



Pacific Conference of Churches

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LET PEACE GOVERN SECURITY

A Pastoral Open Letter on Micah 4:1–4 and the Ocean of Peace

To the leaders and peoples of the Blue Pacific, and to all who seek to be friends of our region

Dear sisters and brothers,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our peace.

I write from Majuro, where the ocean surrounds every conversation about life and the future. Here, as across our Blue Pacific Continent, the ocean gathers islands into relationship. It carries memory, food, faith, culture and the promise of generations still to come. Its currents move through our histories and shape our sense of belonging. We understand ourselves through it and within it.

The hope of an Ocean of Peace grew from this deep Pacific consciousness. It offered a way for our region to name its own vocation in a troubled world: peoples of the ocean seeking peace through relationship, dialogue, dignity and care for the whole community of creation. Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's vision was received with hope because it gave regional expression to a shared longing and opened space for the Blue Pacific to exercise moral agency amid the gathering currents of geopolitical rivalry.

Pacific women have long carried this hope. When Pacific women leaders gathered here in Majuro in 2023, they reaffirmed the future named by the foremothers of the movement in the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action: a Pacific Zone of Peace. Their vision arose from

our region's experience of nuclear injustice, wars and armed conflict, and from the patient work of peacebuilding. It recognised the importance of peace education and the role of faith and traditional leaders in forming communities able to live together without fear. That women-led inheritance belongs within every vision for an Ocean of Peace.

Majuro also carries a solemn memory. Earlier this month marked eighty years since the Able detonation over Bikini Atoll on 1 July 1946, the first so-called peacetime nuclear explosion following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A second detonation, Baker, took place underwater at Bikini on 25 July. They began twelve years in which the United States conducted 67 atmospheric nuclear tests in the air, at the surface and underwater at Bikini and Enewetak.¹

The word “test” remains painfully inadequate. Marshallese lives, land, lagoons and ocean carried the consequences. The legacy reaches into bodies, family histories and the wellbeing of generations. Displacement continues. Contamination continues. The search for truth, justice and full reparation continues.

Within the same nation lies Kwajalein, home to the United States Army Garrison—Kwajalein Atoll and the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. The Marshall Islands sit within the military architecture and wider island-chain calculations of the Pacific. Communities surrounding strategic installations may quickly be treated as collateral damage when tensions rise. The same communities face an advancing climate emergency. The language of friendship is tested by every decision that prolongs fossil-fuel dependence and protects profit at the expense of vulnerable people.

From this place, the words *Ocean of Peace* carry hope, history and responsibility. During the development of the regional vision, Pacific churches and civil-society organisations spoke of peace as the wellbeing of people, land and ocean. We drew from the many Pacific words and practices that hold peace within right relationship: *filemu*, *melino*, *sautu*, reconciliation, reciprocity, neighbourliness and care. Peace begins in the

¹ United States Department of Energy, *Report on the Status of the Runit Dome in the Marshall Islands* (2020), recording 67 atmospheric tests between 1946 and 1958, 43 at Enewetak. [Official report](#). See also United States Department of Energy, “Operation Crossroads, Bikini Atoll, July 1946,” [historical record](#).

dignity of the person and reaches into the household, the community, the nation, the ocean and our relationship with the Creator.

Churches and civil society named the wounds that shape our region: the nuclear legacy, climate injustice, violence against women and children, unresolved struggles for self-determination, the extraction of land and ocean, deep-sea mining, economic systems that leave families behind, and the militarisation of communities and sacred places. They affirmed the wisdom and leadership of women, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous knowledge-holders, churches and local peacebuilders.

Before the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration, the Pacific Conference of Churches articulated the vision through *Securing a Just and Inclusive Ocean of Peace*. We understood peace as the continuing work of becoming more fully human in relationship with one another, with creation and with God. The Kanaky wisdom of *Do Kamo* gave language to that transformation. It called for leadership shaped by humility, sacred kinship, reciprocity, courageous hope and responsibility for the common good.²

The spiritual horizon was a Pacific covenant in which justice heals relationships and communities flourish. Security would receive its purpose from that peace.

The Veitacini Treaty, signed by Fiji and Australia on 6 July 2026, has now entered this story. Its text affirms the Pacific Way, peaceful settlement through dialogue, respect for sovereignty and freedom from coercion. Articles 4, 6 and 7 provide for deterrence, collective defence, mutual response to armed attack and visiting-forces arrangements.³ Several purposes now travel under the sacred and political name *Ocean of Peace*.

The public question raised by RNZ Pacific deserves careful attention: has the Ocean of Peace been hijacked?⁴

² Pacific Conference of Churches, *Securing a Just and Inclusive Ocean of Peace: Faith, Justice, and the 2050 Strategy* (18 June 2025); *Peace and Security as a Wholistic Approach for the Wellbeing of People, Land and Sea in the Blue Pacific*; and Rev. James Shri Bhagwan, *The Ocean in Us*, Epeli Hau'ofa Memorial Lecture (4 April 2024).

³ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Ocean of Peace Alliance (Veitacini Treaty)," signed 6 July 2026. [Official treaty text](#).

⁴ Johnny Blades, "Has the Pacific's Ocean of Peace concept been hijacked?", *RNZ Pacific*, 17 July 2026, [republished by ABC Pacific](#).

Joey Tau, Coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation and Chair of the Pacific Regional NGO Organisations Alliance, has expressed concern about the co-option of the vision by external military and security interests. He has called for Pacific peoples and civil society to shape the institutions created in its name.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Coordinator of Political Engagement for the Pacific Women Mediators Network, has called attention to civilian peacebuilding and demilitarisation. Her concern reflects the daily work of women and communities who prevent violence, mediate conflict, heal trauma and hold relationships together.

Dr Marco de Jong, Pacific historian and lecturer at Auckland University of Technology, has drawn attention to the movement of the public language toward deterrence and strategic competition. He has asked for clarity around the proposed Ocean of Peace Centre, its purpose and its governance.

Their witness belongs within regional talanoa. They offer leaders a gift of truth spoken for the wellbeing of the whole Pacific household. Their concern reaches beneath the wording of a single agreement. It asks who will give meaning to the Ocean of Peace, whose experience will guide it, and which forms of power will grow beneath its name.

Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva, former President of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, offers an image for this talanoa. A soldier holds a gun and a baby cries before him. The baby's vulnerability carries power. Its cry can interrupt the hand, awaken conscience and summon responsibility. Pacific communities and civil-society organisations often speak from such places of exposure. Their moral agency keeps regionalism accountable to people and gives the Ocean of Peace roots in lived experience. When they speak, the region is hearing part of itself.

Micah helps us to hear the depth of this question.

The vision in Micah 4 rises from the fierce judgement of the previous chapter. Rulers have distorted justice. Leaders have built Zion with blood. Priests and prophets have served

money. They continue to speak as if God approves. The poor carry the wounds of this arrangement.

Then God acts. God establishes the mountain of the Lord as a place of teaching and just judgement. Nations come with a desire to learn. They place their disputes within a justice greater than national interest, military strength or economic power. God's justice begins the transformation of society.

Under that justice, swords become ploughshares and spears become pruning hooks. The metal remains. Human skill remains. Organised labour remains. Their purpose is converted.

The oldest agrarian societies mobilised people for cultivation, irrigation, public works and war. Micah turns the assembly toward the work that feeds life. The energy gathered for conflict is released into planting, pruning and the patient care of land. People return to their vines and fig trees. The measure of peace is found in a household able to live without fear.

Conversion reaches the imagination, the treasury, technology, institutions and alliances. It asks what our societies prepare for, what receives our greatest investment, and what kind of future our agreements make possible.

The rest of Micah 4 carries a difficult memory. God gathers the lame, the displaced and the afflicted. Daughter Zion enters anguish, exile and labour pains. Nations gather against her. The chapter closes with an image of threshing and victory. We hear the cry of a small people living beneath imperial power, longing to survive.

The closing verses require spiritual care. Fear can persuade a people that God blesses every weapon raised for their protection. A nation can place itself at the centre of Zion's story and make every neighbour an approaching enemy. Micah has already shown the direction of God's peace: nations learning together, disputes judged with justice, weapons converted, households released from fear.

We read this chapter in the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived under occupation. He blessed peacemakers. He told the disciple who reached for a sword to put it away. He carried the violence of empire in his own body. The risen Christ entered a room locked by fear, showed his wounds and spoke peace.

Pope Leo XIV has called this an “unarmed and disarming” peace.⁵ An unarmed and disarming peace requires courage from persons and nations. It loosens the hold of fear, pride, suspicion and domination. It allows truth to be heard. It creates room for encounter and opens a path toward conversion.

I therefore offer a respectful pastoral appeal to our Pacific leaders, to Australia and other partners, to our churches, and to all who carry responsibility for the Ocean of Peace. Let the vision remain under the shared guardianship of the Blue Pacific. Let its development take place through transparent regional talanoa. Let women, young people, persons with disabilities, churches, civil society, Indigenous knowledge-holders, nuclear-affected communities and peoples seeking self-determination share authority from the beginning.

Let the proposed Ocean of Peace Centre carry a clear civilian and whole-of-society mandate for conflict prevention, mediation, trauma healing, Women, Peace and Security, social cohesion and nonviolent transformation. Let every security partnership honour the Rarotonga Treaty, nuclear justice, climate justice, human rights, decolonisation and the sacred guardianship of our ocean.

The churches also stand under Micah’s word. We are called to repentance wherever our silence, privilege, prejudice or closeness to power has wounded people. Our public witness gains integrity through the peace we practise within our own communities.

Friends of the Pacific are invited into the same conversion. Friendship listens. Friendship remembers. Friendship receives the moral agency of Pacific peoples. Friendship helps swords become tools of life.

⁵ Pope Leo XIV, “Towards an ‘unarmed and disarming’ peace,” Message for the 59th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2026. [Official Vatican text](#)

May peace give security its direction. May justice shape every agreement. May our leaders find courage for patient dialogue. May the voices of our communities be received with grace. May the people of Bikini, Enewetak and all nuclear-affected communities receive truth, justice and healing. May those facing rising seas find faithful solidarity.

And may Christ, our peace, lead the nations toward God's Mountain, where the work of human hands nourishes life, each household rests without fear, and our ocean becomes a living sign of God's embrace.

In the peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "James Shri Bhagwan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" being the most prominent.

Rev. James Shri Bhagwan

General Secretary

Pacific Conference of Churches