As of today, there are 273 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported in the Pacific; Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, CNMI and PNG. The rest of the Pacific are still free of the coronavirus.

We have not been idle. In fact, the Pacific Health Ministers met more frequently than ever. Since early 2020, we met once a week to discuss how we can prepare and respond to COVID-19.

Each of our countries has unique customs and traditions, but share many characteristics – relatively small populations, dispersed across vast distances – that mean we face many common challenges in dealing with COVID 19.

Working in solidarity, we focused on a common framework of health sector preparedness and response plan for the Pacific. We inventoried the capacity of our health systems, including technical capacity on critical preparedness, readiness and response actions for
COVID-19, critical laboratory and medical supplies, personal protective equipment and worked with partners to address the gaps we could without any delay.

It is one of the most challenging tasks we are dealing with in the Pacific, and many of us started to implement border restrictions early on to avoid importation of the virus. In my own country, Nauru, our key challenges are geographical isolation, small Healthcare Workforce, a small critical care unit and communal living family arrangements that can easily fuel local transmission

For the Pacific, as countries start to implement tighter border restrictions in our region and globally, it became harder to send samples for testing, harder to send critical supplies in.

We subsequently agreed to form a humanitarian pathway, a mechanism that enable the provision of medical and humanitarian assistance from regional, international and development partners in a timely, safe, effective and equitable manner.

Looking forward, our Pacific island countries are preparing for what is going to be our new normal. We have urgent unfinished business such as building strong health systems, closing immunization gaps we cannot ignore. And there are emerging issues that demand our attention in the new normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health emergency of unprecedented scale. It poses a real and extreme danger to the health and security of the Pacific people. In this time of crisis, we gather, albeit virtually, with our Pacific family to work in solidarity. And with the continued support of WHO we are confident we will make solid progress.

I hereby urge WHO, SPC and other technical partners and donors for continued support and hereby call on all Pacific Islands to continue to work in solidarity, support the Pacific countries.

Thank you