



PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES United Nations Member States

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Statement by Fiji

Chair of the Pacific Small Island Developing States

Sixth Committee Agenda Item 79 [Cluster II]:Sea-level rise in relation to International Law

31 October 2019

[Check against delivery]

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to address the Sixth Committee on behalf of the 12 members of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, namely Tuvalu, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country Fiji. In so doing, I would like to associate our statement with the statement delivered by Tuvalu as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

As this is my first time taking the floor, allow me to congratulate you as Chairman of the Sixth Committee. I also congratulate the members of the Bureau on their election. Please be assured of our full support throughout the work of the Committee.

Mr Chairman,

It is now well known that the climate change crisis is a phenomenon that knows no borders. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that multiplies risk and magnifies vulnerability. In assessing the current situation within the Pacific, the existential threat of sea-level rise is evident.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that sea levels will continue to rise on average, over a metre by 2100 and that certain regions of the world

are more likely to experience sea-level rise sooner and more extensively than other regions despite our best efforts.

The low-lying small Island States and atolls within the Pacific region, are currently the most vulnerable to sea-level rise and are experiencing, limited access to fresh water, limited food supplies as a result of saltwater inundation and coastal erosion. Sea-level rise affects well-being, livelihoods, infrastructure and economies and will continue to bring destruction, displacement and instability into the future and in this same vein PSIDS continuously calls for the recognition of the climate change and security nexus.

Mr Chairman,

We acknowledge and commend the International Law Commission on the inclusion of sea-level rise in its active programme of work and support the formation of an open-ended Study Group that will address sea-level rise in relation to international law, with a focus on law of the sea issues in the first year of its work.

Through the inclusion of the topic of sea-level rise, member states are provided an opportunity to voice priorities and concerns and pose serious legal questions regarding related issues such as the regulation of maritime entitlements, delimitation of maritime zones and the rights of Coastal States to an extended continental shelf. Under the framework of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the work of the ILC will assist in strengthening this area.

On that note, our Leaders in the Pacific Islands Forum recently committed to a collective effort, including to develop international law, to ensure that once a Forum member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with the 1982 UNCLOS, these maritime zones could not be challenged or reduced as a result of sea level rise and climate change.

We therefore 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.

We are committed to working together and acknowledge the strong consideration given to the seriousness of this subject and seek an effective yet fair and equitable response to addressing the legal challenges of sea-level rise, with a view toward certainty, stability, and order in international law and relations.

I Thank you.