"We are stronger together"

By Prime Minister the Hon Anthony Albanese MP.

I’m delighted to be visiting Fiji this week for the Pacific Islands Forum — the region’s premier political and economic policy organisation.

For more than half a century, this Forum has been gathering in the Pacific Way. Bringing many voices together from across our beautiful and diverse islands. And projecting a strong voice across the vast Pacific Ocean and around the world.

For all of us, the Pacific is our home. As island nations, we are fellow voyagers. We share a love of the ocean that connects us; of the tides that bring us closer together; and the communities to which we belong.

We know we’re stronger together, and that unity is founded on listening and respect.

For Australia, the Pacific is our home and our heart. We treasure our bonds of friendship. We value our diversity, and yet we have so much in common.

We’ve always been there for each other in times of need — from fighting together in defence of liberty during the Second World War through to responding collectively to more recent natural disasters.

Just this year, Australia was proud to help Tonga after the devastating eruption of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai volcano. Australians have been touched by the support from our Pacific neighbours during recent bushfires and floods.

The Pacific Islands Forum has long been an important dialogue for our region, and this week is an opportunity for leaders to continue our conversation about the sort of region we want to be.

The island nations of the Pacific are global leaders on climate change. You are careful stewards of the beautiful Blue Pacific.

But as you know all too well, our region is facing an urgent climate challenge.

Already, we’ve seen rising sea levels, saltwater incursion, food and water insecurity, biodiversity loss and an increasing frequency of extreme weather events.

We know climate change is an existential threat for many of our Pacific neighbours.

And under my Government, Australia will re-establish ourselves as a trusted climate partner and do our part keep 1.5 degrees of warming within reach. My government has increased Australia’s ambition, and have committed to reducing Australia’s emissions to 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. We will reach net zero by 2050.

We’re also committed to supporting the Pacific’s leadership and voice on climate change, and will stand with you in calling for greater action from countries around the world.

Already, my Government has announced new support for partners in our region including through a new Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership to fund climate-related infrastructure and energy projects in Pacific countries and an increase to our Official Development Assistance to help with climate change adaptation and resilience in the Pacific.

On security, we all share a desire for a stable, peaceful and prosperous region where the rule of law and the sovereignty of all nations are respected.

We know there are significant security and geostrategic challenges before us. But we are strongest when we stand together. We have a proud record of responding collectively to challenges — whether it’s assisting each other in the wake of natural disasters; cooperating to counter illegal and unregulated fishing of our seas; or collective responses like RAMSI and the Solomons International Assistance Force.

We in the Pacific look out for each other. We know the security decisions taken by any one of us affect the other members of our community. That’s true for friends and neighbours in a village or town; and it’s just as true for a community of nations like ours.

Our collective security depends on our own decisions, as well as the decisions of our fellow island nations. We must work together to protect the Blue Pacific — and each other. Australia is committed to doing our part to address our shared security challenges.

We want to be a healthy and prosperous region, too.

We know the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating for Pacific Island nations — with a tragic loss of lives and livelihoods.

Australia has been proud to work with Pacific nations through the pandemic, including by providing end-to-end support for the rollout of safe and effective vaccines.

Pacific island nations can also depend on Australia to deliver quality, sustainable development investments that create local jobs and contribute to economic growth.

We will respond to the needs and priorities of Pacific nations without imposing unsustainable financial burdens or expecting something in return.

Our region also has deep wellsprings of culture that should be celebrated.

Australia is proud to be home to a vibrant and diverse Pacific diaspora community.

We benefit tremendously from this, and we want to expand access for Pacific peoples to our labour market and migration program, and ensure workers are treated fairly and have access to good working conditions.

We also want to share the rich heritage of our First Nations peoples more fully with our Pacific neighbours.

We are proud to be home to the oldest continuous living culture in the world, and we can learn so much from the wisdom of Indigenous peoples right across the Pacific region.

As we turn our minds to the next chapter in our shared story, I believe we face enormous opportunities.

Let us seize these opportunities together as One Blue Pacific.

Let us shape the future together, instead of letting the future shape us.

Australia is listening to you.

Australia is standing with you.

We are stronger together.