become the tool of self-reliance which is what our countries really need to be truly independent. It is therefore conceivable in this scenario of a role for SPC, that representation at the South Pacific Conference might adequately suffice at an official level.

In the wake of SPC's 40th anniversary of the signing of the Canberra Agreement (6 February 1947) I submit these thoughts to the honourable Conference.

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