Toda Oceania Declaration on Climate Change, Conflict and Peace

Explanatory Note

In 2018, the Toda Peace Institute and the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (University of Otago, New Zealand) conducted a workshop on "Climate Change and Conflict in the Pacific: Prevention, Management and the Enhancement of Community Resilience" in Auckland, New Zealand.[1]

This 'Toda Oceania Declaration on Climate Change, Conflict and Peace' flows from the debates and findings of that workshop.

Preamble

Recognising that Oceania is a climate change hotspot, with Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) being particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,

Recognising that terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and the livelihoods of communities are under imminent threat from climate change, including threats to food, land, water, health and economic insecurity, which are intensifying under these pressures,

Recognising that climate change-induced displacement is resulting in internal (within a nation) and international migration, seen in the increasing frequency of relocations of entire communities across Oceania,

Recognising that climate change induced pressures, combined with existing vulnerabilities, can lead to conflict, and even violent conduct of conflict, thus threatening peace, human security and stability, both within countries and at the regional level,

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[1] The workshop brought together academics, policymakers, peacebuilding practitioners and civil society actors. Participants came from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Countries. They discussed the local and international challenges and potential conflict linkages posed by climatic uncertainty in Oceania. The workshop established the 'Auckland Climate Change, Conflict and Peace research and policy network' in order to initiate and coordinate future activities.

Concerned that in the international debate surrounding the climate change–security nexus, PICs have attracted minimal attention, despite the vulnerability of the region to the conflict-prone effects of climate change,

Convinced that there is an urgent need in Oceania for policy-relevant research, and evidence-based policy advice, on the issue of climate change, conflict and peace so as to foster the elaboration and implementation of policies and strategies,

The participants of the Auckland workshop agreed on the following:

Findings, Principles and Guidelines

1. Climate change adaptation and mitigation responses require integrated foundations, based on dynamic and adaptive co-management approaches that bring together the best contemporary and traditional modes. These include the following dimensions:

   1.1. Integrating the knowledge and activities of stakeholders from different societal spheres such as: state institutions (such as national and sub-national governments), traditional customary representatives (such as chiefs and elders as well as other cultural and wisdom custodians), religious faith communities (e.g. churches), as well as civil society agencies (e.g. NGOs),

   1.2. Building the significant cultural and spiritual context of Oceania into climate adaptation responses,

   1.3. Weaving together traditional ecological knowledge with climate science,

   1.4. Linking the international climate legal regime with state and traditional customary laws,

   1.5. Building linkages between all levels of climate change governance, from the local to the international,

   1.6. Supporting bridging institutions which have the capacity to bring together stakeholders from different governance levels, societal spheres, localities, and with different worldviews. Such bridging institutions can be civil society organisations, in particular in Oceania the churches and other religious communities and institutions, educational institutions or networks of leaders who are familiar with both the 'modern' and the 'traditional' worlds.

2. There is a real risk that climate change-related conflicts may escalate across Oceania. These will include conflicts over land and scarce natural resources, climate-induced displacement as well as conflicts arising from poor environmental governance or poorly designed and implemented climate change policies and adaptation and mitigation measures. The impacts of climate change, combined with pre-existing vulnerabilities and other factors, multiply the likelihood of conflict and even of violent conflict escalation. Therefore climate change adaptation responses require conflict prevention and conflict-sensitive approaches that prioritise local contexts and the maintenance of peace. This encompasses:

2.1. Identifying and mitigating key local, national and international vulnerabilities which, when combined with the effects of climate change, have an exacerbating influence on potential conflict and violent conflict escalation,

2.2. Prioritising research which pays attention to the complexity of integrated human (economic, social, political and cultural) and natural systems,

2.3. Including dimensions of the climate change–conflict nexus which so far have been widely ignored or underestimated, such as cultural and spiritual aspects, traditional customary law and knowledge, together with contemporary indigenous knowledge and indigenous ways of climate change adaptation, of conflict transformation and peacebuilding,

2.4. Paying attention to the (unintentional) conflict-prone effects of mitigation and adaptation measures,

2.5. Developing context-specific conflict analysis and training tools, and organising comparative learning exchanges,

2.6. Documenting cases of climate-related conflicts in Oceania so as to identify lessons learned for conflict prevention and conflict resolution,

2.7. Focusing on regional dialogue as crucial to the development of conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation responses.

3. Climate change-induced displacement may require the relocation and resettlement of communities. These processes require conflict sensitive planning. This involves:

3.1. Acknowledging the inseparable connection of Oceanic people(s) to the land (vanua, fenua, fanua, 'aina, whenua, enua, fonua, te aba ...) which is fundamentally, culturally and spiritually linked to identity. Therefore the loss of land means a loss of cultural identity. This worldview needs to be incorporated in responses to climate change challenges,

3.2. Respecting the desire of people to stay and adapt their home territory to the effects of climate change whenever possible, as well as the need to plan for relocation when there are no other options,

3.3. Integrating the needs, interests and expectations of both resettlement communities and destination communities, as well as other social groups and stakeholders,

3.4. Ensuring that both resettling and destination communities are meaningfully included, and participate fully, in each stage of the resettlement process, based on ongoing dialogue with all parties.

4. There are dimensions that are central to Oceania's peoples' lives and cultures which are not usually addressed in mainstream 'Western'-dominated international climate discourse. These include: emotions, spiritual connections, traditional laws, knowledge and practices, faith, relationality and the more-than-human world. These aspects are highly relevant for conflict prevention and the maintenance of peace. An approach that is sensitive to these dimensions encompasses:

4.1. Recognising the need for a radical shift in worldview in responding to climate change,

4.2. Highlighting the injustices inherent in the impacts of climate change pertaining to communities and nature across PICs,

4.3. Overcoming human-centred approaches, which separate people from nature,

4.4. Nurturing the concept of Oceanic relationality which will deepen connections between people and other living beings and the material and immaterial worlds,

4.5. Acknowledging that moving beyond the limitations of 'Western', human-centred, and binary approaches, which have so far dominated international discourse, is of major policy relevance for addressing the climate change–conflict nexus,

4.6. Self-critical reflection on Western research and policymaking, calling into question mainstream Western worldviews that continue to inform decision-making,

4.7. Nurturing cross-cultural dialogue through engaging with Pacific worldviews, knowledge systems and spirituality, and integrating Western and Pacific ways of thinking,

4.8. Acknowledging the rights of future generations and of human and non-human beings/things,

4.9. Focusing on education, including education regarding traditional/indigenous /local knowledge, as crucial for conflict-sensitive adaptation responses,

4.10. Paying particular attention to the role of churches and religious communities and institutions as influential civil society organisations across Oceania and their leadership role with regard to climate change and conflict,

4.11. Looking at ways in which civil society actors (including religious institutions) can reinforce and help realise national and regional political efforts to respond to the negative impacts of climate change.

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).

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