



Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs

Social and economic prosperity for Pacific peoples

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Media release

Looking out for Pacific people in the recession

A PACIFIC jobs fono in Wellington today made a good start in considering the impact of the recession on Pacific people and how best to minimise the damage, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs says.

The fono pulled together Pacific businesspeople, employers, economists, academics and others to look at how best to protect jobs, create new ones and provide training opportunities for those who are laid off. Its suggestions will feed into the Prime Minister's jobs summit in Auckland later this month.

"It's always hard at an event like this to come up with concrete actions which are going to make an immediate difference," Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs Chief Executive Dr Colin Tukuitonga said.

"But today identified some very positive starting points for us. In particular it is very clear that we should be focussing on young and low-skilled Pacific workers who we know are already losing jobs.

"These are the people who are going to be an increasingly important part of the future workforce: we need them to regard unemployment as a temporary setback, an opportunity to train and upskill rather than the beginning of a career on welfare."

"We know that we also need to focus not only on workers, but on their families and communities – ensuring that whatever supports or programmes are put in place cater for them as well. If, for example, money management classes are being offered to workers why not offer them to their families as well? "

Dr Tukuitonga said participants also identified opportunities in the community and voluntary sector.

” Let’s invest in our church groups, our social service providers and groups like that to help them cope with what will inevitably be increased demand. Let’s give them some training in how to run small businesses, for example. This won’t just help them with their role now, but will position workers in this sector to move onto other jobs later.”

Dr Tukuitonga said participants also identified the need for a more coherent approach and suggested a work- brokerage role, a one-stop shop for training, jobs, information and so forth which employers in South Auckland, for example, would head straight for when looking for staff, or options for staff who were being laid off.

“Similarly those looking for employment would be offered training – identified in conjunction with employers – so they are well positioned to take up job offers as they become available. Regional summits for employers to identify those needs were also flagged. ”

Other suggestions from the fono included helping Pacific businesses grow, so they are well-placed to take on Pacific workers, and training for the many Pacific people working in the public sector – often in service roles.

Dr Tukuitonga said while a sense of urgency was evident amongst participants it was important to remember that the recession would be temporary. “We also have to recognise how far Pacific people have come – we are better equipped to deal with this now than we were in the 1980s.

“Clearly today’s fono was just the start. We now need to talk to communities, to churches, to unions and other interested parties to ensure Pacific people’s jobs and families are as well-supported as they can be,” Dr Tukuitonga said.

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