



GENERAL MEDIA RELEASE

3rd August 2010

INVITATION: **PRESS CONFERENCE TO LAUNCH THE MELE DECLARATION 2010**

Time: 1.00pm, Wednesday 4th August 2010

Place: Chief's Nakamal, Port Vila

Tomorrow the leaders of the Forum Island countries will begin meeting in Port Vila to discuss regional issues, including issues relating to the development of the Pacific Island countries and the utilisation of customary land to achieve this development.

As their meeting begins, the Melanesian Indigenous Land Defence Alliance (MILDA) calls upon the Forum leaders, and particularly the leaders of the Melanesian states, to reject all policies which require that customary land be registered as a precondition for business or development activities, and to cease all pressures for customary land registration, whether voluntary or involuntary. MILDA also calls for a total overhauling of the current land administration systems in Melanesia to weed out corrupt land dealings and fraudulent titling.

MILDA also calls upon Australia and New Zealand, as donor countries and as Forum member states, to cease activities – and in particular funding programs - that provide inducements, directly or indirectly, to bring about customary land registration in Melanesia.

The launch will take place as one of activities of the Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs annual general meeting, which is taking place this week at the Chief's Nakamal. The Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs is one of the many organisations in the Melanesian region that has endorsed the Mele Declaration 2010.

MILDA is a regional alliance of landowners, civil society groups, activists, researchers and concerned citizens. They met for the second time in June this year, in Port Vila Vanuatu, and issued the Mele Declaration. The Declaration is a call for the defence of customary land in Melanesia, and a recognition of its intrinsic and economic value to Melanesia people and communities.

For more information, please contact MILDA Spokesperson Mr Ralph Regenvanu:

Cell: 7745001

Email: ralph.regenvanu@vanuatuculture.org

Copies of the Mele Declaration 2010, a publication and a DVD will be available at the launch.