



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

January - February 2021





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Introduction

This update aims to highlight recent news on climate change, migration, and the Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

Prepared as a part of the CLI_M_CO2 project, undertaken at the World Trade Institute, University of Bern, Switzerland.

01-15 January 2021

Organisations update

UNHCR

As Portugal assumes the presidency of the European Union (EU), to be followed by Slovenia later this year, UNHCR called on them to lead the effort to forge a better protection system. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, UNHCR's Representative for EU Affairs, also called for reform to be central during negotiations over a new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, and highlighted the importance of "an EU that saves lives, protects refugees in Europe and globally, and finds solutions to end forced displacement and build resilient societies is needed more than ever".

To this end, the UNHCR recommended that the EU Presidency propose predictable, principled and solidarity-focused measures for a rights-based and sustainable asylum system.

They also stressed the need to address root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration and revitalize political and financial support in countries and regions, where most of those forcibly displaced people live.

"We hope that 2021 will be a new chapter for refugee protection, with the EU showing leadership in Europe and globally", said Mr. Vargas Llosa.

UNHCR hopes the proposed EU Pact will be adopted quickly, which includes enhancing search and rescue operations and ensuring predictable disembarkation.

"As negotiations on the EU Pact continue, we trust that EU Member States will seize the opportunity to lead by example and better protect people seeking asylum in Europe", said Mr. Vargas Llosa.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1081932>

Frontiers in Conservation Science

Scientists warn of 'ghastly future of mass extinction' and climate disruption in their new article. Titled, 'Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future', the authors report on three major and confronting environmental issues that have received little attention and require urgent action. First, they review the evidence that future environmental conditions will be far more dangerous than currently believed. The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms—including humanity—is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts. Second, they



ask what political or economic system, or leadership, is prepared to handle the predicted disasters, or even capable of such action. Third, this dire situation places an extraordinary responsibility on scientists to speak out candidly and accurately when engaging with government, business, and the public. They especially draw attention to the lack of appreciation of the enormous challenges to creating a sustainable future.

The article is available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcsc.2020.615419/full>

Pacific Islands & Territories

Vanuatu

The Pacific island nation of Vanuatu has graduated from the official list of Least Developed Countries (LDC), becoming the sixth country to achieve the milestone since the development categorization was created in 1971.

The graduation is “testimony to years of effort resulting in hard-won sustainable development gains,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a message.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1079252>



16-31 January 2021

Organisations update

IOM

The COVID-19 pandemic is having profound, widespread impacts on migrants, refugees and displaced persons, as well as on migration patterns at local and global level. Its implications for the different facets of the migration and environment nexus are also significant, and very diverse. People evacuating and displaced as a consequence of disasters are facing specific challenges respecting physical distancing and practicing other infection prevention measures. Migrants forced to return towards their home countries and locations might put additional pressures on already fragile ecosystems and livelihoods. Families and communities that were relying on migration as an adaptation or coping strategy have little options to send out their members or have stopped receiving remittances.

In order to explore the theoretical and practical implications of these dynamics on migration and the environment all over the world, IOM is hosting a series of contributions by practitioners and researchers. This series provides a forum for the environment and migration community to share experiences, knowledge, ideas and recommendations on the linkages between the COVID-19 pandemic and disaster displacement, environmental migration, and the environmental impacts of people's different movement decisions. This series includes contributions by authors with different disciplinary and professional backgrounds and on all regions of the world, aiming to provide a snapshot of the diversity and complexity of these implications.

To access articles in the series, please visit: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/covid-19-pandemic-migration-and-environment>

PIFS

Climate change is not a "doomsday proposition" but a living existential threat to humanity, Pacific government officials have warned.

The stark warning was made at today's Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement, co-organized by the Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP)'s Technical Working Group (TWG) on Human Mobility and the Secretariat of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Government representatives from 10 Pacific countries reiterated strongly the need for accelerated and ambitious action to address disaster-induced displacement as part of the global fight against the climate crisis.

"Every year, more of our citizens will be forced to leave their homes to escape stronger storms, rising seas, and swelling rivers brought by climate change," said Honorable Prime Minister of Fiji, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama in a video message.

"Climate driven displacement is not a doomsday proposition; it is happening right now. In response we have to change and adapt as quickly as the climate."



The virtual event gathered government officials, UN agencies, civil societies, academia and the private sector together to exchange policy best practices on disaster displacement and review challenges ahead as the Pacific continues to grapple with extreme weather events.

The outcomes of the consultation will also inform the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, an eight-member group established by the UN Secretary-General to identify concrete recommendations to better prevent, respond and achieve solutions to internal displacement.

“For far too long, the idea of internal displacement may seem abstract but the issue is real and here in the Pacific,” stressed H.E. Tregor Albon Ishoda, Ambassador of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to Fiji, recalling the “devastating impacts” of Tropical Cyclone Yasa and Harold in the consultation. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), more than 50,000 people in the Pacific region are at risk of having to flee their homes each year due to extreme weather events. Pacific islanders are amongst those most at risk of being displaced, bearing the brunt of sudden and slow-onset effects of climate change with humanitarian consequences.

“The breach of human rights, and scale and severity of humanitarian problem in the region requires more systematic attention be given to internally displaced persons in the Pacific,” urged Dr. Tausi Taupo, Secretary of Justice, Communication and Foreign Affairs of Tuvalu in his keynote address.

Support to internally displaced persons are provided by the National Disaster Management Offices in the Pacific and collaborative efforts of local actors, NGOs and development partners. However, as the climate crisis is escalating at an alarming pace, panelists have stressed that accelerated global actions are needed to ensure the inclusion of internal displacement in national development planning, legal frameworks and guidelines.

“Climate change presents more than just disaster risks. It is an existential threat that could displace entire nations,” said Nasser Judeh, Member of the High-Level Panel. “Displacement and disaster risks need to be recognized as a shared development priority.”

<https://www.forumsec.org/2021/02/12/pacific-governments-call-for-urgent-action-on-disaster-displacement-in-light-of-the-climate-crisis/>



01-15 February 2021

Organisations update

US White House

Joe Biden's administration is crafting a report that will include proposals for how the US might respond to global migration due to climate change. Biden commissioned the report as part of a broader executive order he signed yesterday aimed at overhauling the US refugee resettlement program, which was gutted under the Trump administration.

If Biden's report, due in 179 days, leads to an actual pathway to resettlement in the US, it could be a game-changer for people who've fled their homes because of climate change. There are currently no policies that allow someone who's been displaced by climate-related disasters to apply for a visa, green card, or refugee protections in the US. It's a gap that's, for the most part, missing globally, too. International institutions literally don't even have the words to tackle the issue: there's still a debate over whether to consider displaced people "migrants" or "refugees" since the terminology could affect what legal protections a person is entitled to.

The executive order is available at:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/executive-order-on-rebuilding-and-enhancing-programs-to-resettle-refugees-and-planning-for-the-impact-of-climate-change-on-migration/>

UNEP

A stronger focus on the promotion of circular economy, the protection of biodiversity and the fight against pollution lie at the heart of a new agreement for enhanced cooperation between the European Commission (EC) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

The signing of this document is timely, taking place against the backdrop of the fifth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA5) and the launch of the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resources Efficiency (GACERE) as the global community seeks to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the pressing climate, resource and biodiversity emergencies. The partners look to reinforce existing synergies and to introduce fresh areas of action in light of developments in the global environmental agenda, including the European Green Deal.

The five chapters identify how to:

1. Improve the science-policy interface and international environmental governance
2. Enhance climate resilience and climate neutrality with a focus on sustainable energy
3. Promote healthy and productive ecosystems
4. Scale up the circular economy and resource efficiency



5. Work towards a pollution-free planet and better health

The Annex builds on and looks to extend, existing close collaboration to address the environmental challenges and advance the sustainability agenda through the EC-UNEP strategic Framework Agreements and programmatic cooperation.

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/blogpost/european-commission-and-un-environment-programme-agree-reinforce>

SPREP

The Pacific Climate Change Centre (PCCC) is set to launch its new online e-learning platform on Friday 12 March, 2021.

The PCCC is the regional centre of excellence for information, training, and research on climate change in the Pacific. A vital component of the PCCC's work and contribution to Members and the public is its ability to provide, coordinate and facilitate capacity-building and training.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the ability of the Centre to deliver its regional and national workshop, which led to the PCCC exploring the viability and options of formalising an online e-learning platform, as part of its service.

The PCCC online e-learning platform will see the utilisation of both electronic and online technologies to deliver and access education, training, and workshops on climate change, remotely. It will host various courses such as Executive Courses, Open Learning Short Courses, Children's Education Corner and Webinar Series.

The platform uses the cloud-based services of Moodle – which can cater for 1,000 users at any one time. It has also identified a suite of at least 18 courses from current Climate Change Resilience programme projects that can be delivered through the platform.

The online e-learning platform is currently uploading materials of previous online courses conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency in 2020 and building the next course. It is also in the process of seeking accreditation from the Samoa Qualifications Authority as an informal education and training centre.

<https://www.sprep.org/news/announcing-the-pacific-climate-change-centre-online-e-learning-platform-to-be-launched-soon>



16-28 February 2021

Organisations update

IASC

New guidelines published and partners aim to put young people at the forefront of humanitarian action. The document is the first of its kind, and has been described as the 'go-to' guide for working with, and for, young people in natural disasters, conflict, forced displacement and other emergencies.

The Guidelines are available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-02/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20Working%20with%20and%20for%20Young%20People%20in%20Humanitarian%20and%20Protracted%20Crises_0.pdf

UNFCCC

UNFCCC's Initial NDC Synthesis Report measures the progress of national climate action plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs, ahead of the 26th session of Conference of its Parties (COP26) this November in Glasgow.

It found that even with increased efforts by some countries, the combined impact falls far short of what is needed.

"Today's interim report from the UNFCCC is a red alert for our planet. It shows governments are nowhere close to the level of ambition needed to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees and meet the goals of the Paris Agreement", Secretary-General António Guterres said on the report's findings.

He said 2021 is a "make or break year" to confront the global climate emergency.

"The science is clear, to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, we must cut global emission by 45 per cent by 2030, from 2010 levels", he stressed.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085812>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Fiji

Forum Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor has welcomed Fiji parliamentary standing committee consideration of the 2005 revision of the founding agreement of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Secretary General Taylor and Deputy Secretary General Dr Filimon Manoni appeared virtually on Monday 22 February before a five-member panel considering submissions on the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.



The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence convened after the Fiji Government Cabinet recently endorsed a proposal to ratify the 2005 Agreement. Fiji and several other Forum members signed the Agreement at the Forum Leaders Meeting in Papua New Guinea in 2005.

SG Taylor said the submission before the Standing Committee signified the engagement and commitment from the Forum's host nation. The Committee members are Chair- Hon. Alexander O'Connor, Deputy Chair Hon. Dr Salik Govind, Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, Hon. Anare Jale, and Hon. Pio Tikoduadua.

"Fiji's ratification will represent a significant milestone in our Forum family and fasten the bridges that we have rebuilt within the Forum and the regional relations we have strengthened over the years," Dame Meg told the Committee.

She presented a historical overview of the Forum, which has gone through name changes, increase in membership, and key milestones such as the UNCLOS, decolonialisation, regional trade and the Rarotonga Treaty.

The 2005 Agreement follows on from previous governing agreements for the organisation in 1973, 1991, and 2000, and it broadens membership categories for Associate Members and Observers.

"Fiji's ratification will be significant for the region as it is the final act required to bring into force the 2005 Agreement, and thus set in motion the next chapter of the Forum," said Dame Meg.

<https://www.forumsec.org/2021/02/25/fiji2005fa/>