

**OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE****15 May 2015****Inaugural Meeting of the Pacific Islands Regional Initiative (PIRI) Meeting**

Financial inclusion is important for inclusive growth and development, with shared prosperity at the center of the development, in developing and emerging economies.

The Governor of the National Reserve Bank of Tonga (NRBT) attended the inaugural launch and first meeting of the Pacific Islands Regional Initiative (PIRI) which was held on 6-8 May 2015 in Dili, Timor-Leste. This event was co-hosted by the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI), which is based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and the Central Bank of Timor-Leste, and supported by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Program (PFIP), which is based in Suva, Fiji.

The PIRI was formerly known as the Pacific Islands Working Group (PIWG), and consists of Governors from the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, Central Bank of Samoa, National Reserve Bank of Tonga, Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, Bank of Papua New Guinea, Reserve Bank of Fiji and the Central Bank of Timor-Leste. The PIWG had focused on addressing the challenges faced by the Pacific region of having the highest unbanked rates in the world due to geographical dispersed islands, low population density and underdeveloped physical and banking infrastructure.

In September 2014, the AFI Global Policy Forum (GPF) determined that a sustained commitment is required to address the continued challenge of high rates of financial exclusion worldwide. In this regard, the PIWG was converted into a long-term regional initiative, known as the PIRI, in order to build capacity and identify activities the group could accomplish together to advance evidence-based financial inclusion policies in the region. This regional initiative is an ambitious and progressive effort undertaken within the AFI Network to enhance conditions that will lead to the financial empowerment of all Pacific Islanders. The Governors from each of member regional central banks importantly endorsed and agreed on the broad vision, mission, objectives and financial inclusion policy areas for the PIRI, as outlined in the Dili Consensus.

The primary objectives of PIRI are as follows:

1. Remove policy barriers to improve access;
2. Utilize technology for financial service provision and access;
3. Empower and protect through financial literacy and education;
4. Collaborate with stakeholders, including the private sector, to advance financial inclusion in the region, and;
5. Utilize data for smart policymaking and monitoring.

The NRBT became a member of the PIWG in 2012 and reaffirms its commitment to promoting financial inclusion initiatives. The first steps include a stakeholder workshop and a stocktake of the financial services that are currently available as well as a survey of what financial services / products are in public demand. This would help in developing the national financial inclusion goals and strategies to achieve these goals. Tonga's efforts are to be supported by international organisations such as the PFIP and AFI.

National Reserve Bank of Tonga