

## News Release

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### **“SAFETY, VIGILANCE, RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION KEY WHEN REOPENING PACIFIC ENTRY POINTS”: UN AND ADB**

As COVID-19 continues to cause wide-spread movement restrictions, the United Nations [UN] and the Asian Development Bank [ADB] today convened a virtual roundtable meeting with the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands to discuss multisectoral considerations for safely reopening points of entry and the types of institutional support available from the UN, ADB and other development partners to Pacific island countries.

“Small island developing states, which depend largely on tourism for their economies, have been hit hard by the global slowdown following the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN has, from the beginning of this crisis, advocated for the safe, responsible and timely reopening of national entry points, on which many small businesses and jobs depend. While the decision of when, how and with whom to open borders is a sovereign decision, safety, vigilance, responsibility and international cooperation are critical as the world slowly opens up again.” These were the words of Sanaka Samarasingha, UN Resident Coordinator for ten countries in the Pacific.

The event brings together a number of UN entities such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization, the World Health Organisation, the International Organisation for Migration, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Tourism Organisation and the World Trade Organisation among others along with related global organisations such as the International Air Transport Association and regional entities like the South Pacific Tourism Organisation and the Pacific Community.

“ADB is committed to working with its Pacific developing member countries and helping them protect their people from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19,” said Mr. Paul Curry, ADB Principal Operations Coordination Specialist for Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands. “Close collaboration between development partners will be critical, when Pacific countries begin to open their borders.”

The recent supplement to ADB’s annual flagship economic publication, the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020, said the Pacific will continue to feel the blow of the COVID-19 pandemic this year with restricted trade flows and declining tourism numbers dampening the economic outlook for the Pacific subregion.

The remote Pacific nations moved quickly and decisively to stop COVID-19 in its tracks by shutting their borders early. This proactive stance has come at a significant financial cost. Future economic prospects in the Pacific will largely depend on safe opening of its borders.

Measures put in place by governments around the world to help contain the spread of the virus have included significant border closures, entry restrictions, and changes to visa and entry requirements. The aviation sector has been particularly hard-hit, with ICAO forecasting that globally airlines may be faced with 1.5 billion fewer international air travellers this year and a US \$273 billion drop in gross operation revenue.

Today's UN-ADB regional meeting focused on multisectoral considerations and assistance available for safely reopening national entry points targeting *pre-border*, *at border*, and *post-border* openings for both air and sea transport. Support from the international community could include initiatives such as the training of customs, immigration, police, and health officials and the distribution of personal protective equipment for use at airports and seaports. The establishment of clear protocols and the importance of ensuring that other actors such as airlines, seafarers associations and tour operators are included in preparing plans for reopening borders was emphasised.

With the UN warning against complacency, COVID-19 continues to accelerate at breath-taking speed. The number of coronavirus cases globally has roughly doubled in the past six weeks to more than 16 million, with WHO predicting that countries may witness multiple waves of the virus at different intervals and in variable local contexts for several more years to come.

Similar roundtables are planned for Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands and Tokelau.

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**For further information please contact:**

**UN Fiji Multi-Country Office:**

Sanya Ruggiero, UN Resident Coordinator's Office, Fiji  
[sanya.ruggiero@un.org](mailto:sanya.ruggiero@un.org) [Tel: + 679 8666 445]

**ADB in the Pacific:**

Sally Shute-Trembath, External Relations specialist  
[sshute-trembath@adb.org](mailto:sshute-trembath@adb.org) [Tel: +612 8270 9444]