



**GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & IMMIGRATION**

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Itikianga Tinamou Ora – the Cook Islands and New Zealand, evolving and dynamic

Prime Minister Puna delivered a keynote address to a full house of more than 100 drawn from New Zealand Government, the diplomatic corp, business and academia in the Legislative Council Chamber in Parliament Buildings at an event hosted by the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA) on Wednesday 4 April.



Since its establishment in 1934, NZIIA has played a valuable role in promoting discussion and understanding of international issues and emerging trends, especially from a New Zealand perspective.

The topic for the speech was Itikianga Tinamou Ora: The Cook Islands in Free Association with New Zealand. Prime Minister Puna stressed the importance of the relationship “which is founded on close historical and cultural ties, unique constitutional arrangements, strong people to people ties and shared values and have endured and strengthened over time.”

The relationship was underpinned by the notion of Itiki as “the ties that bind” and also likened to the characteristics of tinamou meaning steadfast, enduring and permanent as well as ora which is alive, living and dynamic.

Prime Minister Puna emphasised the “relationship of free association has been an enduring, evolving and living partnership and must continue to be so as we look to the future.” The Cook Islands continues to value this special relationship with New Zealand and is committed to maintaining the current citizenship status.

In keeping with the core focus of the NZIIA, the Prime Minister also expanded on the theme of the Cook Islands place in the international arena and especially in the Pacific. New Zealand’s Pacific re-set was welcomed and would contribute to a deeper understanding of the region. Although the Pacific is turning into a contestable space, the Cook Islands were comfortable in dealing with newer partners in a collaborative manner. This partnership approach was taken in the ground breaking project Te Mato Vai where the Cook Islands, New Zealand and China are showing that the Pacific can be a region of cooperation, and through partnerships, can bring about transformational change in the region.

The issue of Official Development Assistance was raised in the speech and the way in which the Cook Islands were looking to “re-set our partnerships to move beyond a development focus to one of equality and mutual benefit.”

The Prime Minister also highlighted the challenges facing the Cook Islands in terms of climate change, ocean management, communications, economic development and growing security threats.

The NZIIA session concluded with a question and answer session with all the Cook Islands Ministers fielding a number of questions from the audience ranging from citizenship, cultural identity, and the nature of the constitutional relationship.

End.

[Click here](#) for a full transcript of the Prime Minister's speech