

11th HEADS OF MISSION MEETING

21 August 2025 Le Lagon Warwick

**Closing statement by Hon. Prime Minister Jotham Napat and same
time Acting Foreign Minister**

Dean and Heads of Vanuatu Missions and Consul Generals

Dean and members of the Resident Diplomatic Corps

Director Generals, Directors and government officials,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here as Prime Minister and also to be acting on behalf of the Hon. Marc Ati, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade. At the outset I express the Vanuatu Government's appreciation to our Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consul Generals for being able to attend the 11th Heads of Mission Consultations. By the same token, I thank Government Ministries that have attached importance to this platform as the conduit for concrete exchanges, information sharing that allows the equipping of all arms of Government with the essentialities that will marshal the shaping of our external pursuits.

We must not underestimate how important these consultations are for the national interest. It is often not understood by the Government machinery that the Foreign Service of the Republic of Vanuatu is the only permanently based overseas arm of Government. That is why I must place extreme emphasis on the national significance

of the annual consultations as a compass that charts from the national foreign policy principles, how the country adjusts to the pace of regional and global transformation. And on this note I convey the Government's gratitude to our officials who recognize this thrust and have spent valuable time with our diplomats.

I will not dwell too much on my statement for I know that through the last couple of days you will have been enriched through the dialogue and exchanges with some participating Government departments on national priorities. In my first address to the nation on 30 July this year, under the theme of "Vanuatu Yumi Stanap" you will already have familiarized your selves with key achievements of the Government's 100 Day Plan and the course it has set in the attainment of the NSDP goals by 2030. And it is in this context that I will use this occasion to draw our attention to some fundamental foreign policy directives of this Government.

I thank our valued development partners for honoring the invitation to be here this afternoon and networking with your counterparts as we –together – build stronger our friendships. Vanuatu is not a foe, but a friend to everyone, to every single nation-state. This is the DNA of Vanuatu's long standing foreign policy, heavily embedded in our culture and fasen. It is in this vein, as Prime Minister, that I am very pleased with the progress we are making in building stronger and genuine partnerships with major partners, through trust and mutual respect.

But it has not all been plain sailing. A quick reflection of our 45- year journey will show that as a very small and fragile economy, we have had to work extra hard to get to where we are today. And I appeal to some partners to look at and understand Vanuatu from a common periscope. Too often the external lens that judge Vanuatu's progress, of course unfairly, consequently place enormous stress on a constantly vulnerable country. We must build stronger these bridges to be able to sustain the

weight and expectations of mutually beneficial walkways to fair development. This is a just call. Like we have with actions on Climate action, equally is access to development funding through bilateral arrangements. On behalf of the Government, I thank all our partners who recognize this need and are actively supporting Vanuatu with its unique development challenges.

To Vanuatu diplomats abroad, it's good to see most of you present for the consultations. You are the frontline of our nation's foreign policy. In most difficult challenges- such as the global lockdown during the pandemic, you have been relentless in continuing to provide the services demanded by Government policy and our nationals abroad. This 3-day consultations have been about you, your work, your challenges, and your mission to carry Vanuatu's interests across the world.

At the same time, I warmly acknowledge our officials, particularly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation & External Trade, whose efforts provide the vital backbone of policy support at home. There is room for improvements and I will make some proposals towards the end of my statement.

As we bring the 11th Heads of Mission Meeting here in Port Vila to a close, and as you prepare to return to your respective missions, I call on each of you to reaffirm our collective commitment to the implementation of the Government's 2025 priorities. These priorities must remain the guiding compass of your daily work, where you represent the Republic of Vanuatu. Allow me to highlight a few key priorities for your takeaway. These directions are aligned to the People's Plan and embraced through the Foreign Ministry's Corporate Plan and annual Business Plans, all consistent to the country's first documented Foreign Policy principles which was launched last year.

First, Post-Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure Rebuilding stands as an urgent call to action. The December 2024 earthquake, followed by successive natural disasters has tested the very fabric of our society. Our people look to us for leadership in mobilizing international support to rebuild what has been lost, but more importantly to build back stronger and more resilient communities. Your mandate is to seek for innovative financing, technical expertise, and political backing for the restoration of critical infrastructure: roads, health clinics, schools, and utilities. Also ensure that Vanuatu's recovery is underpinned by principles of sustainability and inclusiveness. In the spirit of the nakamal and through the tool of kava diplomacy every conversation you have and every door you knock on must echo the urgent needs of our people and their hope for a brighter, safer, and fair future.

Second, Economic Recovery and Growth is the engine that must power our nation forward. You are Vanuatu's ambassadors not only in diplomacy, but also in trade, investment, and tourism. Champion our nation as a safe and attractive destination for business and leisure. Advocate energetically for our agricultural products, our world-renowned fisheries and beef, and importantly, our unique kava industry. Promote new markets, secure fair trade arrangements, and attract investment that delivers real jobs, skills, and value- adding programs.

Third, Governance and Public Sector Reform is vital for building trust and credibility. My government is committed to transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Capitalize on your networks to bring home technical assistance, international training, and cooperation programs. Seek best practices from our partners, and forge relationships that help modernize our institutions and strengthen the foundations of good governance. Remember, every advance in our public administration translates to better services and more opportunities for our people.

Fourth, Education Reform is a long-term investment in the sustainable development of Vanuatu. Education fuels innovation, empowerment, and prosperity. As diplomats, use every connection and forum, in bilateral and multilateral arena to advocate for scholarship opportunities, academic exchanges, and technical training for Ni-Vanuatu students and professionals, including the public service. Secure partnerships that open doors for our youth and cultivate the knowledge our nation needs to thrive in the 21st century. Collaborate closely with the Ministry of Education and our own National University in expanding opportunities for our people.

Fifth, Health is the business of all of us. Yesterday, the Vanuatu Central Hospital commemorated its Golden Jubilee. In my statement I outlined major reforms in the health sector, including the establishment of a new Health Services Commission. With the branding of the Vanuatu National Hospital, upgrades to provincial hospitals, health centres and clinics will require your collective efforts in supporting this major priority of Government.

Sixth, Foreign Relations and Sovereignty Protection remain your paramount responsibilities. Defending our independence, maritime boundaries, and natural resources is a sacred duty. This includes the critical negotiations over the southern islands of Umaenupne and Leka (Matthew and Hunter). Our sovereignty over these islands is non-negotiable and fundamental to our identity. As you are aware, negotiations with France are ongoing and positive. The mandate for maritime boundaries rests with the National Committee but there will be times when you will be called upon to support our joint efforts.

Last but not least, Climate Change Advocacy and Resilience remains central to our foreign policy. Continue to make Vanuatu's voice impossible to ignore in global

forums. Demand climate justice, press for delivery of loss and damage funds, and ensure our communities benefit from real, practical resilience support.

Ambassadors, these are not mere aspirations, but rather a practical roadmap for action. The coming year presents unprecedented challenges, but also immense opportunities. Whether you represent Vanuatu in global capitals, regional groupings, international organizations, or development forums, these priorities must guide your every engagement and decisions.

The people of Vanuatu rely on you to transform these goals into diplomatic achievement and tangible benefits that uplift lives and build a nation fit for future generations. Your value as a Heads of Mission or Consul General will always be measured not by the number of meetings attended or the weight of agreements signed, but by the impact you deliver to the People of the Republic of Vanuatu.

I commend you for your service and sacrifice, often in difficult and challenging circumstances. This government will continue to strengthen your capacity, address your welfare, improve coordination with headquarters, and ensure that our limited resources are used strategically and transparently. You have our trust. If there was be one Mission that I had to single for performing beyond the unexpected, I must commend Ambassador Antas, who for six years has been the stalwart of Vanuatu presence in Geneva. Excellency, you have served with distinction. To you and your dear spouse, we thank you for the sacrifices for our nation. I call on the Foreign Ministry not to neglect institutions and but reinvest their vast experiences for the common good of the Foreign Service.

We live in a time of great complexity and global uncertainty. But I want assure you that if Vanuatu's foreign service remains united in vision, committed to our

principles, and driven by service to our nation, Vanuatu will remain strong and continue to make its mark on the global stage.

In moving ahead to next year's consultations I make these recommendations:

1. Consultations must be held in the first six months of year, preferably the first quarter to align with planning and budget processes
2. The Foreign Service Act review to be ready for November Parliament this year to ensure the legislation is adapting to the demands of the state

In closing, I thank you sincerely for your participation and for the work you do every day. Safe travels as you return to your postings, and may you carry Vanuatu's hopes and aspirations with you, wherever you serve. Your success is our success, and together with our partner, we will continue to build a stable, sustainable and prosperous Vanuatu.

Tank yu tumas, God bless you all, and may God continue to bless the Republic of Vanuatu and all its friends.

End.

I wish to take this opportunity to make a few proposals to the better organization of the annual Heads of Mission Consultations:

