

WELCOMING REMARKS
SECOND PACIFIC CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
TE HERENGA WAKA—VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

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Tena koutou, talofa lava, and warm Pacific greetings to you all. It is my great privilege to welcome you here on behalf of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

Two years ago, I was standing in front of a similar crowd at the very first Pacific Climate Change Conference, hosted by this University. At that time, I referred to the breath-taking ignorance, complacency and self-interest that surrounded the twin global challenges of climate change and ocean acidification.

Two years on, much has changed. The Paris Agreement has been signed – signifying the commitment of world leaders to address climate change. This new found resolve of world leaders was tested a little over one year later when President Donald Trump announced his intention to withdraw the United States of America from the Paris Agreement. Yet, world leaders showed the foresight, intelligence and moral courage to remain committed to the Paris Agreement. And of course – here in New Zealand – a new government has been swept to power on the back of our nation's concerns about inequality and environmental degradation and we find ourselves with the previously unthinkable – a Minister for Climate Change, who not only understands the gravity of the issue, but also has a mandate to act.

Yet time is no longer on our side.

The consequences to life as we know it are grave and will be irreversibly set in motion unless we rapidly decarbonize the world's energy supply.

And, of course, as you are all aware, the people of the Pacific are on the frontline of climate change. At our first biennial Pacific Climate Change Conference in 2016, the then President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, described the desperation he felt in seeing the Kiribati people threatened by having their low-lying island nation lost to rising sea levels. This is not just the loss of land, but their livelihood and identity as a culture.

He spoke of his first-hand experience watching extreme high tides and more severe storms damage homes, erode the coastline and destroy vital food crops.

He spoke of his sense of urgency – urgency which we all must feel if we are to head off the looming catastrophe that faces us and our fellow travellers over evolutionary time with which we share our one and only precious planet.

So thank you for being here.

It is heartening to see so many leaders and dignitaries in attendance. I would like to personally acknowledge our opening keynote speaker, the distinguished Prime Minister of Samoa and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, the Honourable Tuilaepa Dr Sailele Malielegaoi, who has long been an advocate of climate change action. Thank you to mana whenua Te Ati Awa for welcoming us here today. As well as Cardinal John Dew; the Minister for Climate Change, the Honourable James Shaw; the Wellington Mayor Justin Lester; the Minister of Pacific Peoples, the Honourable Aupito William Sio; and former Governor-General Sir Anand Satyanand. We also welcome Members of the Diplomatic Corps, our speakers – in particular, our international speakers who have travelled so far to be with us – and of course all our conference delegates, including those representing 13 Pacific Island nations.

This conference is jointly hosted by SPREP – the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, based in Samoa. So before I close, I would like to offer my thanks to SPREP Director-General, Kosi Latu, who has worked closely with Professor James Renwick, Associate Professor Luamanuvao Winnie Laban and Dr Pala Molisa from Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington to organise this conference.

Thank you again – and please enjoy the discussion and debate ... and the exchange of knowledge and differing world views that the next three days will offer you.

Ngā mihi and all the best.

*Museum Te Papa Tongarewa
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