

## **Joint statement from Vanuatu's Prime Minister, The Hon. Charlot Salwai Tabimasma, and Australia's Prime Minister, The Hon. Scott Morrison MP**

The Prime Ministers of Australia and Vanuatu have today reaffirmed the strong, enduring and multifaceted relationship between our countries. This relationship is based on common values, shared aspirations, respect and friendship, and our shared interest in the peace and prosperity of our home, the Pacific.

The Australian Prime Minister's historic and first official visit to Vanuatu reinforces the importance of this relationship for both our countries, following on from the Prime Minister of Vanuatu's official visit to Australia in June last year.

We work together to support economic and human development, national security and regional stability, climate and disaster resilience and response, and other areas important to our relationship and our region.

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The links between people, communities, educators and students, sporting groups and churches in Australia and Vanuatu are longstanding and extensive. They are the ties that bind us. We want to build on those links and make them stronger.

In the spirit of this strong partnership, Australia is committed to helping Vanuatu achieve its national development goals, including in education and skills development in urban and rural areas to create jobs and economic growth; build climate resilient infrastructure; and support responsive and capable institutions to deliver services.

We are increasing labour mobility opportunities that will deliver dividends for Vanuatu workers and Australian businesses. Vanuatu already has the highest participation rate in the Pacific under the Seasonal Workers Program, and will benefit from the new Pacific Labour Scheme. We will work together to improve selection and preparation of new entrants, enhance links with Australian businesses and employers, and maximise skills development opportunities. We were pleased to welcome the first twelve ni-Vanuatu workers under the new scheme to Australia in December 2018.

We will deliver more high quality major infrastructure and economic investments together. On 16 January, we officially opened the Lini Highway upgrade – named in honour of Vanuatu's founding father – and completed the Port Vila Urban Development project. This \$39 million investment has transformed Port Vila's road and drainage network, and provides public amenities such as walking paths, public restrooms and laundry facilities. The new \$2 billion Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), announced in November 2018, will also provide substantial new sustainable infrastructure investment opportunities. This initiative will offer grant funding and long-term loans to support high priority infrastructure development in telecommunications, energy, transport and water.

Australia will continue to provide support for the reform and revitalisation of Vanuatu's national television and radio broadcaster, the Vanuatu Broadcast and Telecommunications Corporation (VBTC).

Our passion for sports is a strong bond between us. The Australia-Pacific Sports Linkages Program provides a framework to develop sports cooperation and as part of this program, Australia will bring the Young Matildas to the Pacific in the second half of 2019. This will be the first Australian national football team tour of the Pacific since 2006.

Australia will continue to support Vanuatu in its development efforts in building its resilience, and response to and recovery from natural disasters. Australia's \$50 million investment in Tropical Cyclone Pam recovery and reconstruction has helped to rebuild community infrastructure and revitalise Vanuatu's economy. Vanuatu currently faces challenges from volcanic activity in Ambae and Ambrym. In the face of these events, Australia always stands ready to assist our Pacific family. Australia has provided \$5.5 million to assist people affected. Australia will also provide support to refurbish Port Vila Central Market House, damaged during Tropical Cyclone Pam.

We will continue to deepen our security partnership. We are working together to build police capability and improve infrastructure, and opened the upgraded Police College on 16 January. We are also upgrading infrastructure for the Vanuatu Mobile Force and Police Maritime Wing, and will support training and leadership opportunities. In addition to this, Australia will support the Government of Vanuatu to build a new police station on Malekula Island. We continue to work cooperatively to advance a bilateral security treaty. Guided by the Boe Declaration on regional security, we will also work together to address the Pacific's unique security interests including transnational crime, human, environmental and cyber security.

Vanuatu will also receive a replacement Guardian-class patrol boat under the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP). The PMSP is a \$2 billion (over 30 years) program, which consists of replacement Guardian-class patrol boats, integrated aerial surveillance, and enhancements to regional cooperation.

Australia congratulates Vanuatu on its hosting of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2020. The PIF is a key multilateral forum for our region, and an opportunity for Pacific island countries to engage in dialogue on critical issues facing our future.

We greatly value the partnership between our countries and we will work together to support a Pacific region that is secure strategically, stable economically and sovereign politically.

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