

## Foreword by Dr. Alfred Oehlers

Good ideas, it is often said, possess an uncanny timelessness. Those found in this book are no exception. Conceived at possibly one of the most tumultuous times in the history of the Pacific, the themes addressed nonetheless carry an enduring resonance, addressing matters that both trouble, but also, inspire. Though the incessant drumbeat of headline-grabbing developments may distract, there remains much to reward the reader with an eye to deeper fundamentals and trajectories shaping the future of the region.

This catalog of troubles is well known, and as the contributors to this volume ably remind us, comprise a daunting spectrum. Pressing challenges associated with Covid-related health and economic crises demand immediate attention, alongside risks to sovereignty and security from transnational criminal syndicates and other malign actors. Meanwhile, persistent threats such as those posed by climate change and the insecurities in food and water occasioned, hover menacingly over the very future viability of states. The unity of the region - once widely celebrated and apparently assured - in more recent times has frayed. And finally, the broader geopolitical backdrop has shifted dramatically, with still uncertain implications for interrelationships among the region, its identity, and very soul.

But yet, as disturbing as this catalog might appear, there is hope. Seemingly inspired and catalyzed by the magnitude of the challenge posed, the region has rallied at several pivotal junctures. In the depths of the pandemic, a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway was created. Economic adversity was courageously weathered, and as transitions now occur out of Covid lockdowns, vital discussions are occurring not only about recovery, but the future shape of economic configurations nationally and regionally. The region's global leadership and voice on climate change have been burnished further. Deeply divisive issues centered on the organizational symbol of unity in the region - the Pacific Islands Forum - were reconciled the Pacific Way, wholly by Pacific leaders themselves. The entreaties of greater powers in the complex geopolitical milieu now encountered were handled confidently, deftly and politely by Pacific leaders, with a sharp reminder the region shall be engaged only on its terms, in its ways, and with its interests foremost. And almost encapsulating this admirable journey

towards a future defined by the Pacific itself, came the release of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* this year.

Far from telling a tale of woe, our present juncture speaks to a future of opportunity and potential. For what appears to be emerging are the contours of a fresh departure point for development in the region at an elevation and trajectory qualitatively higher than in the past. A departure point that holds promise of a more resilient and bolder economic integration. One that reflects and captures a more profound unity that can only come from a healing of that so nearly lost. And one that is born of a greater clarity and certainty of identity and purpose, that can illuminate a path forward for the region, but also, undergird principled conversations with the wider world.

The realization of such a tantalizing potential, of course, is not the job of the authors in this present volume. They have done their job commendably, offering penetrating analysis, insight and suggestions. Instead, that job will fall to us, as beneficiaries of these labors, who now must harness these ideas to developments fast unfolding giving shape to that future to come.

Our task is urgent. We are poised at a unique and critical moment. Pacific leaders have thrown down the challenge by cogently and emphatically articulating a unified vision for a resilient region enjoying peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, for all Pacific peoples to lead free, healthy and productive lives. There can be none other more powerful affirmation of our shared commitment to such universal values than success in the accomplishment of that vision. Our time to act in support of these aspirations, is now.

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