



**2023 DECLARATION ON THE CONTINUITY OF STATEHOOD AND THE PROTECTION OF PERSONS IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED SEA-LEVEL RISE**

***PREAMBLE***

1. ***Recalling*** that the statehood and sovereignty of Pacific nations underpin a peaceful, safe and secure Blue Pacific region where people can realise their full potential as individuals, communities and nations, and where the health and wellbeing of our people and human rights and equity for all can be ensured,
2. ***Recalling*** also that Members of the Pacific Islands Forum as oceanic states, countries and territories place great value on our ocean, its seabed, and land, and cherish our deep connection to our communities, natural environment, resources, lives, livelihoods, identities, culture, and traditional knowledge,
3. ***Recognising*** that our shared commitment to work together, including through various modes of regional and sub-regional cooperation, is an important platform for achieving the greatest benefits for our people,
4. ***Underlining*** that coastal States, particularly Small Island Developing States and low-lying States, are disproportionately impacted and specially affected by sea-level rise and climate change, and Members of the Pacific Islands Forum are committed to reducing and preventing these impacts and strengthening the resilience of our communities,
5. ***Recognising*** the threats and adverse impacts of climate change and sea-level rise as the defining issue that imperils the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of Pacific peoples, communities and countries, and undermines the full realisation of a peaceful, secure and sustainable future for our region,
6. ***Reaffirming*** our commitment for collective responsibility and accountability for the stewardship of the Blue Pacific Continent and the protection of our sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction over our land, maritime zones, and natural resources, including in response to climate change-related sea-level rise,
7. ***Further reaffirming*** our 2021 *Declaration On Preserving Maritime Zones In The Face Of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise*, which proclaims that our maritime zones, as established and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply, without reduction, notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise,
8. ***Recognising*** that under international law there is a general presumption that a State, once established, will continue to exist and endure, and maintain its status and effectiveness, and that international law does not contemplate the demise of statehood in the context of climate change-related sea-level rise,

9. ***Further recognising*** that continuity of statehood in the face of climate change-related sea-level rise is consistent with important principles and rights of international law, including the right of peoples to self-determination, the right to a nationality, the protection of territorial integrity and political independence, principles of equity and fairness, the maintenance of international peace and security which in turn requires stability in international relations, the right of a state to provide for its preservation, the duty of cooperation, the sovereign equality of states, and permanent sovereignty over natural resources,<sup>\*†</sup>
10. ***Acknowledging*** that protecting persons and communities affected by climate change-related sea-level rise involves protecting, promoting, and fulfilling their human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and also protecting their culture, cultural heritage, identity and dignity, and meeting their essential needs, including through international cooperation,
11. ***Further acknowledging*** that States carry an important duty in ensuring protection of their people, and continuity of statehood is necessary and fundamental for that protection to be implemented and to endure,

**WE, THE LEADERS OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM, THEREFORE:**

12. ***Affirm*** that international law supports a presumption of continuity of statehood and does not contemplate its demise in the context of climate change-related sea-level rise,
13. ***Declare*** that the statehood and sovereignty of Members of the Pacific Islands Forum will continue, and the rights and duties inherent thereto will be maintained, notwithstanding the impact of climate change-related sea-level rise,
14. ***Further declare*** that Members of the Pacific Islands Forum, individually and collectively, bear an important responsibility for ensuring protection of our people, and are committed to protecting such persons affected by climate change-related sea-level rise, including with respect to human rights duties, political status, culture, cultural heritage, identity and dignity, and meeting essential needs,
15. ***Commit*** to cooperate and take action including regionally and sub-regionally to achieve the purposes of this Declaration, and
16. ***Call upon*** the international community to support this Declaration and cooperate in achieving its purposes, consistent with our duty to cooperate and principles of equity and fairness.

**MADE ON 9 NOVEMBER 2023 AT THE FIFTY-SECOND PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM, HELD IN AITUTAKI, COOK ISLANDS**

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\*Consistent with General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XVII) of 14 December 1962, “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”.

†Nothing in this Declaration should be interpreted as undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Forum Members.