



# FORTNIGHTLY SECURITY UPDATE (FSU)

## Vanuatu

**Calls for disengaged workers in Australia to return home:** Minister of Internal Affairs Napuat has [called](#) for the safe return of nationals who have disengaged from Australian labour mobility programs. Approximately 2,000 Vanuatu nationals have disengaged from labour mobility programs since 2019, with some having returned already. But the Hon. Minister Napuat said the disengaged workers numbers remain high. Minister Koanapo issued a similar [appeal](#) to The Hon. Minister Napuat's in April 2024, prior to his portfolio change. Vanuatu's High Commission in Canberra and Consul General in Sydney are prepared to assist.



Minister of Internal Affairs Napuat meets with Australian officials.

**Comment:** Ni-Vanuatu workers are the largest group of disengaged workers in Australia's labour mobility programs but Vanuatu also

*sends a significant number of people – around 10,000 Ni-Vanuatu are currently working there.*

*Social media (Facebook) reactions to the issue have been mixed. Many appreciate the economic benefits of remittances but worry about the social costs, including family separation and community strain. Some support the call for worker returns, especially if reintegration programs improve and local job opportunities are enhanced. So, strengthen pathways for local economic opportunities, skills utilisation, and reintegration could make returning more attractive to seasonal workers.*

### Minister orders fisheries investigation:

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Xavier Iauko has [ordered](#) an investigation into alleged illegal fishing by VanFish Fishing Company after photos of one of its boat's activities emerged on social. Initial reports suggested that a VanFish boat was operating within a restricted area of Vanuatu waters. Follow-up actions will include verifying catch data, issuing penalties if allegations are confirmed, and installing tracking devices on all vessels. The Fisheries Department has undertaken to provide a comprehensive report on compliance measures, ensuring VanFish adheres to fishing regulations.

Separately, on 29 October Prime Minister Salwai met with a Chinese fisheries delegation



and expressed dissatisfaction with SinoVan's slow production of tinned fish for local and regional markets, as well as unmet commitments to employ Vanuatu citizens.

**Comment:** *Vanuatu, like other island countries, relies heavily on marine resources, with fish as a primary asset, yet faces significant challenges from illegal fishing in its waters. To address this, the government could enhance oversight, ensure transparency with fishing operators, and promote sustainable practices that also foster local job creation. Investing in vessel tracking technology would further improve monitoring, reduce illegal activities, and protect marine resources essential to the nation's economy and food security.*

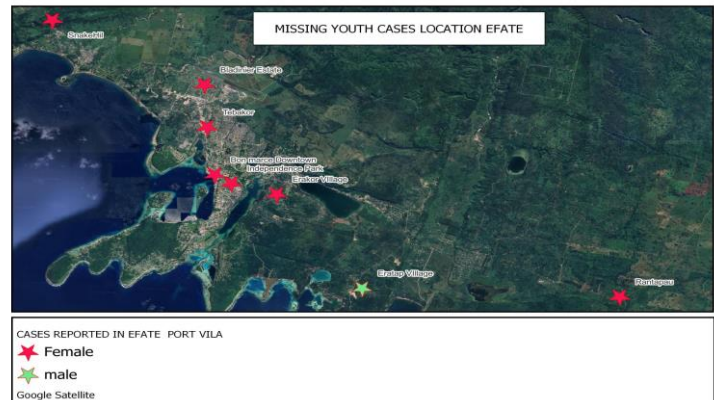


[A photo](#) of the VanFish boat was captured by locals, 5 nautical miles from Pango Point.

#### Eleven youths reported missing since June:

The Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) has been actively handling and investigating the missing person reports, which have drawn significant attention on social media. According to the Vanuatu Police Force [Facebook page](#), most of those missing are females aged from 16 to 20.

Many commentators suggest the missing people reflect a troubling pattern among some families and communities. Some members of the public have questioned whether there has been a deterioration in guidance and care from parents or guardians.



Map showing last known locations of people reported missing between June and October.

**Comment:** *The recurring disappearances underscore a pressing issue, posing a growing [challenge](#) for authorities to respond swiftly and effectively. Most are assumed to have left their families voluntarily and to be residing with new partners. Still, law enforcement will need to investigate until this can be confirmed. Community awareness [programs](#) to educate the public on the risks of youth disappearances and the importance of [reporting](#) suspicious activities could help.*

#### Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) engages 51 new recruits:

This week 51 police recruits, comprising of 30 men and 21 women, started their six-month training programme, designed to equip them with essential skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties. This training is crucial for preparing them to serve and protect their communities effectively.





*The new recruits moved into their campsite at the Police College on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024.*

**Comment:** Community policing and foot patrol remain a challenge within area councils and urban areas across the country. With the continuous increase in police recruitment each year, there is hope that police presence will be strengthened in all 72 area councils throughout Vanuatu.

## Regional

**FFA Marks Ground-breaking Of new fisheries surveillance centre:** The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) [held](#) a ground-breaking ceremony in Honiara last week to mark the commencement of construction of its new Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre (RFSC).

The new RFSC, a state-of-the-art facility with an estimated cost of over 850 million vatu, is designed to enhance maritime surveillance and cooperation among the FFA's 17 Members. Construction of the new RFSC is set to commence in 2025 and is expected to be completed over the next two years. The design phase has been supported by Australia.

**Comment:** The RFSC serves as the coordination centre for all FFA surveillance operations, assisting Members in monitoring the vast Pacific Ocean. An upgraded facility will enhance PICs' Maritime Domain Awareness, and assist governments with making fast, informed

*decisions on maritime security threats. The RFSC will also help with countering Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing across FFA members' 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).*



*The ground-breaking of the new RFSC.*

**PIF delegation visits New Caledonia:** A PIF "Troika Plus" delegation spent three days (27-29 October) in the New Caledonia on "strictly observational mission", after months of violence broke out in May, resulting in thirteen deaths and economic damage estimated at around €2.2 billion. The delegation included the Prime Ministers of Tonga, Cook Islands and Fiji, as well as Solomon Island Foreign Minister Shanel Agovaka (in place of prime minister Manele). They were supported by PIF Secretary-General Waqa and PIF officials.

During the visit President Louis Mapou [said](#) New Caledonia was facing a "turning point" and regularly [highlighted](#) the idea of New Caledonia's "integration in its region". Mapou told local media that New Caledonia's ties to Europe meant it didn't know the Pacific region as well as it should; this was why the PIF visit mattered.

Meanwhile, another visit is expected in New Caledonia in the coming days – the Presidents of both Houses of the French Parliament (Senate

and National Assembly), will be in the territory from 9 to 14 November.

**Comment:** *It is concerning to see that Vanuatu has the closest country to New Caledonia is not included in this mission. One of the aims of the visit was to help reduce tensions in New Caledonia and promote peaceful consultation. The PIF delegation's findings will be shared with leaders at next year's PIF meeting in Honiara.*



*Forum Troika plus leaders in New Caledonia for their fact-finding mission, 28 October 2024*

#### Climate change a prominent topic at CHOGM:

Climate change [features](#) prominently in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) leaders' statement and the Samoa communiqué.

And on the sidelines of the event, several PICs [called](#) on Australia to do more to phase out fossil fuel exports. Tuvalu Prime Minister Teo, alongside representatives from Vanuatu and Fiji, supported the launch of a report focused on Australia, Canada and the UK's global emissions.

Australian Foreign Minister Wong said Australia is transitioning to a net zero economy but couldn't be held responsible for emissions from coal and gas it exported to other countries, adding that the "vast majority" of new coal-fired power plants were being built in China and other developing nations.

One of the other main outputs from CHOGM was the *Apia Commonwealth Ocean Declaration for One Resilient Common Future* – the first oceans-focused [declaration](#) by the grouping. The declaration included points on recognition of national maritime boundaries despite the impacts of climate change and the need to reduce emissions from global shipping.

**Comment:** *CHOGM provided an opportunity for the 56 member countries to discuss their positions ahead of COP 29 next month in Baku, Azerbaijan. And the leaders' communiqué helpfully emphasised the need for heightened ambition in climate financing and support for developing countries.*



*King Charles speaks at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting's official opening in Samoa, 25 October.*

#### Maamau wins third term as Kiribati President:

Taneti Maamau has been [re-elected](#) as Kiribati President for a third term, after the i-Kiribati people went to the polls last Friday.

Maamau won the vote despite a late move by one of the three candidates, Kaotitaake Kokoria, who suddenly broke away from Maamau's ruling Tobwaan Kiribati Party (TKP) to form his own alliance. Maamau reportedly won with about 55% of the vote, while Kokoria received around 42%.

**Comment:** Maamau's TKP, whose 33-member majority in the 45-seat parliament is expected to grow now that the presidency has been secured. Still, Maamau will have some work to do to organise his Cabinet after 14 sitting MPs lost their seats at the national election in August. The first sitting of the new parliament is scheduled for 2 December.



A victorious President Maamau exits a Fiji Airways domestic flight from Onotoa Island to Tarawa on Monday, 28 October 2024

#### Australia to ramp up missile production:

Australia is significantly [enhancing](#) its missile defence capabilities due to increasing strategic competition between the United States and China, including in the Indo-Pacific. Australian Defence Industry Minister Conroy also pointed to China's recent [ICBM test](#) in the South Pacific in September. Conroy said Canberra is also looking to expand partnerships with the US, Japan, and South Korea to boost stability in the Indo-Pacific. Australia also plans to equip its navy with long-range strike missiles.

Australia will also cooperate with arms manufacturers to produce Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems and 155mm artillery shells at home. This is aimed at mitigating the risks of global supply chain disruptions. The goal

is to strengthen Australia's ability to deter possible threats.

**Comment:** In April, Australia released a [National Defence Strategy](#) that foreshadowed a sharp rise in spending to counter its vulnerability to interruptions to trade or prevention of access to its vital air and sea routes. Increasing geostrategic tension between China and the US, and China's growing security activities in the Pacific likely influenced Australia's approach.

Australia's need to increase defence spending can hurt Vanuatu and other PICs as it could divert resources away from other challenges we face. It may be necessary to advocate for Australia and other partners to recognise island countries' top security concerns, like climate change, and to prioritise helping PICs address those issues, rather than focusing on geopolitical rivalry. Vanuatu could also call for new military activities not to harm our fragile ecosystems, which matter to our culture and economy.



Australian Minister for Defence Industry Conroy [speaking](#) in Canberra on 30 October.

#### Regional police unit celebrates first mission:

The newly formed Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG) last week marked its first successful deployment during the CHOGM in Samoa. Over 40 police from 11 Pacific nations – including Vanuatu – provided security.



Samoa Prime Minister Fiaame [convened](#) a gathering of Pacific leaders and PPSG officers to celebrate the police deployment. The prime ministers of Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu, Australia and New Zealand, as well as senior ministers from Nauru, Solomon Islands and PNG [attended](#).

During the event, Australian Prime Minister Albanese [reiterated](#) Canberra's commitment to help establish four "Centres of Excellence" in the region as part of the Pacific Policing Initiative. The centres will be aimed at bolstering specialist capabilities within Pacific nations.



*Pacific Island Leaders with members of Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG) in Samoa.*

**Comment:** Transnational crime, drugs, human trafficking and cybercrime are big increasingly hard to combat alone, so opportunities for greater regional cooperation with other Pacific Island Countries is positive.

#### **Indonesian hospital ship begins Pacific tour:**

Indonesian naval warship *KRI Dr Wahidin Sudirohusodo (WSH)-991* [arrived](#) in the Solomons last week, the first stop in its Pacific tour. In addition to the Solomons, the ship will visit Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. The visit to Vanuatu is scheduled to take place from 8 to 12 November.

According to Indonesian media reporting, the visits will include offers to provide "social

services, renovate places of worship, offer free health services, and distribute medical aid packages" in each country it visits.

**Comment:** The hospital vessel, built in 2022, is the lead ship of the Indonesian Navy's hospital ship class. Jakarta's deployment of the vessel to the region would be aimed partly at improving ties in the region after the inauguration of Indonesia's new President, Prabowo Subianto, on 20 October. Prabowo is a businessman, and retired army general who served as the minister of defense from 2019 to 2024.



*Indonesian personnel raise flags as the vessel docks in the Solomons on 25 October.*

#### **PNG withdraw from the upcoming United Nations climate change talks:**

Papua New Guinea has decided to withdraw from the upcoming COP 29 climate talks in protests what it was described as "[empty promises and inaction](#)" from major polluting nations. Prime Minister Hon. James Marape made [his decision known](#) in August, before PNG foreign minister Tkatchenko said last week, PNG would "no longer tolerate empty promises and inaction, while our people suffer the devastating consequences of climate change". Tkatchenko emphasised that small island nations had trouble accessing climate finance and criticised the international

community for failing to meet its commitments.



*James Marape at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Meeting in Tonga. 29 August 2024 Photo: Pacific Islands Forum.*

**Comment:** Pacific Island Countries are on the frontline of the climate crisis but are only responsible for [0.03% of global greenhouse gas emissions](#). PNG's stand may bring attention to a lack of action on climate change, but some have questioned whether its absence might harm regional cooperation and solidarity on climate action.

## International

**Greenhouse gas inventory highlights stakes ahead of annual climate talks:** Severe wildfires [added](#) to the already rapid accumulation of planet-heating greenhouse gases in the atmosphere last year, highlighting a potential vicious cycle as the average temperature rises, the United Nations weather agency said ahead of the next round of international climate talks.

In its annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said carbon dioxide from fossil fuels and cement production continues to be emitted at a faster rate than can be absorbed by the ocean and

forests. The unabsorbed portion lingers in the atmosphere and drives the so-called "greenhouse effect" of a hotter climate.

Carbon dioxide is "accumulating in the atmosphere faster than at any time during human existence," the WMO said.



*The Baring Head station in New Zealand collects data related to greenhouse gases.*

**Comment:** For nations like Vanuatu, which are on the front lines of climate change, continuing to push for a unified regional effort to enhance global climate finance and assistance with mitigation measures will be crucial. The upcoming COP29 presents an opportunity to lobby for changes that prioritise the needs of vulnerable island nations.

**Indonesian ships drive away Chinese coastguard in disputed waters:** The Indonesian coast guard (Bakamla) says it, along with Indonesian navy ships chased and [expelled](#) a Chinese vessel away from Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), in South China Sea waters.

The Bakamla said that when a China Coast Guard (CCG) ship identified itself over radio as patrolling "in Chinese waters," it responded by affirming Indonesia's sovereign rights under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Meanwhile, China's foreign ministry, said the CCG vessel's operations were legitimate.



A video [shared](#) by Bakamla showed Indonesian officers speaking to their Chinese counterparts.

**Comment:** The South China Sea, one of the world's busiest maritime regions, has long been a geopolitical flashpoint, with China claiming much of the sea that overlaps with territories also claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Although Indonesia does not usually engage in South China Sea territorial disputes, Beijing's maritime actions in Indonesia's EEZ have prompted a response. And Indonesia's new President, Prabowo Subianto, has a background as a military leader, so he may take a firmer stance on such issues than his predecessor.

#### Israel attacks Iran with a series of airstrikes:

Israel [said](#) its strikes on 26 October were targeted at military sites and were retaliation for the missiles that the Islamic Republic had fired at Israel earlier this month.

Initially, nuclear facilities and oil installations were seen as possible targets, but in mid-October Washington was assured by Israel that it would not hit such places. Iran has downplayed the impacts of Israel's attack but on Thursday, two top Iranian officials [said](#) Iran was planning a response.

**Comment:** The Israeli attack heightens the risk of escalation as conflict continues across the Middle East, where militant groups backed by Iran — including Hamas in Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon — are already at war with Israel.

For decades, Israel and Iran have avoided direct military attacks – Israel has carried out covert operations to assassinate Iranian figures and conduct cyberattacks, while Iran used proxy militias to target Israel. Recent military strikes mark a worrying turning point.



Gen. Ali Fadavi on Thursday indicated that Iran intends to retaliate to Israel's attacks.

#### Foreign interference in US Presidential election:

Ahead of the US elections on 5 November, several [allegations](#) of election interference have been made, including a presidential candidate's phone being hacked and a fake video showing ballots burned.

US national security officials have warned that US adversaries may also seek to incite violence after Election Day, on 5 November. The US sees meddling by Russia as the top threat, followed by Iran. China's hacking and post-election influence operations were also seen as threats.

**Comment:** The possibility of post-election violence being incited adds another layer of risk, emphasising the need for vigilance and robust



*security measures to protect the integrity of the democratic process.*



*Presidential candidates Former President Donald Trump; Vice President Kamala Harris.*