



PERMANENT MISSION  
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA TO  
THE UNITED NATIONS

**Twenty-first Meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on  
Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

*SEA-LEVEL RISE AND ITS IMPACTS*

**Written Statement by H.E. Mr. Viliami Va'inga Tōnē**

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Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Tonga warmly welcomes the topic of focus for the twenty-first meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP21), entitled “*Sea-level rise and its impacts*”, and we look forward to engaging in constructive and meaningful exchanges. On that account, Tonga aligns itself with the statements from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS).

It would be remiss of us not to mention the dedication and determination of you, distinguished Co-Chairs, and the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea in spearheading the ICP for this year, 2021, despite the rather unfortunate circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, we congratulate you all in pursuing this worthwhile initiative which is so dear to our nation and that of the Pacific Island countries and Small Island Developing States.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made a clarion call in their comprehensive assessment report on the Ocean and the Cryosphere in a Changing Climate by highlighting the urgency to prioritize adaptation and mitigation measures given the circumstances. In their revised assessment report, it alluded to a worrisome prediction that sea levels will continue

to rise on average, over a meter by 2100 in a low emission scenario while a high emission scenario presents an increase on average of more than five (5) meters by 2300. The latter is certainly not an option for us in the Pacific to which requires a strong call for mitigation actions.

It is also noted that certain regions will experience sea level rise at a faster and more extensive form than others. The Pacific region, because of its peculiar setting of low-lying small Island States and atoll, is unfortunately experiencing the latter and are the most vulnerable to Sea-level rise. Accordingly, the adaptation period that is required for low lying coasts such as Tonga and the Pacific region will require a shorter time to prepare than others. The impacts of which are set to hinder the progress of achieving Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. It was for the aforesaid that PIF leaders in 2019 noted with concern the threat posed by Sea-level rise to our Blue Pacific and committed to ensuring that maritime zones of Pacific Member States are delineated in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which could not be challenged or reduced as a result of Sea-level rise and climate change.

Sea-level rise in Tonga has risen well above the global average and is often exacerbated by natural disasters, which are now frequently occurred with tropical cyclones of unprecedented high magnitudes, often accompanied by abnormally high tides which are also commonly referred to as King Tides. Such are starkly evident by the coastal erosion that has carved off nearly 40 meters on some of the larger islands where sea levels are encroaching on the land.

The impacts of Sea-level rise in Tonga have thus inevitably elicited affected areas to experience limited access to fresh water, disruptive food supply, local displacement and so forth. With the accelerated rate of Sea-level rise projected for the next 50 years, let alone 20 where the amount is estimated to be increased by the same which took 60 years to occur, our inherent birthright is certainly on the line.

While some may have other priorities in relation to Sea-level rise, we simply plead to survive. And such cannot be tackled by Tonga alone, or the Pacific region alone. It is a global crisis. Every country is duty-bound to ensuring our world is left with an enduring legacy through coordinated efforts to urgently address this at the global level.

In envisaging the aforementioned, Tonga maintains that the baselines which determine our territorial boundaries, once established under the UNCLOS, should remain unchanged despite the effects of Sea-level rise and any climate change modification that might ensue. Our Sovereignty must not be compromised accordingly.

To that end, we trust the leading role that is played by the Co-Chairs in endeavoring to produce a comprehensive report on this critical topic outlining important discussions at this meeting with hope it will contribute to addressing our concerns in this regard. We wish the Co-Chairs and all delegations a productive and fruitful deliberation during ICP21, and we will continue to support your unrelenting efforts in this process.

I thank you.