



# MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

November - December 2020





## Table of Contents

Introduction	2
01-15 November 2020	2
Organisations update	2
IOM	2
UN Secretary-General	2
UNEP	2
16-30 November 2020	4
Organisations update	4
PIFS	4
01-15 December 2020	6
Organisations update	6
UN Secretary-General	6
SPREP	6
16-31 December 2020	8
Organisations update	8
UNHCR	8
Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update	9
US - Marshall Islands	9



# Introduction

This weekly 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 November 2020

### Organisations update

#### IOM

The first informal multi-stakeholder consultation was held Monday (9/11) in preparation for the regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), which will take place on 12-13 November.

The consultation focused on the progress made in the implementation of the GCM within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region and was structured around two roundtables: i) Progress and challenges in the implementation of the GCM in the UNECE region; and ii) Best practices for stakeholder engagement in the GCM implementation.

“This event builds on the Compact’s explicit recognition that non-governmental partners are vital contributors to a collective commitment to achieving well-managed migration founded on cooperation and full respect for human rights,” said Michele LeVoy, Director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and rapporteur for the event. “This consultation is an opportunity for civil society and other stakeholders to share realities on the ground, but also their concerns for the wellbeing of migrants in the region and how these can be effectively addressed,” she concluded.

The UNECE region covers over 50 countries, located in Europe, North America, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Western Asia. Its geographic, cultural and economic breadth makes migration contexts and dynamics across the region extremely diverse. To give voice to this, over one hundred groups and individuals from across the region, including trade unions, civil society organizations, local authorities, youth organizations and National Human Rights Institutes, private sector, the Red Cross and others participated in the virtual consultation.

The different speakers expressed their concerns on various topics including the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on migrants and their communities, migrant workers’ rights; children on the move with a particular focus on family reunification; access to services; alternatives to immigration detention; and border management and forced returns. Several recommendations were made during the consultation which will feed into the formal deliberations later in the week.

“Active and sustained stakeholder engagement is vital to the health and longevity of the Global Compact,” said Jonathan Prentice, the head of secretariat for the United Nations Network on



Migration. "These meetings are not a static process; they must be part of a dynamic engagement with all partners and at all levels to further the implementation of the Compact," he added.

<https://www.iom.int/news/first-multi-stakeholder-consultation-regional-reviews-global-compact-safe-regular-and-orderly>

The reports are available here: <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/country-regional-network/europe-north-america>

## **UN Secretary-General**

Drawing on the United Nations Network on Migration, the UN Secretary-General reported to the UN General Assembly on the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the activities of the United Nations system in this regard and the functioning of the institutional arrangements. It is the first report responding to this mandate and is based on extensive input and consultation.

The report is available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global%20Compact%20for%20Safe%2C%20Orderly%20and%20Regular%20Migration%20-%20Report%20of%20the%20Secretary-General%20%28A-75-542%29.pdf>

## **UNEP**

A new United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report says worldwide mass bleaching events, like the one that began in 2014, could become the norm in the coming decades. The report's updated climate models demonstrate that coral bleaching is happening faster than anticipated and the future health of the world's reefs is inextricably tied to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Time is of the essence for marine species, human livelihoods and the still unknown treasures in our vastly unexplored oceans, the report said.

The report is available at: [https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/projections-future-coral-bleaching-conditions-using-ipcc-cmip6-models-climate?\\_ga=2.183946598.1122350308.1608719199-1346459152.1608719199](https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/projections-future-coral-bleaching-conditions-using-ipcc-cmip6-models-climate?_ga=2.183946598.1122350308.1608719199-1346459152.1608719199)



# 16-30 November 2020

## Organisations update

### PIFS

COVID-19's impact on global trade has not slowed focus from Pacific nations keen to implement a regional partnership helping Forum Island Countries to enhance production and export of high-quality goods and services.

Initiated by Pacific trade officials in 2017, the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Initiative, PQII, was endorsed with a roadmap by Forum Trade Ministers in February 2020. Ministers tasked the Forum Secretariat to mobilise and coordinate partners and resources around its priorities.

By October 2020, PIFS had signed a USD 1.5m grant agreement with a multi-donor facility, the Enhanced Integrated Framework. The funds will go towards the Initiative's priorities, focused on Pacific Least Developed Countries, and will be managed jointly with those already committed by Australia, the European Union and Germany.

A team of three staff will be engaged to support the Initiative, led by PQII Coordinator Dr Ulrich Diekmann, agronomist and former coordinator at the metrology institutes of Germany and Australia. Dr Diekmann is to provide technical leadership to the regional initiative which expects to roll out activities from 2021, with Standards Australia and the National Measurement Institute of Australia as key implementing partners. Work supporting production and export of high-quality goods and services from Forum Members will include, for example, developing and strengthening standards and technical regulations, governance systems, testing and certification, and value chains.

PIFS, UNCTAD and UNIDO are working to develop complementary programs which will also be run under the umbrella of the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Initiative.–

Reflecting on the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Initiative Dame Meg Taylor, PIFS' Secretary General, noted that "far from impeding our progress, COVID-19 has strengthened our resolve to move ahead with what has emerged as a signature initiative of the Pacific Aid-for-Trade Strategy 2020-2025. The ability to set and provide compliance with higher standards for Pacific goods and services is not only essential to support our long-term development aspirations, but also to recover quickly from the devastating economic impacts of this global pandemic".

<https://www.forumsec.org/2020/11/28/global-quality-standards-edge-closer-for-pacific-trade/>



# 01-15 December 2020

## Organisations update

### UN Secretary-General

UN chief António Guterres had a dire warning message for the world at Columbia University in New York on Wednesday, urging humanity to end the war against nature which has seen a collapse in biodiversity, record global warming and ocean temperature rises, and a global pandemic.

But he also said there was plenty of room for hope that a new, sustainable world can emerge from the pandemic, and an international coalition of nations committed to net neutrality, by 2050. Here's his concluding remarks as he makes climate action the UN's top priority for the 21st Century.

<https://news.un.org/en/audio/2020/12/1079052>

### SPREP

Bold, urgent action to protect our biodiversity is being called for in a Pacific declaration to tackle the global biodiversity crisis.

The Vemööre Declaration: Commitments to nature conservation action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021-2025 was endorsed at the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas this week.

The State of Environment and Conservation in the Pacific Islands: 2020 Regional Report launched during the Conference provides a bleak picture of biodiversity in the region, catalysing the call for action.

Pacific island governments, partner countries and the heads of 11 organisations that make up the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation have declared the need for transformative action.

The Declaration states that the global biodiversity crisis is an "existential threat to our Pacific Ocean, our Pacific Islands and to ourselves as Pacific peoples."

*What is the Vemööre Declaration?*

There are five key areas within the declaration under which there are different action tracks, these are actions that governments and environment organisations recognise, endorse and are committed to implementing.

These five key areas are: Our Ocean, Our Islands, Our Connection with Nature, Implementation and Call to Action.



An example of an action track is Our Connection with Nature: “Ensuring that environmentally and culturally sensitive tourism is implemented throughout the Pacific”;

Implementation: “Strengthening financing of nature conservation and nature-based solutions in the Pacific that are resilient in the face of global economic or political disruption.”

In total there are 21 action tracks that governments and heads of organisations have recognised, endorsed and are committed to implementing.

*What are some brief examples of what the Vemööre Declaration commits our Pacific islands region to?*

There are a wide range of key actions that need to be acted upon in the Pacific islands region that will result in positive protection for our environment:

An expansion of our networks of marine protected areas (MPAs), including locally managed marine areas, and other area-based effective conservation measures. The Pacific islands will ensure that our MPA networks are ecologically representative, sustainably and effectively managed and resourced, community-led, and socially equitable.

Nature-based solutions to sustain social-ecological systems will be implemented across our Pacific islands region as a fundamental response to climate impacts, disaster risk management, water and food insecurity, and threats to human health.

People will be at the heart of conservation action by engaging community and civil society organisations, artists, traditional knowledge holders, elders (men and women) and young people, rural and urban, in the design, monitoring, and implementation of conservation initiatives.

Financing of nature conservation and nature-based solutions in the Pacific will be strengthened so that they are resilient in the face of global economic or political disruption

A strong commitment to action and accountability in implementing the urgent economic and societal transformations to address the biodiversity crisis that threatens both nature and people in our Pacific Islands. The global community will be called upon as averting this crisis depends not only on action within the Pacific region, but on worldwide cooperation to address the global drivers of environmental change which affect the Pacific so profoundly.

*How will we know the Vemööre Declaration: Commitments to nature conservation action in the Pacific Islands region, 2021-2025 is being followed and achieved?*

The Pacific Islands Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas 2021 – 2025 is the guiding mechanism for nature conservation action across our region and will help achieve identified targets in a cohesive manner.

The Framework is aligned to the Vemööre Declaration, as well as meeting the Blue Pacific goals endorsed by our Pacific island leaders.

Implementation of the Framework will be monitored and evaluated over the coming years through the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas. It will also guide the work of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) as the inter-



governmental regional organisation that works in partnership with its Member governments and partners to achieve its strategic goals.

*What does Vemööre mean and why is it named this?*

Vemööre' is a term in the Kwényî language from the Isle of Pines, New Caledonia that refers to making something viable. It is used to highlight our collective commitment and responsibility to implement the principles of life, to preserve balance, to build alliances, and to respect the word between people and between the spirits of our environment. Vemööre is also close to the notion of resilience.

New Caledonia was the host of the virtual 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, including the virtual High- Level Segment, which saw the endorsement of the Vemööre Declaration.

*Who attended the virtual High-level segment of the 10th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and endorsed the Vemööre Declaration?*

Those in attendance included the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, Australia, France, and New Zealand.

Pacific Island Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT) members present were BirdLife International, , cChange Pacific, Conservation International, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Oceania Regional Office, The Nature Conservancy, Pacific Community, Protected Area Learning Research Collaborative (PALRC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - New Caledonia, and World Wide Fund for Nature-Pacific.

To access the declaration:  
<https://www.sprep.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/declaration-Vermoore-endorsed-2020-eng.pdf>

<https://www.sprep.org/news/the-veroore-declaration-for-the-pacific-addressing-biodiversity-crisis>



# 16-31 December 2020

## Organisations update

### UNHCR

While a full picture for 2020 is yet to be established, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, estimates that global forced displacement surpassed 80 million at mid-year, according to a report on trends in global forced displacement.

At the beginning of this year, some 79.5 million people had been forced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, and human rights violations. This total included 45.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 29.6 million refugees and others forcibly displaced outside their country, and 4.2 million asylum seekers. Existing and new conflicts and the novel coronavirus have dramatically affected their lives in 2020.

Despite the U.N. Secretary-General's urgent appeal in March for a global ceasefire while the world fights the pandemic, conflicts and persecution continued. Violence in Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Somalia, and Yemen drove new displacements in the first half of 2020. Significant new displacement has also been registered across Africa's Central Sahel region as civilians are subjected to brutal violence, including rape and executions .

"With forced displacement doubling in the last decade, the international community is failing to safeguard peace," said Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

"We are now surpassing another bleak milestone that will continue to grow unless world leaders stop wars."

For people forced to flee, COVID-19 became an additional protection and livelihoods crisis on top of the global public health emergency. The virus has disrupted every aspect of human life and severely worsened existing challenges for the forcibly displaced and stateless.

Some of the measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 made it harder for refugees to reach safety. At the peak of the first wave of the pandemic in April, 168 countries fully or partially closed their borders, with 90 countries making no exception for people seeking asylum. Since then, and with UNHCR's support and expertise, 111 countries have found pragmatic solutions to ensure their asylum system is fully or partially operational while ensuring necessary measures are taken to curb the spread of the virus.

Despite such measures, new asylum applications dropped by a third compared to the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, the underlying factors leading to conflicts globally remain unaddressed.

Fewer durable solutions were found for the displaced in 2020 compared to the same period in previous years. Just 822,600 displaced people returned home, most – 635,000 – were IDPs. With 102,600 voluntary repatriations in the first half of the year, refugee returns dropped by 22 per cent compared to 2019.



Resettlement travel for refugees was on temporary hold due to the COVID-19 restrictions from March to June. Consequently, only 17,400 refugees were resettled in the first six months of 2020 according to government statistics, half the figure of 2019.

Although the actual number of stateless people remains unknown, 79 countries in the world have reported 4.2 million stateless people on their territory.

UNHCR publishes annual worldwide data on forced displacement each June in its Global Trends reports. The Mid-Year Trends report released today is available here: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5fc504d44/mid-year-trends-2020.html>

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/12/5fcf94a04/forced-displacement-passes-80-million-mid-2020-covid-19-tests-refugee-protection.html>

## **Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update**

### **US – Marshall Islands**

Nearly 25 years ago, with the stroke of a pen, the United States broke its commitment to provide medical care for Marshall Islands residents living in the United States.

This past weekend, congressional negotiators agreed to reinstate that promise, delivering Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program coverage to tens of thousands of Marshallese and residents of several other Pacific Island nations living in the United States.

“We are all so overjoyed with tears of joy for this fight that many have us have been part of” for decades, said Sheldon Riklon, a Marshallese physician at the University of Arkansas Medical Center’s Northwest Center. “This is an historic legislation that we finally right the wrong.”

The healthcare assistance comes as the COVID-19 pandemic and related job losses have hammered many Marshallese and Pacific Island communities in the United States, from Washington state to Arkansas.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the gruesome health injustices... the rest of the world ignored,” said Melisa Laelan, executive director of Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, in a statement. “Today we find peace and comfort in knowing that one of our fundamental human rights will finally be restored.”

In 1986, the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands signed a bilateral agreement that allowed the Marshallese to enter the United States as “legal non-immigrants” in return for the U.S. military continuing to operate a weapons testing base in the Marshalls. It also provided the Marshallese with Medicaid coverage.

Similar agreements, known as Compacts of Free Association, were signed with the nations of Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Then, in 1996, President Clinton signed the welfare reform bill, which changed the categories of people qualifying for federal aid, including Medicaid — the Marshallese and other compact nation citizens were shut out.



Although the omission of these residents was considered an error, Congress refused to reinstate them — even as some legislators, including Sen. Mazie Hirono and U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, both Democrats from Hawaii, pushed to have them reinstated.

Their efforts, and those of others, have now paid off.

“This bipartisan agreement will unlock new tools to assist the COFA community suffering from unequal access to health care,” said Hirono in an email statement. “By allowing States to enroll COFA citizens in Medicaid, we are upholding the promises we made to our critical national security partners in the Freely Associated States.”

Gabbard noted the bill would also help states such as Hawaii, Oregon and Washington, which had stepped in to fill that federal void for compact residents.

The Marshallese were “promised support by the federal government due to the damage done to their health and homes from nuclear testing,” said Gabbard, who also pushed to have compact nation children reinstated in the federal school meal programs.

Juliet Choi, director the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, said she was thrilled and stunned by the news, which comes at such a politically fraught and polarized time in American politics. She called it a “bright and hopeful” indication the nation can rally together to right wrongs during “this dark time,” she said, referring to the pandemic.

Between 1946 and 1958, the United States detonated 67 nuclear bombs on, in and above the Marshall Islands — vaporizing whole islands, carving craters into its shallow lagoons and exiling hundreds of people from their homes.

For decades afterward, the U.S. continued to use the islands to test biological and convention weapons. The U.S. still sends missiles to the islands, and Marshallese who live near the U.S. military base in Kwajalein atoll are accustomed to having to take cover, periodically, from incoming missiles from California, or other weapons testing programs.

“This is certainly a great Christmas present for all COFA citizens across the U.S. A huge kommol tata to everyone that played a role in getting us to this historical milestone,” said Eldon Alik, consul general of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Arkansas.

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-12-21/congress-approves-medicaid-for-marshallese>