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## **Vanuatu Takes France to the ICJ Over Sovereignty of Umaenupne (Matthew) and (Umaeneg/Leka) Hunter Islands and maritime boundary delimitation**

**Wednesday 2nd September, 2026 | Port Vila - The Hague** - Vanuatu has instituted proceedings against France before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concerning sovereignty over Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) Islands and delimitation of a maritime boundary between Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

Deputy Prime Minister and Lead Negotiator for Maritime Boundaries, Sovereignty, and Decolonisation, Johnny Koanapo said Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) islands belong to the people of Vanuatu, and that the protection of Vanuatu's territorial integrity is fundamental to Vanuatu's nationhood.

"Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) islands have been part of Vanuatu for centuries. The islands are deeply sacred and intrinsically linked to Vanuatu's cultural identity," he said.

"After formal negotiations, and several decades of diplomatic engagement with no outcome, it is clear that judicial determination offers the clearest pathway to a lasting and internationally recognised resolution."

"The ICJ is the most lawful and constructive mechanism to resolve disputes between states. These proceedings will allow us to place our legal positions before an impartial tribunal and receive an authoritative determination," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

"France is a global champion of international law, and the rules-based order. Agreeing to participate in ICJ proceedings will demonstrate their longstanding commitment to these principles."

In its Application, Vanuatu affirms that Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) islands have always been part of Vanuatu long before colonisation

"Communities across the southern islands of Aneityum, Futuna, and Tanna maintain enduring bloodlines and cultural connections to the islands, reflecting a long and living relationship," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

Bilateral negotiations failed to resolve this dispute, despite sustained efforts from both sides. Referring this issue to the ICJ is wholly consistent with the international rules-based order and principles Vanuatu and France support.

“Vanuatu stands firmly in support of the international rules-based order and the peaceful resolution of disputes through international law. In seeking acceptance that Umaenupne (Matthew) and Umaeneg/Leka (Hunter) islands belong to Vanuatu, and that maritime boundaries are finally settled we are using the legal processes provided under the international rules-based order to assert our rights with dignity and determination in the face of an unresolved colonial legacy,” the Deputy Prime Minister said.

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