
Securing our future in the Pacific



Pacific Islands Forum with United Nations Missions

*Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu*

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Pacific Islands Forum

Statement for the Sixth Committee Debate on Cluster II: Sea Level Rise in Relation to International Law

Trusteeship Council

October 31st at 3 pm

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 Pacific Islands Forum countries with Missions to the United Nations, namely Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country Tuvalu.

Firstly, we would like to congratulate you Mr. Chairman and members of your Bureau for your election. We also like to assure you of our group's unwavering support as you steer the Committee's work in this Session.

Last year, our region called for the Commission to examine the international law implications of sea-level rise as a matter of extreme urgency.

We therefore welcome the decisions of the Commission to move the topic of "sea-level rise in relation to international law" to its active programme of work, and to establish an open-ended Study Group on the topic at its meeting in May this year.

We express our deep gratitude to the members of the Commission for the priority they have accorded this topic, and for listening to our call.

As we have said before, for the Pacific, sea-level rise is a subject of critical importance. This is particularly true for low-lying small island States and atolls in the Pacific. The Pacific is already facing the adverse impacts of climate change, including, rising sea levels upon deteriorating

marine and coastal environments and more destructive storm surges and natural disasters, which further threaten our livelihoods, health, culture, wellbeing, and infrastructure.

International law should not further disadvantage those affected by the impacts of climate change. In the Pacific, we aim to ensure that our maritime zones and the entitlements flowing from those zones are not challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise. We contend that the response of international law to sea-level rise must take into account the interests of those who are particularly affected, including small island developing states with the least responsibility for its causes.

In that connection, in August this year, our Forum Leaders met in Tuvalu and committed to a collective effort, including to develop international law, with the aim of ensuring that once a Forum member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ("UNCLOS"), that the member's maritime zones could not be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change.

Mr. Chairman, we therefore are committed to working together to respond effectively to these challenges posed by sea-level rise. We also call on other member States to recognize the need of retaining maritime zones and the entitlements that flow from such maritime zones once delineated in accordance with UNCLOS. This will ensure the sustainable development of our people, our communities and our culture in the face of sea-level rise and climate change,

We thank the ILC for setting out how it intends to approach each sub-topic and we look forward to continue engaging with the ILC on each of the facets of this important topic.