

Diaspora-led Dialogue: Climate Change Challenges to the Cultural Identity and Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations

Taukiei Kitara, James Bhagwan, Maina Talia, Enele Sopoaga, Anote Tong, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, Tammy Tabe, Tereao Teingia-Ratite, Exsley Taloiburi, Yessie Mosby, Katerina Teaiwa, Peter Emberson, Ian Fry, Susan Harris-Rimmer, Simon Kofe, and Carol Farbotko

Introduction

In 2020, the Pacific Island Council of Queensland (PICQ) in partnership with Friends of the Earth Australia (FOE) hosted two online forums on the topic of Climate Change Challenges to the Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations. In 2021, PICQ continued the dialogue, hosting an online conference on Climate Change Challenges to the Cultural Identity and Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations.

The forums and conference signalled the start of a new, atoll-led conversation on the impacts of climate change (Kitara 2020). These impacts, such as sea level rise, increased frequency of intense weather events, groundwater salination, and declining food security, threaten to undermine atoll peoples' claims to territorial sovereignty and, in so doing, threaten to undermine the political basis for their self-determination. Currently, international law means that the possession and enjoyment of national sovereignty are tied to static conceptions of territory, population, authority, and recognition and are ill-equipped for the challenges of climate change.

The forums were hosted by PICQ, which is a collective of the many, diverse Pacific Island nation organisations and communities in Queensland, who come together as a collective to represent the voice and views of Pacific Island people to local, state, and federal government

and to the wider community. PICQ is a non-profit community incorporated organisation, managed by volunteer representatives of member community groups and individuals who believe in the collective voice for the benefit of all Pacific Islanders. PICQ works on issues such as climate change, justice, youth empowerment, women's welfare and leadership, men's mental health and well-being, and Pacific labour mobility. Taukiei Kitara, a committee member of PICQ from Tuvalu and long-time climate activist, was inspired to bring atoll people together for much-needed dialogue on climate change and sovereignty. Taukiei Kitara's vision came to fruition when PICQ, in partnership with Friends of the Earth Australia, members of Pacific Island diaspora communities in Australia reached out to those in the islands to join them in an atoll-led conversation on climate change and sovereignty in the two online forums and conference. The forums and conference were open to any Pacific Islanders, whether in the islands or in the diaspora, as well as other interested people, to ask critical questions about the nature and future of sovereignty in a changing climate and share their perspectives with a wider audience with a view to shaping future local, regional and international decision-making.

The first forum featured speakers His Excellency Anote Tong (former President of Kiribati), the Honourable Enele Sopoaga (Member of Parliament, Tuvalu), Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (Climate Envoy for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Director of the non-profit organisation Jo-Jikum, Marshall Islands) and Exsley Taloiburi (Climate Change Advisor, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat). It was held on 19th October 2020. The second forum featured speakers Maina Talia (Director, Tuvalu Association of Non-Government Organisations and Tuvalu Climate Action Network), James Bhagwan (General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches) and Katerina Teaiwa (Associate Professor of Pacific Studies, Australian National University). It was held on 9th November 2020.

The conference featured some of the same speakers as well as additional speakers: Honourable Enele Sopoaga, Maina Talia, James Bhagwan and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner returned, and were joined by Tereao Teingiia-Ratite (President of Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations), Yessie Mosby (350.org member, Masig Island, Torres Strait), Honourable Simon Kofe (Tuvalu Minister for Foreign Affairs), Peter Emberson (UNESCAP), Professor Susan Harris-Rimmer (Griffith University Climate Action Beacon), Dr Ian Fry (Australian National University) and Dr Tammy Tabe (University of the South Pacific).

This paper provides a written synthesis and summary of main themes that were discussed in the two online forums and conference. It is an attempt to capture the rich and fruitful discussions in a way that inspires further dialogue and action, acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness in understanding and addressing the challenges of climate change to cultural identity and sovereignty.

Online Forum Themes

Inclusive dialogue across space that builds bridges and addresses divides is welcome and must be advanced

The two online forums were an opportunity for the Pacific Island diaspora to facilitate dialogue across space and national borders, and across boundaries shaped by history, on

the shared issue of climate change and sovereignty. The importance of connections was recognised by the speakers, who were keen to engage with diaspora communities. The digital forum format, with its low emissions, was contrasted favourably with other climate change dialogues requiring physical, emissions-intensive travel. There are also further recognised connections that are still emerging, such as with the Indigenous groups of Australia, which PICQ is nurturing. The imperative to '*continue to connect*' was highlighted as important by Enele Sopoaga.

Atoll nations' histories of sovereignty, including journeys to independence and decolonial struggles, are an important starting point

Atoll nations in the Pacific Islands are Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. Atoll nations are made up almost entirely of small, low-lying islands called atolls and reef islands.¹ Atoll people, on gaining independence from colonial rule, understood that they needed to amplify their voice in the international community, given their small size. Shortly after independence occurred in Kiribati and Tuvalu in the 1970s, however, the Law of the Sea changed, and maritime size became recognised as important in international law. So, despite small land and population size, the atolls could begin to position themselves and identify as Large Ocean States, with the practical benefits of increased revenues from oceanic resources. According to Anote Tong, '*for a change we began to think that we were a bigger country than we used to think we were. And of course, it brought in new revenue, and gave us a bit more breathing space.*' As Large Ocean States, with extensive oceanic resources, the development prospects for atolls, such as greater wealth to be derived from fishing revenues, can be considered optimistically.

The decolonial struggles by Pacific Island people were also highlighted as important. Katerina Teaiwa discussed Banaba island. Banaba, in Kiribati, was the site of extensive colonial-era phosphate mining, which decimated the island's environment and exploited its resources to fuel colonial agriculture in Australia and New Zealand. Banabans were relocated by colonial authorities to Rabi island in Fiji. Taking people's resources and removing them from their land in this way meant that their heritage and identity was uprooted, and in a way, spread over the fields of Australia and New Zealand (Teiawa 2017). The Banaba experience was explained as a microcosm of what could happen if heritage and identity are taken away by environmental damage: the Banabans did rebuild their culture on Rabi island in Fiji, but it was extremely challenging, even within the Pacific region. The history of displacement and its links to sovereignty are important, in order to learn from examples of previous environmental degradation and colonial forces such as the experience of the Banabans.

Sovereignty and identity as inextricable from atoll homelands

Atoll people do not want to lose their homelands, the place where they practice their culture and customs, to rising sea levels. For atoll people, identity is inextricably linked to place, and this forms the basis of understanding climate justice according to Maina Talia. Land - *fenua*, *fanua*, *vanua* - is where culture, language and communal values are rooted. For Maina Talia,

¹ Banaba Island is the only raised coral island in Kiribati.

'protecting our land means we are protecting our identity.' The atolls are the homelands and source of identity for their populations, so losing a homeland to climate change is an existential threat. Enele Sopoaga voiced this as: *'We achieved our independence, we are going to remain in our territories, and maintain our sovereignty and our cultural identity forever'*. Cultural connection to land is not well-understood by outsiders, however, and it has been difficult to get traction to centralise the importance of identity and culture in international fora. Arts, story-telling and Indigenous wisdom can assist in this endeavour.

Decolonizing sovereignty

Sovereignty was discussed as the absence of foreign domination. For Maina Talia, *'Sovereignty is the liberty to do what we think is right in our cultural context.'* It is not determined by a declaration or convention, imposed by the West. Pacific Island sovereignty consists of Indigenous spirituality, culture, language, political systems and relationship with nature. Indigenous customary wisdom will guide the way to continuity of culture and communities (Lumā Vaai 2019; Talia 2021).

Issues of sovereignty, including how it is defined in international law, have their foundation in systems of thought that originated outside the Pacific Islands. The dominant conception of sovereignty, which originates in the legal systems of former colonizers, is upheld today by all states, including in the Pacific Islands, as a fundamental principal of international law. States are defined and participate in international negotiations under this dominant conception of sovereignty. But the era of decolonisation is here, so it was observed that there is no longer a need to accept foreign logic, such as the dominant conception of sovereignty, without question. It can be challenged. Atoll states cooperate with industrialised states, for example, but they can also set the agenda for change. Atoll people need to speak loudly as Indigenous people of the Pacific to raise issues of sovereign rights, drawing on wisdom from before colonization, before Christianity. The atoll communities have their own processes and their own wisdom. Atoll people need to start talking about sovereignty from this cultural heart, talking to children about it, and advocating in different platforms, including the international political and legal arenas.

There was discussed a need to teach others and advocate for change from a Pacific cosmological perspective, on what counts as a state, what counts as land, and what is valued. For Katerina Teaiwa, it was important to challenge and rethink from within Pacific cultures the ways in which land and boundaries have been constructed by imperial thinking *'cosmological, epistemological, social, cultural and spiritual definitions of land need to be brought into the equation.'* This means that a holistic, Pacific-based conception of territory cannot be discounted, even if the water rises. For all who participate in the debate, it is necessary to ask whose *mana* (meaning spiritual power in many Pacific Island languages (Tomlinson and Tengen 2016)) is being advanced and who is being acknowledged as holders of knowledge.

Atoll people are building climate resilience in atolls to prevent sovereignty being lost

It was acknowledged that much can and should be done to prevent the problem of lost sovereignty before it occurs. Vitally, this includes the plan outlined in the Paris agreement

for emissions reduction and adaptation, and loss and damage, and these are particularly important obligations for large, industrialised states who contribute the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions. If such measures are taken, and climate resilience is built in the islands, Pacific Island atoll people need not lose their sovereignty. A key barrier to building climate resilience is access to the necessary resources. There is a moral responsibility for those who have polluted to pay for adaptation and loss and damage.

Great efforts are being made in atoll nations, governments, civil society and so on, to work to find solutions to climate change challenges. Involvement in international negotiations is a part of this, but so are national adaptation plans, mitigation measures, the arts, grassroots actions. Protection of sovereignty is occurring in such activities now. For example, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner explained that the Marshall Islands has developed a roadmap to transition to renewable energy by 2050. The Marshall's adaptation plan includes radical solutions such as elevating and building islands, which involves many questions such as which islands, who will move internally when these elevations are done, what impact on culture, how will it be funded? This is how shorelines, communities and sovereignty can be protected.

Geopolitical considerations for atolls in a changing climate

How are security and sovereignty connected, particularly with respect to the security interests of major regional powers? Pacific Island leaders such as his Excellency Anote Tong and the Honorable Enele Sopoaga have been involved in international climate change negotiations for decades (since Kyoto 1997 in Sopoaga's case), in collaboration with other Island states, working hard to reach milestones such as the Paris Agreement. Climate change has been on the agenda of Pacific Island Forum leaders for over twenty years, and is a crucial regional security issue, documented in the Boe Declaration² and the Kainaki II Declaration³, where there are calls for measures to ensure regional survival in the face of climate change. Efforts are being made to protect maritime boundaries, ensuring they will not be compromised due to climate change impacts. But these measures do not negate the need for global emissions reductions. It is unacceptable for 'solutions' proposed by outsiders to attempt to impinge on sovereignty, such as by gaining power over Tuvalu's oceanic territory if the land territory becomes uninhabitable. In relation to this proposal to gain control over oceanic territory as a form of recolonization—since Pacific Island people will always value their ocean as integral to their culture and identity—Enele Sopoaga clearly states '*we are never going to be colonized again*'. One idea is to build a pan-Pacifika union, an ocean continent, pooling all the sovereignties of the Pacific Island states, in order to become a large, geopolitically well-positioned, union.

Indigenous atoll cultures and spirituality must be prioritised in facing climate change challenges

The duty of atoll people to care for the Indigenous wisdom of their ancestors was discussed. It is important to incorporate spirituality into thinking ahead and planning for climate change impacts. When island people gift the umbilical cord to the environment after a baby's

² <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

³ <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/50th-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Communique.pdf>

birth, it reminds them that they are part of the land and sea and binds them to place. How does being uprooted from place impact such spirituality and culture? Any journey should not be about exile but exodus, a reference to the story of Moses in the Old Testament of the Christian bible, of God being with those who He leads to a promised land. The question becomes how to flourish in a new place with one's own identity, spirituality and culture? This is part of the issue of sovereignty. Pacific Conference of Churches and churches in Tuvalu are working to understand and nurture faith that is empowering rather than fatalistic (see also Talia 2021).

When there is a disconnect from customary wisdom that has held atoll people in good stead for thousands of years, education in both formal and informal knowledge systems also plays an important role. How can the knowledge of elders be most effectively shared and used among their communities? How can Indigenous and local knowledge be appropriately recognised, respected and valued by donors and other outside organisations, for instance? Another issue is whether more Pacific Studies courses could be both studied and led by Pacific Island people? Atoll people could learn more about the histories and skills of ocean seafaring, for example, both at school and in their communities.

What mobility solutions do atoll people consider to be important?

The news media's focus on mass migration away from the islands is incorrect. For some in the Pacific, mobility can help build climate resilience, but chiefly through return labour mobility. International labour mobility of people, particularly young people, has long been a feature of atoll life and can support climate resilience in the islands. This is linked to the importance of the homeland to atoll people. Aote Tong stated: *'The question is, do our young people want to go? I believe so, but they always want somewhere to be able to go back to.'* Migration with Dignity is about people having choices, including choices to learn new skills abroad, to return home with new skills if they choose, or to have options to settle permanently abroad based on their skills. For others, mobility is not an acceptable option. For Enele Sopoaga, *'there is no Plan B...we must fight for our rights as Tuvaluans to remain in our God-given islands forever, never losing our sovereignty.'* Stopping warming going beyond 1.5 degrees is the only plan, otherwise the whole world faces catastrophe, especially the small islands. If Tuvalu would ever be relocated, it would be as the nation of Tuvalu, with full rights protected under international law, according to Enele Sopoaga.

According to Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, people in the Marshalls do not want to move, and migration should not be the only option. For James Bhagwan, Pacific people do not think highly of policy proposals to allow large-scale migration to places such as Australia. For him, such migration has colonialist tendencies, keeping in mind 'Pacific labour' mobility is reminiscent of the injustices and indignities of blackbirding and indentured labour. Large countries cannot just see Pacific Island people as a labour force, and labour mobility does not absolve larger countries from fulfilling their climate change emissions reductions and other climate obligations. Yet James Bhagwan also views climate mobility, not as a solution, but as an option to keep in the back pocket when everything else fails. Similarly, for Maina Talia, it is important not to send a confused message to the international community. Migration is not, and must not be a solution, although it can be an option for some who wish to move.

Not all people in affected atolls are having their voice heard. If decisions are being made about relocation, how is it ensured that the community voice is heard, that the needs of different groups (eg. elderly, women) are considered? Here there is an important role for Pacific Island researchers, activists and civil society. There is a clear need to learn from community relocations and for communities to be involved from beginning to end in planning, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Anisi 2020).

Conference Learnings

On the 22nd and 23rd of July 2021, the online conference revisited and continued the dialogue commenced in the two forums, and extended learning on the impacts of climate change on cultural identity and sovereignty (Boege 2021). The conference featured a variety of experts in their fields ranging from cultural and Indigenous knowledge holders, politicians, academics, and civil society representatives. The vision of the conference was to enable a constructive debate and discussion to start to build an adaptive pathway for future generations of atoll people that ensures cultural identity and sovereignty. Two key themes linked the presentations: centralising the cultures, histories and knowledges of atoll people, including diasporas, in devising solutions to climate change challenges, and raising awareness on the policy and legal aspects of sovereignty and climate change

Prioritising the cultures, histories and knowledges of atoll people, including diasporas in devising solutions

A number of cultural knowledges were shared, enabling opportunities for increased understanding of cultural identity. Taukiei Kitara revisited the practices in his atoll culture relating to umbilical cords, in order to highlight the culture significance of ongoing connection between atoll land and members of the atoll community who travel to, and live in, new places. He shared knowledge of how in Tuvalu, the umbilical cord of a newly born child is cut into two pieces. One would be buried on land with a tree (such as a coconut tree) planted on top of it. The other half is taken by the father to the ocean when he goes fishing and he lets it drift in the ocean. This practice demonstrates the connection to land and ocean of Tuvaluans. The umbilical cord buried on land indicates that the child will grow and respect the land and nurture the land for it provides everything that is needed for a person to survive. The other half of the umbilical cord which was set adrift in the ocean indicates that the umbilical cord will use the ocean as a highway to other lands. Wherever the umbilical cord lands, it grows and establishes its own society, but it will always find its other half which is buried on home soil and country. For example, Taukiei Kitara's umbilical cord is buried on Nui Island, Tuvalu. He grew up and travelled to Australia and lived in Australia for a very long time, representing the part of his umbilical cord that drifted in the ocean. He will always be connected to his home island where his buried umbilical cord remains. This means he will always be a Tuvaluan no matter where he lives or travels.

The conference also provided the opportunity to learn from Yessie Mosby, Torres Strait Island community and youth leader in Australia and a leader in advocating for climate justice on Masig Island in the Torres Strait. Yessie Mosby shared the story of his community who are on the frontlines of climate change; the bones of their ancestors are being washed away on their islands because of sea level rise. They have not contributed to the causes of

climate change and yet it has physical, mental and spiritual impacts upon them. Yessie Mosby detailed his community's action of taking their climate change case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee as an important pathway to pursuing climate justice (Faa 2020). For Yessie Mosby, a journey by canoe down the coast of Australia will also demonstrate his community's frustration with existing climate change policies.

Tammy Tabe, migration expert from the University of the South Pacific, shared her story of her community's history of displacement from Kiribati to Solomon Islands, and the many lessons learned which can help communities in the Pacific Islands undergoing relocation or facing relocation as a possibility in the future (see also Tabe 2020). For her, it is important for all engaged in the climate change struggle to understand the histories of the forcibly removed populations of the Pacific Islands. Maina Talia stressed the importance of communalism in Pacific Island societies, explaining that in Tuvaluan culture, land and people are not separable into different categories, as they may be in other cultures: land cannot be bought and sold, resources are shared, voluntary labour is at the heart of the community, and land is the reference point of a community's identity. When an umbilical cord is buried in the land it signifies the land as home, which cannot be replaced. Similarly, as explained by Tereao Teingiia-Ratite in Kiribati, the islands are the centre of the world and are at the heart of i-Kiribati cultural identity, with identity bound up in a person's land. The i-Kiribati *maneaba*, the community meeting house, exemplifies the cultural values and communalism of the people.

According to the Honourable Enele Sopoaga, building trust between all the different stakeholders across the Pacific is important if durable solutions to climate change challenges are to be built. James Bhagwan emphasised the importance of including the spiritual in solutions. Using powerful messages that speak to the core Indigenous and religious values in Pacific Island cultures, he identified a partial '*loss of vision and understanding of the delicate interdependence of life that once guided and ensured the survival of Pacific Island generations for centuries.*' And yet the ecological crisis, including climate change challenges, can and should be addressed by '*reweaving the ecological mat*' to unravel what is 'toxic' and reweave towards a healthy, ecologically respectful society with an inclusive politics that prioritises the indigenous and spiritual values and knowledge that has enabled wellbeing among Pacific Island people. Several speakers made special mention of the importance of mobility narratives, particularly those that feature Pacific Island people's mobility histories and cultures, to engage island people in facing climate change challenges (see also Suliman et al. 2020). For James Bhagwan, an example of engaging with such narratives involves sharing biblical migrant stories – narratives of people seeking refuge, looking for a new life and exploring new possibilities was important, as was elevating an understanding of hospitality, to include receiving communities in mobilities dialogues. In this way, there is exodus rather than exile.

Developments in law and policy

Solutions to climate change challenges to sovereignty and cultural identity are being pursued in a range of legal and policy arenas, as befits the complex nature of climate change issues. Simon Kofe outlined how the Tuvalu government is taking action in developing international law to better deal with climate change challenges in order to protect Tuvalu's

sovereignty. This work involves protection of statehood and maritime zones. Since sea level rise can reduce coastal territory, and because statehood and maritime zones as currently defined depend on fixed territory, solutions are needed to ensure that island nation-states do not have their statehood and maritime zones diminished. One important part of the solution is the declaration of permanent maritime borders, irrespective of the size and shape of islands, by Tuvalu along with other Pacific Island states (Jackson 2021). Also important are actions by Tuvalu to continue to affirm its status as a state, which has significance for customary international law. Thus, the Constitution of Tuvalu is being amended to ensure the permanence of Tuvalu's borders in its most fundamental law. Tuvalu is also considering amending its Constitution to include explicit mention of Tuvalu's continued sovereignty, as a state with rights and a unique identity, even if the land is not habitable. Simon Kofe explained the importance of exploring how to advance international law with concepts such as the *nation ex-situ*, a proposed international law solution to the problem of climate change making territory uninhabitable. The idea of *nation ex-situ* is to enable the existing statehood of an atoll state to be newly defined in a new territory, if a state's territory becomes submerged by rising sea levels (Burkett 2011). This could be achieved, for example, if another state ceded some of its territory and the international community recognised the atoll's statehood as defined by that new territory. He also explained the Tuvalu government's work in creating the digital nation Tuvalu 2.0. Through such actions, the state of Tuvalu demonstrates to other states, in its laws and policies, that other states must continue to recognise the statehood and maritime boundaries of Tuvalu in international law even if territory is lost. All these legal developments advance international customary law to help protect Tuvalu's sovereignty and the unique cultural identity of Tuvalu's people.

Enele Sopoaga made clear the importance of the global community fulfilling its commitments to achieve mitigation of greenhouse gases under the Paris Agreement, and ensuring loss and damage is taken seriously by large states. He also underscored the importance of Pacific Island countries being properly represented at the upcoming United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference of Parties in Glasgow, either in-person or electronically, not forgetting how climate change is related to other environmental issues such as plastic waste and seabed mining. Peter Emberson reported on Pacific Islands regional dialogue on the climate mobility in the regional programme on *Enhancing Protection and Empowerment of Migrants and Communities Affected by Climate Change and Disasters in the Pacific Region* (PCCMHS)⁴. This programme seeks to protect and empower communities adversely affected by climate change and disasters in the Pacific region, focusing specifically on climate change and disaster-related migration, displacement, and planned relocation. Guiding principles are being developed to ensure human security through such solutions as safe migration pathways (including existing labour mobilities, which must be made safer) and harmonising policy. Legal avenues were also discussed in detail by Susan Rimmer and Ian Fry, who communicated promising developments in human rights, particularly cultural rights, and international environmental law. Ian Fry advised on

⁴ This programme includes International Organisation for Migration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), and Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).

the need to establish a new international fund specifically to support the financing of physical adaptation in atolls, including land reclamation, which can significantly strengthen the land against sea level rise.

Arenas for Action

Together, the two online forums and the conference pointed to several arenas through which action on cultural identity and sovereignty must be pursued, all of which are important given the complex, multi-faceted nature of climate change challenges. It was clear that there is a need for dialogue and awareness-raising on issues relating to cultural identity and sovereignty of atolls, in multiple arenas including cross-boundary dialogues, international law, civil society, education, research, churches, and policymaking in the Pacific Islands and elsewhere. The work of the forum and conference speakers, and many others, emphasises the inclusion of cultural and spiritual values, knowledges and cosmologies in conceptualising and developing solutions. Pacific people need to be much better recognised by the international community as experts on the climate change issues that affect them. The events clearly showed simplistic 'climate migration' programmes will not solve the complex challenges of climate change and that a range of legal and policy measures are needed to better protect sovereignty in a changing climate and enable cultures of atoll people to continue to thrive, both at home and in diasporas.

Several action areas for atoll communities and their partners can be identified from the forums and conference, including:

- To continue to promote and raise awareness on the importance of protecting and nurturing cultural identity and sovereignty, including focusing on how Nature and spirituality shapes who Pacific Island people are, especially Pacific Island culture and values, and it is vital to understand the importance of nature and its relationship to Pacific Island people.
- For Pacific Island people to continue to strongly identify through cultural practices, cultural values to continue to build resilience to climate change challenges.
- For community and national atoll leaders and educators to continue to empower atoll people to protect their cultural identity and sovereignty through multiple pathways (including education, religion, legal systems, the arts and others), working towards culturally valued and spiritually informed lasting solutions to the challenges of climate change.
- For atoll legal experts and their partners to continue their important work within legal systems that prioritise atoll cultural identities and sovereignty in climate change solutions.
- Empowering young people in atolls and the diaspora to embrace their cultural identities and help them understand how their cultural identity helps to address climate change challenges, through greater participation in cultural events including dancing, singing, language, handicrafts, fishing, cultivation of crops, food preservation and cooking and all other culturally unique skills and activities to

ensure cultural values and skills are passed on to younger generations, especially in the diaspora.

- To encourage the inclusion of cultural knowledge on migration and its relationship and connection to sovereignty and cultural identity within formal and informal education and knowledge systems.
- For Pacific Island people, especially atoll people, to deepen their connections with Indigenous and Torres Strait communities in Australia to enable collaborative knowledge and problem-solving.
- For continued facilitation of dialogue between atoll communities across the boundaries of Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and with atoll diasporas, focusing on sharing knowledge and collaboratively devising solutions to challenges to cultural identity and sovereignty.
- For atoll leaders and diaspora leaders to continue to urge Australia, New Zealand and other industrialised countries to engage Pacific Island diasporas more robustly at the federal level, in foreign policy, labour mobility policy and climate change policy, in addition to working with atoll governments.

The online forums and the conference highlighted the important role of the Pacific diaspora in working with atoll people in the islands to address the challenges of climate change to cultural identity and sovereignty (see also Enari and Jamieson 2021). PICQ is already working hard on a voice for Pacific people at federal level in Australia, such as through the recommended Pasifika advisory group to federal government. Still, the voice of Pacific Island people in Australia must be listened to more carefully, which will better enable the building of solutions to climate change challenges with the communities and nations themselves, and not be dominated by outsiders. The connection between Pacific Island diaspora communities and their homelands is of great cultural significance and an important source of knowledge, as the online forums and conference clearly demonstrated. The conference ended with an invitation from Tereao Teingiia-Ratite to engage with her poetry, so it is fitting to finish with her poem titled Nareau's Creation:

Once upon a time, Nareau created small but beautiful atoll islands
Called them 'Tungaru' and commanded dwellers to be 'itungarungaru'
They, also were 'te tunga' that stops the emerging seas and oceans
That would be the impact of climate revolution to drown the earth
Once upon a time, Nareau created all dwellers to become 'aomata'
To own lands, traditions, tangible and intangible properties
To toil for their wellbeing in order to fulfil their call
Once upon a time, Nareau created a huge meeting hall – 'te mwaneaba'
For all to make legislatures and approved decisions for society welfare
'Anti', 'anti-ma-aomata' and 'aomata' lodged within to see all is functioning well
Once upon a time, Nareau created my forefathers and foremothers
Who passed down ethnicities by mouths through generations
The 'Tungaru' identity and sovereignty

References

Anisi, A. (2020) Addressing Challenges in Climate Change Adaptation: Learning from the Narikoso Community Relocation in Fiji. Toda Peace Institute Policy Brief No. 84. https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-84_anna-anisi.pdf

Boege, V. (2021) Climate Change, Identity and Sovereignty in the Pacific. Toda Peace Institute Global Outlook <https://toda.org/global-outlook/climate-change-identity-and-sovereignty-in-the-pacific.html>

Burkett, M. (2011). The Nation Ex-Situ: On climate change, deterritorialized nationhood and the post-climate era. *Climate law*, 2(3), 345-374.

Enari, D. & Viliamu Jameson, L. (2021) Climate Justice: a Pacific Island perspective, *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, DOI: 10.1080/1323238X.2021.1950905

Faa, M. (2020) Torres Strait 8 could set 'global precedent' with United Nations human rights fight linked to climate change. Australian Broadcasting Commission. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-30/torres-strait-islanders-fight-government-over-climate-change/12714644>

Jackson, L.C. (2021) Pacific forum leaders set permanent maritime borders, as rising seas shrink islands <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/12/pacific-forum-leaders-set-permanent-maritime-borders-as-rising-seas-shrink-islands>

Kitara, T. (2020). Climate change and sovereignty. Toda Peace Institute Global Outlook <https://toda.org/global-outlook/climate-change-and-sovereignty.html>

Lumā Vaai, U. (2019). "We are therefore we live": Pacific Eco-Relational Spirituality and Changing the Climate Story. Toda Peace Institute Policy Brief No. 56. https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-56_upolu-luma-vaai_we-are-therefore-we-live.pdf?v=0

Suliman, S., Farbotko, C., Ransan-Cooper, H., Elizabeth McNamara, K., Thornton, F., McMichael, C., & Kitara, T. (2019). Indigenous (im) mobilities in the Anthropocene. *Mobilities*, 14(3), 298-318.

Tabē, T. (2020). Colonial Relocation and Implications for Future Climate Change Induced Migration and Displacement. Toda Peace Institute Policy Brief No. 79. https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb79_tammy-tabe.pdf

Talia, M. (2021). Kauafua fatele for Christ's sake: A Theological Dance for the Changing Climate. In *Theologies from the Pacific* (pp. 63-75). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Teaiwa, K. M. (2017). Our sea of phosphate: The diaspora of Ocean Island. In *Indigenous diasporas and dislocations* (pp. 169-192). Routledge.

Tomlinson, M., & P Kāwika Tengan, T. (2016). *New Mana: Transformations of a classic concept in Pacific languages and cultures*. ANU Press.

Resources

Climate Change Challenges to the Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations Webinar 1:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9boJidSGaVo&t=7s>

Climate Change Challenges to the Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations Webinar 2:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFLvEiq_Cts

Climate Change Challenges to the Cultural Identity and Sovereignty of Pacific Atoll Nations Conference: [Link to conference recording when available.]

<https://www.picq.com.au>

<https://www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Pacific-Conference-of-Churches-Secretariat-432821093498034/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Kiribati-Association-Non-Governmental-Organisation-KANGO-1958827684371486/>

The Authors

Taukiei Kitara is from Tuvalu, currently living in Brisbane, Australia. He worked for the Tuvalu Association of Non-Governmental Organisation (TANGO) as a Community Development Officer, was a founding member of Tuvalu Climate Action Network and has represented Tuvalu civil society at several United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conferences of Parties. He is the President of the Brisbane Tuvalu Community and is also a council member for the Pacific Island Council for Queensland (PICQ). He is studying for his Masters in Global Development at Griffith University.

James Bhagwan is the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, the peak Ecumenical body in the Pacific, whose membership accounts for approximately 80 percent of the Pacific population, with 31 member churches and nine national councils of churches across the region.

Maina Talia is the Secretary of the Tuvalu Climate Action Network. He is currently completing doctoral studies at the Charles Sturt University in Sydney specifically focused on the issue of “tuakoi (neighbour) and climate change from three trajectories, indigenous wisdom, biblical and geopolitics”.

Enele Sopoaga is a Tuvaluan diplomat and politician who was Prime Minister of Tuvalu from 2013 to 2019. He is currently the Leader of the Opposition. He continues to call for international initiatives to tackle climate change, including “adaptation techniques” and a transfer of affordable sustainable technologies to vulnerable developing nations.

Anote Tong served three terms as President of the Republic of Kiribati and is a world-renowned leader in the battles against climate change and for ocean conservation. He was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, is a winner of the Sunhak Peace Prize and was the 2012 Hillary Laurate. Tong has been awarded honorary Doctorates in Engineering from the National Pukyong University in South Korea and Law from the University of the South Pacific to add to his B.Sc. from Canterbury University and Master’s in Economics from the London School of Economics.

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner is a Marshall Islander poet, performance artist and educator. She received international acclaim through her poetry performance at the opening of the United Nations Climate Summit in New York in 2014. Her writing and performances have been featured by CNN, Democracy Now, The Huffington Post, NBC News, National Geographic and more. Kathy also co-founded the youth environmentalist non-profit Jo-Jikum dedicated to empowering Marshallese youth to seek solutions to climate change and other environmental impacts threatening their home island.

Tammy Tabe is a migration expert from the University of the South Pacific. Her work examines the challenges Pacific Islander people encounter as settlers in a foreign land, and how they have adapted and become integrated into the local community.

Tereao Teingiia-Ratite is the President of the Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations (KANGO). She currently works with the University of the South Pacific, is a writer and poet, and has a strong connection with community organisations in and around Kiribati.

Exsley Taloiburi is a Climate Finance expert with extensive experience in providing climate finance analysis and policy advice to Forum Leaders and Economic Ministers in the Pacific region and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties. He is the Climate Change Finance Advisor and Team Leader for Climate Change and Resilience at The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Yessie Mosby is a Zenadth Kes Masig man, living in the Kulkalgal tribe area in the Central Torres Strait Islands. He is a traditional owner, a father, an artist and craftsman, a #TorresStrait8 claimant in the human rights complaint to the United Nations over climate change, and the Torres Strait organiser with 350.org Australia.

Katerina Teiawa is an artist and Associate Professor of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. Founder of the Pacific Studies teaching program at ANU, Teaiwa's commentary on Pacific issues has been published in the Conversation, Sydney Morning Herald, the Guardian, Inside Story, New York Times, the ABC, Foreign Affairs and Australian Outlook. She has been a consultant with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UNESCO & DFAT on cultural policy and sustainable development, and was a founding member of the Oceania Dance Theatre at the University of the South Pacific

Peter Emberson currently works on the UNESCAP Pacific Climate Change Mobility Project. He is part of the Fiji government delegations to the annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties, taking special interest in the complexities of international negotiations, assisting Fiji with themes relating to 'adaptation' and 'loss and damage'.

Ian Fry, an international environmental law and policy expert from the Australian National University and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiator for Tuvalu, focuses primarily on migration policies associated with the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and related instruments.

Susan Harris-Rimmer, from the Griffith University Climate Action Beacon, is the author of 'Gender and Transitional Justice: The Women of Timor-Leste' and often acts as a policy advisor to government and produces policy papers.

Simon Kofe is a member of parliament of Tuvalu, and the Minister of Justice, Communication and Foreign Affairs. He is a lawyer by profession and has previously held positions as an associate in private practice in Fiji, Crown counsel in the Attorney General's Office of Tuvalu, Assistant People's Lawyer of Tuvalu, Legal Adviser of the Fisheries Department of Tuvalu, and more recently the Senior Magistrate of Tuvalu.

Carol Farbotko is a cultural geographer with research interests in climate change adaptation, migration and the politics of climate risk. She has published widely on culture, identity and climate change challenges in Oceania.

Toda Peace Institute

The **Toda Peace Institute** is an independent, nonpartisan institute committed to advancing a more just and peaceful world through policy-oriented peace research and practice. The Institute commissions evidence-based research, convenes multi-track and multi-disciplinary problem-solving workshops and seminars, and promotes dialogue across ethnic, cultural, religious and political divides. It catalyses practical, policy-oriented conversations between theoretical experts, practitioners, policymakers and civil society leaders in order to discern innovative and creative solutions to the major problems confronting the world in the twenty-first century (see www.toda.org for more information).

Contact Us

Toda Peace Institute

Samon Eleven Bldg. 5th Floor

3-1 Samon-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0017, Japan

Email: contact@toda.org