

Help Pacific 'Ocean of Peace' live up to its name, Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister tells UN

Welcoming the growing attention the world is paying to the Pacific Ocean, Rimbink Pato, Papua New Guinea's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, urged the international community to ensure that the Ocean becomes a "zone of cooperation, of stability and security, of pristine beauty and prosperity," and expressed his hope that it lives up to its name: "the Ocean of Peace."

Mr. Pato's comments were part of his UN address, delivered during High-Level week of the [General Assembly](#) at UN Headquarters in New York.

As host of this year's Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum ([APEC](#)), Papua New Guinea, said Mr. Pato, will see many major issues discussed, including several related to the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, particularly climate action and gender equality.

Mr. Pato described the Agenda as "a solid pathway that holds much promise for the international community." He acknowledged that it is essential that Papua New Guinea fully harness the potential of its young people, who comprise some 60 per cent of the population, and ensure that women and girls have full equality in Papuan society.

Almost a year after the closure of the Australian-run Manus Island migrant detention centre in Papua New Guinea, Mr. Pato said that his country is working closely with Australia in resettling qualified asylum seekers.

Migrants still remain in Papua New Guinea and that each will be addressed on a case by case basis, he said, adding: "that is our contribution to the extent possible, in partnership with Australia, to address human trafficking, people smuggling and transnational crime.

Turning to the implementation of the [Bougainville Peace Agreement](#), the Minister noted the international community's increasing interest in the referendum, one of the pillars of the Agreement, which is scheduled for 15 June 2019.

He announced that his country's Government is fully committed to the Agreement, and has appointed former Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, to preside over the work of the Bougainville Referendum Commission.

On Friday, UN chief António Guterres recognized the efforts of the Pacific Islands Forum ([PIF](#)), of which Papua New Guinea is a member, for taking forward peacebuilding priorities, and congratulating the Government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government on implementing the Agreement: Mr. Pato expressed his gratitude to the UN, and other partners,

for working with Papua New Guinea on this “important national issue.”

[Full statement available here](#)