

ADDRESS BY ADIMAIMALAGA TAFUNA'I, CHAIRPERSON OF PIANGO BOARD,  
2008 PIANGO COUNCIL, RENDEZVOUS HOTEL, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Tena koutou, Tena koutou, Tena koutou katoa

I pay homage to the Indigenous people of Aotearoa NZ, and acknowledge with deep respect the land upon which we are gathered here today.

Fakaa lofa lahi atu. To the Niue Community in Auckland and to NIUANGO, our gratitude and alofa for the magnificent work you have done to have us all here. I know that many of us would have preferred to be in Niue, but you gave us a taste of Niue last night and we are experiencing the rock, through your presence here and your selfless commitment and willingness to be a part of this Council, when many of you had probably never heard of PIANGO until Pefi, roped you in!

Ni sa bula vinaka, Talofa tele lava.

Warm Pacific greetings and welcome to PIANGO Council 2008!

As PIANGO's current and outgoing Chairperson of the Board, it gives me the humble privilege and the greatest pleasure to stand here today to welcome you all to this Triennial PIANGO Council Meeting.

In Papua New Guinea in 2005, we adopted our Strategic Plan for 2006-2010. Now, three years later, we are witness to some fulfilling results of the implementation of this Strategic Plan. We have positioned PIANGO at regional level, and continue to work on strategically positioning PIANGO at international level. At this juncture, I wish to pay tribute to PIANGO's immediate past Executive Director, Ms Cema Bolabola, who in the 3 years up until December 2007 was instrumental in producing the current Strategic Plan and contributed immensely to PIANGO's elevated positioning.

With the support of our PIANGO family and our donors, we are experiencing blessings way beyond our dreams, and moving into a new direction and new

era for Civil Society in the Pacific region. It is gratifying to see the respect and recognition we are beginning to attract as a regional organisation. None of this could have come about without challenges and turbulence on the way, and believe me, there have been many, but nevertheless, I stand tall and proud here today handing over an organisation that is definitely going places and one that has attracted huge funding support and investor confidence, especially in the past 6 months.

For the first time ever, PIANGO has been able to secure a multi-year funding agreement with its long time partner NZAID. The agreement provides FJ\$1.5 million per year for 3 years from 2008 – 2011. AUSAID has also for the first time, provided substantive funding support to PIANGO through its Pacific Leadership Program and we hope that this will lead to a multiyear funding agreement in the near future. For this recent funding boost, I acknowledge the remarkable initiative and drive of the new Executive Director, Bakanebo Tamaroa, who took over the reigns in January this year and has managed to recruit a professional team to support his vision and leadership. It is indeed very inspiring for me to see PIANGO leaping ahead and to witness a strong model of teamwork.

Please bear with me as I'd like to thank and acknowledge the people on this dynamic team. Our secretariat staff, who have worked tirelessly for many weeks, indeed months, preparing for this event and three very special people who have worked with them to make all this happen. Itintaake who in a voluntary capacity has worked as a research and policy analyst researching the many reports done on PIANGO over the years, so that the Secretariat can ensure that the many recommendations have indeed been achieved, Debbie Singh our Rapporteur and media liaison person, who with Emele has been part of the planning team for this council and assisted our communications officer in the production of the many publications you have to guide you through our Council process - and last but not least Emele Duituturaga – our facilitator, who I am proud to have back on the PIANGO team. She has been a long time supporter and advisor to PIANGO, and who better to have facilitating this meeting and ensuring that this Council is an event we can all be proud to be a part of.

With increased donor confidence and the consolidation approach taken by the Board and the Secretariat, it is fitting then, that the theme of this year's Triennial Council Meeting is "Strengthening NLU Effectiveness Towards 2010 and Beyond".

We would not have been able to make such progress had it not been for the ongoing support of our main development partner NZAID, and I'd like to acknowledge in particular the support and advice of Mr Dimitri Geidelberg, who when we paddled through turbulent waters – or when the jumbo jet hit turbulence – was always there to help with the steering. To Ausaid, CCFD, the Commonwealth Foundation, Australian Volunteers International, UNDP Pacific Centre, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Dev-Zone – your assistance is deeply appreciated - a heartfelt thank you to all of you.

To the outgoing board members, your contribution to PIANGO over the past three years, has been above and beyond the call of duty. If you feel unappreciated, just know that where PIANGO stands today, is due in some small part to your hard work and dedication. I am privileged to have been your Board Chair and will cherish the friendships we have built up over the past three years. To all of you, our NLUs, thank you for your support.

In closing, I ask one thing.....please support each other and be proud of each other's achievements – reach out across our beautiful Pacific Ocean to each other - and like the beautiful young Niuean dancers showed us last night – continue to move PIANGO forward by joining your voices together, singing with one voice, gathering strength from each other and believe me, this exciting voyage to 2010 and beyond – will be a smooth and enjoyable one.