



Pacific Disability Forum

A partnership of Pacific organisations
of and for persons with disabilities

Quarter 1 Newsletter

2025

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Week 2025: Advancing Inclusion in the Pacific

From 10–14 February, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) in Suva hosted Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Week 2025, bringing together officials, civil society, and Pacific Organization for Persons with Disabilities for meaningful dialogue on equality and inclusion.

With support from IDA and AWID, six persons with disabilities from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga participated in the event. The week's discussions come ahead of key global forums including CSW69, the Global Disability Summit, and COSP18, offering Pacific voices a platform to shape international priorities on gender and disability inclusion.





The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), in collaboration with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, is Conducted training sessions in Labasa on the use of the Washington Group Short Set Plus (WGSS+) questions.

These questions are designed to collect disaggregated data to help identify persons with disabilities within the population.



The training session was held at the Fiji National Council of Persons with Disabilities (FNCPPD) Labasa complex, with over 15 enumerators participating in preparation for the upcoming national Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES).

The training aimed to deepen their understanding of the government's international commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and how these obligations translate into advancing the rights of persons with disabilities through data collection and analysis.

Staff Deepen Understanding of Disability Rights Through CRPD Training

The Pacific Disability Forum recently held an internal training on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), facilitated by Member Services Officer Savaira Tinai.

The session offered staff a valuable opportunity to revisit the core principles of the Convention and explore how each article connects directly to their daily work. Through interactive discussions and real-life examples, the team strengthened their understanding of disability rights and how to apply them across areas like education, health, employment, and public services.





GESI Week Continues....

The sessions were divided into two during day 3 of the GESI Week, **Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion**.



The spotlight was on Disability Inclusion in the Pacific, with engaging discussions and interactive sessions generating meaningful insights. Participants explored how the Pacific can amplify its priorities for 2025 and beyond, focusing on strategic engagement at major international events like the Global Disability Summit (GDS) and the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP-CRPD) that will take place in April and June respectively.

PDF Announces partnership with CBM Australia Inclusion Advisory Group in the launch of the “Disability in GESDI Analysis:

Quick Reference Guide.” This guide aims to address an essential gap that PDF has been advocating for: ensuring that disability remains a central focus in GESDI approaches, with the necessary expertise dedicated to the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities.

This resource is designed to be used by GESDI advisors, development practitioners, and researchers throughout GESDI analysis phases to ensure that disability rights and equity are fully incorporated. It highlights critical issues and considerations for individuals with disabilities who are most at risk of being left behind, reinforcing the importance of inclusive development.

We strongly encourage the widespread adoption of the “Disability in GESDI Analysis: Quick Reference Guide,” developed in collaboration with the disability movement. Let’s work together to make sure no one is left behind.

Link to the the guide

https://www.cbm.org.au/resource/disability-in-gesdi-analysis-quick-reference-guide?fbclid=IwY2xjawJinB1leHRuA2FlbQ1xMQABHIUYD4vcX4u8tSWChnle77COM3-wGU7t6Ud5IVlr3npvIZKemXvrlq4upw4H_aem_v7s7zvK0rr4swlvFTL7AnQ



Kiribati Mission



As part of our #GrowingStrongerTogether (GST) program, the Pacific Disability Forum visited Kiribati on Tuesday, 18 February 2025, to continue our work on localisation, institutional strengthening, and organisation development with member organisations.

Now in its third year, the GST program began 2025 with assessments and support for:

- Te Toa Matoi
- Kiribati Deaf Association (KDA)
- Kiribati Association of Blind and Visual Impairment

The assessments focused on key areas such as governance, finance systems, and program capacity. Difficult but important conversations helped uncover real challenges and set the foundation for targeted support.

In addition, we supported KDA in developing their new strategic plan, with board members and staff engaging in two days of collaborative planning.

This work was made possible with support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Disability Rights Fund Pacific.





Shaping the Future of Inclusive Education in the Pacific

The Pacific Disability Forum recently took part in the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Paiaudaud held in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

The event brought together Pacific Heads of Education Systems and senior inclusive education representatives from 15 Pacific Island Countries to focus on building more inclusive education systems across the region.

Key discussions addressed policy, data, human resources, and advocacy, with participants sharing country-specific insights and prioritizing recommendations from the Pacific Regional Inclusive Education Review (PRIEF) 2025–2030.

Special attention was given to the needs of neurodivergent and autistic learners, and strategies to monitor progress at all levels of education.



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Strengthening OPD Partnerships in Kiribati

As part of our #GrowingStrongerTogether program, PDF met with the Australian High Commission in Kiribati to share updates on our work with local OPDs. Meeting with First Secretary Mr. Ryan Kinder, we highlighted the importance of institutional strengthening, governance, and compliance—key to helping OPDs become trusted partners and access direct aid.

Supported by DFAT's Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, we're committed to ensuring persons with disabilities are at the centre of development.

For us, equity means:

- Disability-specific and inclusive mainstream services
- Reaching rural and remote communities
- Adequate government resourcing
- Donor support from policy to practice

Children are the Leaders of the Blue Pacific Continent – Pacific Child Wellbeing

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) was honoured to participate in the Pacific Child Wellbeing Summit held in Suva, Fiji, alongside Ministers, senior officials, and partners from across 17 Pacific Island countries. The three-day event provided a valuable platform to promote inclusive and holistic approaches to child wellbeing in our region.

Representing PDF, CEO Sainimili Tawake contributed to the dialogue by emphasising the importance of disability inclusion in all efforts to safeguard and nurture children across the Blue Pacific Continent. Her address reinforced that children with disabilities must be an integral part of all regional strategies aimed at ensuring safe, healthy, and enabling environments for every child.

Solomon Islands Mission



Violet Savu, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Officer for the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), recently undertook a monitoring and evaluation mission in the Solomon Islands to assess PDF-supported projects in partnership with local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

The visit built on last year's collaboration between PDF, PWDSI, BVIPSI, and the Ministry of Education to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities. As part of a BVIPSI delegation, Ms. Savu engaged in discussions with senior ministry officials on strengthening inclusive practices, enhancing teacher training—particularly in braille and inclusive methods—and preparing for a school heads' training on the CRPD and the right to education.



Final Regional Meeting Advances Inclusive Education for Deaf Children in the Pacific

The Regional Reference Group for the “Improving Education Access and Quality Learning for Deaf Children in the Pacific” project held its fourth and final meeting, bringing together PDF’s Acting Manager Inclusive Development, Sisi Coalala, alongside partners from MFAT, USP, Deaf Oceania, and regional deaf representatives. This five-year initiative, supported by MFAT and implemented in Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Tonga, and Vanuatu, focused on strengthening inclusive education for deaf learners by building teacher capacity, improving sign language services, supporting early intervention, empowering families, and ensuring deaf voices influence policy and planning.



Pacific Disability Inclusive Resilience Development Strategy 2025–2035 Launch



The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), in partnership with UN Women Fiji MCO, launched the Pacific Disability Inclusive Resilience Development Strategy 2025–2035 at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva, Fiji. This milestone strategy integrates disability inclusion into disaster risk management and climate resilience efforts across the Pacific. Key remarks from Ms. Hulola Ouma (UN Women Fiji), Ms. Sofia Temby (Australian High Commission), and PDF CEO Ms. Sainimili Tawake underscored the importance of leaving no one behind—particularly persons with disabilities—as the region confronts climate change and natural disasters. Launched ahead of International Women’s Day 2025, the strategy reinforces commitments to gender-responsive and disability-inclusive resilience, especially for women and girls with disabilities. This 10-year roadmap calls for strengthened partnerships and inclusive action across all sectors to ensure a resilient Pacific for all.

Geneva Mission



Pacific Disability Forum at CRPD 32nd Session 4th March 2025



PDF attended the 32nd session of the CRPD Committee in Geneva to support our Tuvalu member OPD, Fusi Alofa.

Fusi Alofa had submitted its Shadow Report and participated in the dialogue, private briefing with the Committee, and observed questions directed at the Tuvalu Government. Ms. Mine Pilikosi, President of Fusi Alofa, represented the organization at the meeting.



PDF and the International Disability Alliance supported Fusi Alofa in Geneva. This engagement was part of our commitment to building the capacity of our members, enabling them to be strong advocates and voices for persons with disabilities in their countries.



The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) in Pago Pago, American Samoa

Inclusive Development Programme Officer, Telesia Kobiti, visited Pago Pago, American Samoa, to present the Pacific Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian and Resilient Development Strategy 2025-2035, a 10-year strategic plan. She will also present the access audit findings from churches in Fiji and Tonga, conducted in partnership with the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN).

Ms. Kobiti highlighted the critical role of faith-based organizations and churches in promoting inclusion at the local and community levels. She specifically referenced Change Area 4 of the strategy, which advocates for community inclusion in humanitarian and development resilient settings, and Change Area 5, which emphasizes inclusive and accessible services and processes for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, she stressed the importance of collaborating with organizations of persons with disabilities and ensuring their active participation in decision-making, leadership, and empowerment within resilience initiatives.

Additionally, Ms. Kobiti shared summarized findings and recommendations from the access audit activities carried out in collaboration with the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) as well as the Lavame'a Ta'e'iloa Disabled People Association (LATA) through funding support from EDAN. The findings highlighted the ongoing accessibility barriers that persist within the church and the importance of inclusivity for persons with disabilities, especially in churches, as the church serves as a vital community hub in many Pacific nations.

In conclusion, Ms. Kobiti urged church leaders to explore collaborative actions to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities within their congregations.

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) expresses its sincere appreciation to its partner, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), for the opportunity and financial support provided to participate in the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM) in Pago Pago



PDF provides support Registrations and Communications support to FDPF for Kadavu Outreach Program

The Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF), in partnership with the Pacific Disability Forum with support from the Ministry of Health & Medical Services (MHMS) 2024/2025 Grant, successfully conducted a Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) outreach program in the five districts of Kadavu. The aim was to increase awareness and understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and expand access to SRH services among women and young people with and without disabilities.

Day 1 – Qalira Village, Nabukelevu Village

Day 2 – Tikina O Ravutaki, Wailevu Village

Day 3 – Tikina O Yawe, Korovou Village

Day 4 – Tikina Tavuki, Tavuki Village

Day 5 – Tikina O Naceva, Muanisolo Village



Advancing Inclusion: PDF Joins Regional Dialogue on GEDSI in Weather Ready Pacific

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) was pleased to participate in a well-attended regional convening held over two days in Nadi, which brought together voices from the Pacific women's movement, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), faith-based organisations, and civil society.

PDF CEO Sainimili Tawake joined the discussions aimed at shaping an inclusive, co-designed pathway to mainstream Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) into the Weather Ready Pacific (WRP) decadal programme. This gathering marked an important step in ensuring GEDSI is meaningfully integrated into early warning systems and climate preparedness in the Pacific.



Strengthening CRPD Understanding: PDF Leads National Training in Tonga



The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), in partnership with UNICEF, successfully led a 5-day national training on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) from 17–21 March 2025 in Tonga. The training targeted members of the Disability Taskforce, including representatives from government ministries and organisations of persons with disabilities, to strengthen their understanding and implementation of the CRPD.



Strengthening Ties for Inclusion: PDF CEO Meets with Australian Consul General in New Caledonia



Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) CEO Sainimili Tawake had the privilege of paying a courtesy visit to Consul General Annelise Young at the Australian Consulate General in New Caledonia, with support from DFAT Suva Post. The meeting focused on strengthening collaboration to support disability inclusion efforts, particularly through engagement with Collectif Handicaps in Noumea.

Discussions covered opportunities to enhance support and access to resources for persons with disabilities, as well as ongoing DFAT programs promoting disability equity across the Pacific. PDF extends sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Australia for their continued commitment to advancing disability-inclusive development in the region.

Advancing Inclusive Preparedness: PDF Conducts DRT Training in Timor-Leste



This week, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) conducted capacity-building training in Timor-Leste for Disability Resource Teams (DRTs) under the AHP Disaster Ready 2.0 Plus project. The sessions focused on Disaster Risk Management, Climate Change Adaptation, and Disability Inclusion in Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM).



Working alongside AHP partners—World Vision, CARE, Oxfam, Plan, and Caritas—PDF aimed to strengthen the resilience of persons with disabilities, especially women, youth, and children, to disaster and climate impacts. The visit also included meetings with DFAT and UNICEF to reinforce efforts toward disability-inclusive disaster preparedness. Action planning with DRTs remains a key step in ensuring all emergency initiatives are accessible and inclusive.





A meeting was held between the Honourable Minister Sinaitakala Tuitahi and the CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), Sainimili Tawake from Fiji, along with representatives from Tonga's Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), at their office, to discuss the current state of disability-related initiatives in Tonga.

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Director of the National Social Safety and Security Division, Luisa Manuofetoa, and other staff members from the Division.

Ms Tawake also pays a visit to the Ministry of Women, Tonga to discuss possibility of the current government to host the next PRCD, it is also a courtesy visit to discuss possible ways to effectively collaborate with the 4 OPD's.

Assistive Technology Workshop

Nadi, Fiji

The event brought together together partners from across the Pacific to reflect on the region's journey in assistive technology, share real-life impact stories, and commit to future action through the Blue Pacific Vision.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has advanced assistive technology (AT) access in the Pacific by supporting the Pacific Priority Assistive Product List (APL) and a proposal for a Regional Facility. These initiatives guide national policy, procurement, and service delivery, promoting AT as a human right essential for inclusion. Developed through inclusive consultations, regional data collection, and collaboration with partners including the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), PRATA, and SPC, the APL reflects input from 141 respondents across 14 Pacific Island Countries and lists 43 prioritized products in seven functional domains. WHO continues to advocate for regional coordination, technical support, and sustainable systems to ensure equitable AT access for all.

Participants explored key strategies for sustainable access, the supply chain behind assistive tech, and innovations for school-aged children.

The momentum built today sets the stage for deeper collaboration and action in the coming days to strengthen assistive technology access across the region.



Growing Stronger Together

Nadi, Fiji

The Growing Stronger Together (GST) Workshop brought together Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) from across the Pacific for a powerful week of learning, reflection, and collaboration. Through group activities, case study sharing, and strategic discussions, OPDs had the opportunity to reflect on their journeys, review core funding acquittals, and engage in peer learning.

A key highlight was the interactive session on the Pacific Disability Forum's Strategic Plan, where OPDs shared their voices and provided valuable input to shape the future direction of the Forum. The workshop also fostered deep connections, with participants brainstorming practical ways to apply key insights to strengthen their own advocacy and organisational growth. A big vinaka vakalevu to all OPDs, partners, and CBM Australia for supporting this impactful initiative.



OPD IMPACT STORIES

United Blind Persons of Fiji

The UBP band was revived through a project funded by Vodafone ATH Foundation and the Be Happy Music Club. Vodafone had immensely contributed by providing funds for the purchasing of the band's musical instruments including the sound system. Be Happy Music Club also stepped in to purchase a few other extra instruments. These tremendous supports have enabled the band to play at a total of ten invited gigs and also received allowances as a token of appreciation for their performance.

The band also released an original song during the International Day of Persons with Disability, titled "Nothing About Us Without Us" that was written by Tomasi Radakua. Tomasi is a member of the Fiji Psychiatric Survivors' Association of Fiji. The White Cane Awareness week was a •Through the Disability Rights Fund, the organization was able to conduct a situational survey out in the field to our members in the central and northern division. The DRF team also managed to secure their fund for the year 2025.



OPD IMPACT STORIES

Finding Her Voice: Tirisa's First Encounter with Sign Language Support

During the recent SRH conducted by FDPF in Collaboration with PDF Outreach in Muanisolo Village, 11-year-old Tirisa Nade from Kadavu experienced a moment of inclusion she rarely finds in her daily life.



Deaf since birth and attending a mainstream school without an interpreter, Tirisa met a sign language interpreter for the first time at the workshop. She shared her joy in learning new signs like “mummy,” “daddy,” and “teacher,” and expressed a heartfelt need for a teacher who can communicate in sign language. Despite the challenges, she feels supported by her peers and continues to show incredible resilience. Tirisa’s story is a touching reminder of the urgent need for accessible education for all children with disabilities.

Nuanua O Le Alofa (NOLA) was proud to be part of the “Growing Stronger Together” initiative led by the Pacific Disability Forum—an inspiring three-day journey of reflection, learning, and empowerment aimed at strengthening the capacity of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across the Pacific.

As a mentor in this regional space, we were honored to share our story of building a resilient, inclusive, and rights-based disability movement in Samoa. The gathering also provided a valuable opportunity for us to contribute to the first regional dialogue on the new Pacific Disability Forum Strategy and the Pacific Regional Framework for Persons with Disabilities (PRFPD). As we prepare for the in-country phase of the mission in July, we carry forward the spirit of unity and shared leadership. We rise by lifting each other, and together, we are unstoppable.



OPD IMPACT STORIES

Kiribati Deaf Association

During the Growing Stronger Together program, Itebwa shared how the Growing Stronger Together (GST) program has transformed their approach to leadership and operations. He admitted that before the trainings, they were unaware of key areas like compliance, due diligence, and internal controls, but now, thanks to GST and PDF, they are equipped with the knowledge they need.

He emphasized the importance of open conversations, within the team and with members, and how they now discuss issues transparently and support one another. He even shared personal experiences that served as valuable lessons for all of us.

A standout moment? KDA's walls are lined with butcher paper reminders of what to do, and what not to do. Even finance tips, the dos and don'ts, have become part of their everyday learning.



Lavame'a Ta'e'iloa Disabled People Association Inc

Rhema delivered an insightful presentation today under the theme "Put Your House in Order," guiding OPDs on how to build stronger systems for sustainability. He highlighted the importance of satisfying donors through transparency, visibility, and regular communication.

He also walked us through the organizational structure, who they are, what they do, their clients, challenges, accomplishments, and key priorities for 2025, including translating the Tonga Disability Act. He closed with a powerful reminder: "Let's talk, but more actions – let your actions speak for themselves."

Through the completion of their due diligence they are able to secure bigger funding to expand their work to the outer island. The importance of compliance for OPDs and we need the support of others.



PhysioNet – Helping People With Disabilities Overseas



Honouring Service: Peter Thompson Awarded MBE

We are proud to celebrate Peter Thompson, founder of PhysioNet, who was recently awarded an MBE in the King's New Year Honours for his service to disabled people globally.

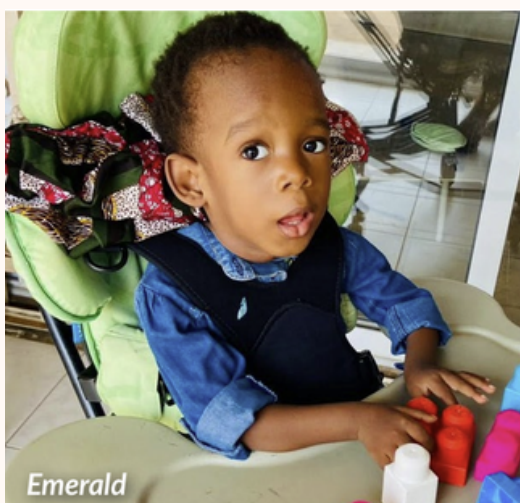
Peter's journey began after witnessing the dire need for disability aids in post-war Sarajevo.

From a modest start in a barn, his determination led to the founding of PhysioNet, now a thriving charity with multiple depots and over 100 dedicated volunteers.

Despite challenges, Peter's leadership and vision have made a lasting impact, ensuring vital equipment reaches those in need worldwide.

Congratulations, Peter, and the entire PhysioNet team!

Emerald Shines Bright



Three-year-old Emerald from Ghana has Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), a rare and life-limiting condition that causes progressive muscle weakness. Though she has a normal intellect and speech, she struggles with sitting and head control.

Thanks to her UK-based family and PhysioNet, Emerald received a specially selected chair and stander, shipped from our Yorkshire depot to Accra. A trained physio in Ghana, who completed PhysioNet's training, adjusted the equipment to suit her needs and will continue to support her as she grows.

Emerald can now sit comfortably, play, and enjoy her surroundings—proof that distance is no barrier to impact.



SPECIAL HIGHLIGHT

Pacific Mini Games 2025

The Para Team at the upcoming Palau 2025 Mini-Games marked a significant milestone, as our Program Officer, Leslien Tikotikoca, attended the preparatory meeting—becoming the first representative from the Pacific Disability Forum to participate in this space. This moment represents a proud step forward for PDF, reinforcing our commitment to inclusive sports and greater regional representation for persons with disabilities.



Winning status

Naibili **2 gold**, Mere roden **2 gold**, jim **1 bronze** and agie **1 silver** and gold



Social Club 2025

Farewell



In January, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) bid a warm farewell to our Research Officer. Over the years, their contribution to strengthening evidence-based advocacy and supporting our research initiatives has been invaluable. Their work played a key role in informing policies and programmes that promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities across the Pacific.

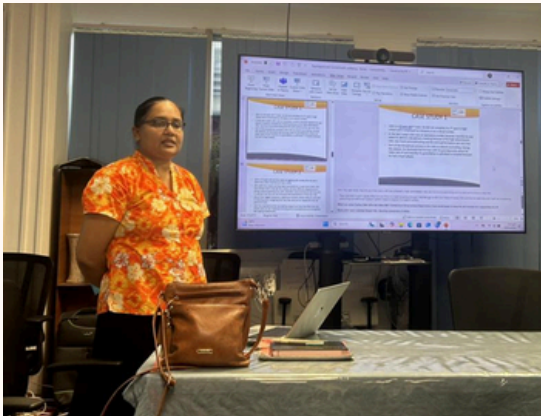
In May, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) bid a warm farewell to our Program Officer Ilisapeci. Their work played a key role in informing policies and programmes that promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities across the Pacific.



In June, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) bid a warm farewell to our Manager Finance Corporate, Aporosa. Over the years, MFC has contributed to PDF and we are grateful for his contributions.

Social Club 2025

Awareness Session



Wellness Wednesday Focuses on Mental Health

PDF's Wellness Wednesday spotlighted mental health with a valuable session led by Kavita from Empower Pacific.

Kavita's session offered practical strategies for managing mental wellbeing, fostering self-care, and supporting one another through challenging times. Staff were encouraged to reflect on their own mental health journeys and to prioritise emotional resilience just as much as physical health.

We believe, it is very important for all of us to talk about our mental health as well, especially in the workplace and how we deal with it.

Awareness session from South Pacific Stock Exchange



PDF recently hosted an awareness session with the South Pacific Stock Exchange (SPX) to help staff better understand the stock market and how to start investing.

The session was a great opportunity to build financial literacy and learn practical tips for making informed investment decisions. We're proud to support our team's personal and professional growth through sessions like these.

In Loving Memory

As we reflect on the past months, we take a moment to honour and remember the lives of those who have passed on.

Their contributions, kindness, and presence touched many within our communities. Though they are no longer with us, their legacy lives on in the work we do and the hearts they've left behind. We extend our deepest condolences to their families, friends, and loved ones.

Mr. Kanjen Kumtak



The Pacific Disability Forum deeply mourns the passing of Mr. Kanjen Kumtak, CEO of the Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organisation and a dedicated advocate for disability rights across the Pacific. Despite facing multiple disabilities, Mr. Kumtak's resilience, leadership, and unwavering commitment to inclusion left a lasting impact. His legacy of advocacy and empowerment will continue to inspire us. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the disability community. He will be dearly missed.



Mr Molomolo Touaisi

The Pacific Disability Forum is deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. Molomolo Touaisi, Acting Office Manager for Fusi Alofa Tuvalu. A dedicated advocate and climate champion, Mr. Touaisi worked tirelessly to advance disability inclusion and resilience in Tuvalu. His leadership, compassion, and commitment to inclusive development and climate action left a lasting impact on his community and beyond. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. His legacy will live on in the lives he touched.