

Pacific Islands Forum: China must apologise for 'arrogance', Nauru president demands

Monday 10 September 2018, by [DOHERTY Ben](#) (Date first published: 6 September 2018).

Tensions rise further at Pacific Islands Forum as leader accuses Beijing of 'buying their way' through the region.

Nauru's president has demanded China apologise for a senior envoy's "crazy" behaviour at the Pacific Islands Forum, and lashed out at Beijing's "arrogant" presence in the region.

"They're not our friends. They just need us for their own purposes," President Baron Waqa said. "Sorry, but I have to be strong on this because no one is to come and dictate things to us."

"We're seeing a lot of big countries coming in and sometimes buying their way through the Pacific, some are extremely aggressive, even to the point that they tread all over us," Waqa said. "From this forum, all leaders [now] know how arrogant some of these people are."

Waqa said such behaviour merited an apology from Beijing. "We won't just seek an apology, we'll even take it up to the UN," he said. "Not only that, I will mention it at the UN and every international meeting."

This year's annual Pacific summit, which wraps up in Nauru this week, has been one of the most contentious in the event's 49-year history.

The animosity - fuelled by Nauru's continued recognisance of Taiwan over China - erupted spectacularly on Tuesday when the head of China's delegation Du Qiwen attempted to address a meeting but Waqa refused to let him speak until island leaders had finished. Leaked video shows Waqa telling Du: "Show some respect."

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Baron Waqa

The diplomatic spat pits Nauru - with a population of 11,000 and a landmass of just 21 square kilometres - against an Asian superpower that is the most populous country on Earth, with 1.4 billion citizens.

Nauru has remained close to Taiwan largely through Taipei's financial largesse. US diplomatic cables dating from 2007 and leaked to Wikileaks stated Taiwan was paying Nauruan government ministers a secret \$5,000 monthly stipend in exchange for continuing relations. Other MPs received \$2,500 a month. The money was described as "project funding that requires minimal accounting" [\[1\]](#).

Most of the buildings and infrastructure used to host the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) were built or upgraded with Taiwanese money.

Tensions between Nauru and China were first exposed before the forum even started, when Nauru immigration officials refused to stamp the diplomatic passports of the Chinese delegation.

Tuesday's treatment of the Chinese delegate was seen as a deliberate and public humiliation, the source inside the closed-door meeting said, and a reflection of Pacific suspicions about Chinese intent in the region.

Waqar told a media conference late on Wednesday Du was a "nobody" and "crazy".

"Would he behave like that in front of his own president? I doubt it." He disrespected the Pacific, the forum island leaders and other ministers who have come to join us in our territory. Are you kidding? Look at him, he's a nobody.

"He's not even a minister and he's demanding to be recognised and to speak before the prime minister of Tuvalu. Is he crazy?"

Waqar's exchange with Du highlighted sensitivities over Beijing's rising influence in the Pacific. China is set to overtake Australia as the largest donor to the region [2], after pledging US\$4bn in aid to the region last year.

There are concerns loans from China, if not serviced by small Pacific economies, could be called in by Beijing in debt for equity swaps on disadvantageous terms, giving China increased military access and strategic influence in the region.

China has shown no sign of backing down, with a foreign ministry spokeswoman saying on Wednesday that Nauru violated forum regulations "and staged a bad farce".

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P.S.

- The Guardian, Thu 6 Sep 2018 06.58 BST Last modified on Fri 7 Sep 2018 16.26 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/china-must-apologise-for-arrogance-nauru-president-demands>

- This article was amended on 7 September 2018 to clarify details stated in the US diplomatic cables about Taiwanese-Nauru relations. After publication Taiwan contacted the Guardian to say: "While we do not normally comment on WikiLeaks cables, this merits mention. Taiwan's aid to diplomatic allies is transparent, accountable and subject to international scrutiny".

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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nauru-officials-friendly-payoffs-20110828-1jgnu.html>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/08/huge-increase-in-chinese-aid-pledged-to-pacific>