



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

January 2020





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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.

01-10 January 2020

Organisations update

South American Conference on Migration

South American Conference on Migration (CSM by its name in Spanish) gathered in Sucre, Bolivia, and adopted a non-binding regional instrument on the protection of people displaced across borders and on migrants in countries affected by disasters linked to natural hazards.

The Guidelines are available at: <https://disasterdisplacement.org/south-american-countries-now-have-a-non-binding-regional-instrument-on-the-protection-of-persons-displaced-across-borders-and-on-the-protection-of-migrants-in-disaster-situations>

UNFCCC

“25 Years of Adaptation under the UNFCCC”, prepared by the Adaptation Committee is available online:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/AC_25%20Years%20of%20Adaptation%20Under%20the%20UNFCCC_2019.pdf

UNHCR

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has launched a set of ambitious but achievable Recommendations for the 2020 Croatian and German Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (EU). The Presidencies and the envisaged EU Pact on Migration and Asylum present unique opportunities to better protect forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe and abroad, while supporting host countries.

The recommendations are available here: <https://www.unhcr.org/be/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2020/01/200107-FINAL-UNHCR-Recommendations-for-the-Croatian-and-German-Presidencies-of-the-Council-of-the-EU-2020.pdf>



Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Tonga

“Tonga loses UN voting right: Tonga is one of seven countries to lose their votes at the United Nations General Assembly because it hasn't paid its fees. The United Nations said the seven were so far behind in paying their dues that they are losing their voting privileges in the 193-member General Assembly.

The seven are Tonga, Venezuela, Lebanon, Lesotho, Gambia, Central Africa Republic and Yemen.

A UN spokesman said three other countries - Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe and Somalia - were also in arrears but the assembly decided they could retain their vote until September.

The UN Charter states a member of UN which is in arrears shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of contributions due from it for the preceding two years.

Only 146 Member States paid their dues in full for the 2019 budget.

Most of the countries owing money to the UN had remained within the overdue limits and retained their votes.

The Matangi Tonga website reported that since 2001 Tonga, along with other Pacific Island countries, has been expected to contribute .001 percent of the UN budget.

Other Pacific members paid \$US27,883 each in 2019 for their annual contributions.

A payment of over \$US16,000 would be enough for Tonga to regain its voting privileges.

In October UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres voiced deep concern over the "severe liquidity crisis" facing the world organisation.

Writing to the member states about the worst cash crisis facing the UN in nearly a decade, the UN Chief had said the organisation ran the risk of depleting its liquidity reserves and defaulting on payments to staff and vendors.”

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/407139/tonga-losing-un-voting-rights>



13-17 January 2020

Organisations update

ILO

On 3 February, 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is launching a report that assesses the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples around the world, 30 years after the adoption of the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal People Convention – the only international convention that specifically covers their rights.

The report, *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future*, contains estimates by region, country, income groups and gender on employment, wages, income levels, working conditions and educational attainment of the world's indigenous populations. It also contains updated figures on the size of indigenous populations around the world, including Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America.

IOM Fiji

Writing about "How Climate Change Affects the Pacific", Sabira Coelho focuses on the climate change-ocean-migration nexus in this blog post: <https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/how-climate-change-affects-pacific>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Fiji

"Damage caused by Cyclone Tino in Fiji's northernmost parts this month will cost the government \$US2.8 million. Local commissioner Ilisoni Vusoniceva said the sugar sector suffered the most damage at \$US1.4m. Earlier, Cyclone Sarai passed through the country over the new year period. New Zealand has responded to a request for assistance from Fiji to fund a detailed needs assessment and food distribution to areas affected by both cyclones. An MFAT spokesperson said \$US103,000 had been sent through the New Zealand Aid Programme.

This involved deployment of three ships, with 80 personnel on board from multiple Fijian Government agencies and civil society (including technical government officials, the Red Cross and NGO staff), water and food rations for Lau," MFAT said in a statement.

The Lau group includes Moala, Matuku, Toyota, Oneata, Moce, Manuka-i-Lau, Kabara and Fulaga, and faced the brunt of Cyclones Sarai and Tino."

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/408501/cyclone-damage-in-fiji-estimated-to-cost-us2-point-8m>



"The Oinafa Wharf in Rotuma could be relocated if recommendations delivered to the Fiji government are adopted. The wharf is out of operation after it was damaged during Cyclone Tino on Friday. Rotumans have since taken to social media calling for the relocation of the wharf to the other side of the island at Motusa. The Director of Fiji's National Disaster Management Office, Vasiti Soko, said it would look into the relocation once it received an assessment report from the local commissioner.

"That plan was brought to the minister's briefing this morning. The [Fiji Roads Authority] will still have to go back and put together the proposal and table it back. But otherwise we have been advised of the alternative route to actually place the wharf elsewhere."

The Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) was preparing a team to head to Rotuma, but Ms Soko could not say how long the wharf would be out of action.

There are about 1600 people living on the island.

Rotumans' travel plans should not be affected because flights were operating to and from the island as Malhaha Airport was not damaged during the cyclone.

"Ships can also travel to Rotuma but we will have to use a barge to transport passengers to and from the ship to the island," she said.

"The FRA is working this week and next week to fix the structural damage on the bridge at the wharf." Ms Soko also said 13 schools, used as evacuation centres in the northern and eastern parts of the country, had been temporarily closed.

She said health officials had conducted disinfection spraying of the centres to ensure they were ready as the school year began this week.

"Prior to the evacuees vacating the schools, the health officers visited their homes to ensure they were safe for them to return home," she said.

Ms Soko also said the search for a father and daughter was continuing after they were swept away by strong currents in Serua on Thursday.

"Recovery efforts have been hampered by poor visibility and strong currents in the Navua River," she said.

Ms Soko said food security in the northernmost part of Vanua Levu also remained a concern for authorities.

An assessment was being carried out by the Agriculture Ministry to determine the amount of food rations required to assist the affected communities in the area.

Ms Soko said a report on the extent and cost of damage caused by Cyclone Tino should be compiled by the end of the month.

Niue vegetable farm wrecked by Cyclone Tino

Meanwhile, a commercial vegetable grower in Niue is angry at the lack of warnings about Cyclone Tino during the weekend. James Douglas' Niue Fresh hydroponics farm was battered by 100km/hr winds on Friday evening. The damage to the facility housing the vegetables would drastically cut production over the next six weeks, he said. When there was a major storm threat, Mr Douglas said his business was reliant on the red, blue and yellow warnings from the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). However, those warnings did not come through.

"In this case it stayed blue, in fact it didn't move off blue the whole time. It wasn't until Friday night about 10 o'clock we realised that that wasn't blue anymore. In our minds it had moved well past yellow and I couldn't exactly get the crews to come up and start messing around with 100km winds gusting through."

RNZ Pacific has requested comment from the NDMO."

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/407794/post-cyclone-fiji-govt-to-consider-relocating-rotuma-wharf>



20-24 January 2020

Organisations update

UN Human Rights Committee

In its first ruling on a complaint by an individual seeking asylum from the effects of climate change, the UN Human Rights Committee has stated that countries may not deport individuals who face climate change-induced conditions that violate the right to life.

In 2015, Ioane Teitiota's asylum application in New Zealand was denied, and he was deported with his wife and children to his home country of Kiribati. He filed a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee, arguing that by deporting him, New Zealand had violated his right to life. Mr. Teitiota argued that the rise in sea level and other effects of climate change had rendered Kiribati uninhabitable for all its residents. Violent land disputes occurred because habitable land was becoming increasingly scarce. Environmental degradation made subsistence farming difficult, and the freshwater supply was contaminated by salt water.

The Committee determined that in Mr. Teitiota's specific case, New Zealand's courts did not violate his right to life at the time of the facts, because the thorough and careful evaluation of his testimony and other available information led to the determination that, despite the serious situation in Kiribati, sufficient protection measures were put in place. "Nevertheless," said Committee expert Yuval Shany, "this ruling sets forth new standards that could facilitate the success of future climate change-related asylum claims."

The Committee also clarified that individuals seeking asylum status are not required to prove that they would face imminent harm if returned to their countries. The Committee reasoned that climate change-induced harm can occur both through sudden-onset events (such as intense storms and flooding), and slow-onset processes (such as sea level rise, salinization and land degradation). Both sudden-onset events and slow-onset processes can prompt individuals to cross borders to seek protection from climate change-related harm.

The Committee also highlighted the role that the international community must play in assisting countries adversely affected by climate change. The Committee stated that without robust national and international efforts, the effects of climate change in sending states may trigger the non-refoulement obligations of receiving states and that – given that the risk of an entire country becoming submerged under water is such an extreme risk – the conditions of life in such a country may become incompatible with the right to life with dignity before the risk is realized.

The ruling marks the first decision by a UN human rights treaty body on a complaint by an individual seeking asylum protection from the effects of climate change.

The full Human Rights Committee ruling is available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/127/D/2728/2016&Lang=en



UNFCCC

Preparations are underway for Africa Climate Week 2020, which will be convened in Kampala, Uganda, 9-13 March 2020. The event in Kampala, at the Speke Conference Centre, will be the first Regional Climate Week to be hosted this year and will be followed by Climate Weeks in the Asia-Pacific (AP), Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions.

The overview programme and further details are available here: <https://unfccc.int/ACW>

ILO

World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020: This report provides an overview of global and regional trends in employment, unemployment, labour force participation and productivity. The report is available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_734455.pdf

IOM

New Cooperation Agreement Among East, Horn of Africa States Address Overseas Worker Exploitation : A two-day forum of Labour and Social Protection Ministers and high-level government officials from the East and Horn of Africa this week signed a regional cooperation agreement that is an important step in that direction, making it harder for human traffickers to exploit young people looking for work in Gulf states.

The agreement, finalized signed Tuesday at a forum hosted by the Kenyan government, with support from IOM and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), aims to harmonize labour migration policies in the region to make labour migration, safe, orderly and humane by establishing a common platform for engagement with the Gulf states and other countries that are major employers of African migrants.

<https://www.iom.int/news/new-cooperation-agreement-among-east-horn-africa-states-address-overseas-worker-exploitation>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

Marshall Islands

Marshall Islands dengue outbreak: 'We're fighting a war here' : A dengue fever outbreak in the Marshall Islands has entered its sixth month and despite border restrictions, mass spraying operations, countrywide cleanups and awareness campaigns, authorities say it's only getting worse.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/407987/marshall-islands-dengue-outbreak-we-re-fighting-a-war-here>



27-31 January 2020

Organisations update

Platform on Disaster Displacement

“While the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees made a call to world leaders in Davos, Switzerland to prepare for a large flow of people moving against their will due to climate change impacts, at the same time, across the Atlantic, in Quito, Ecuador, the XIIth edition of the Global Forum on Migration & Development successfully featured disaster displacement as one of the many important topics discussed throughout the week.

Not only did disaster displacement make its way into one of the six main Government-led Thematic Roundtables of the Forum (Roundtable 1.1: ‘Providing regular pathways from crisis to safety’), but the topic was also addressed by the civil society group in a full-day dialogue with multiple stakeholders, as well as in a side event organized by the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and other partners.

The challenge now for States and civil society organizations interested in furthering the debate around this topic is how to keep the impetus for the next edition of the GFMD taking place in January 2021 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and taking advantage of the Forum as a platform to build partnerships and scale up the protection and humanitarian pathways for those compelled to move due to disasters and the adverse effects of climate change.”

<https://disasterdisplacement.org/disaster-displacement-at-gfmd>

World Economic Forum

“The world needs to prepare for millions of people being driven from their homes by the impact of climate change, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said. Speaking to Reuters at the World Economic Forum, Filippo Grandi said a U.N. ruling this week meant those fleeing as a result of climate change deserved international protection, and that it had broad implications for governments.

The U.N. Human Rights Committee made the landmark ruling on Monday in relation to Ioane Teitiota, from the Pacific nation of Kiribati, who brought a case against New Zealand after authorities denied his claim of asylum.

“The ruling says if you have an immediate threat to your life due to climate change, due to the climate emergency, and if you cross the border and go to another country, you should not be sent back, because you would be at risk of your life, just like in a war or in a situation of persecution,” Grandi said.



"We must be prepared for a large surge of people moving against their will," he said. "I wouldn't venture to talk about specific numbers, it's too speculative, but certainly we're talking about millions here."

Potential drivers include wildfires like those seen in Australia, rising sea levels affecting low-lying islands, the destruction of crops and livestock in sub-Saharan Africa and floods worldwide, not least in parts of the developed world.

Whereas for most of its 70 years UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, has worked to assist those fleeing poorer countries as a result of conflict, climate change is more indiscriminate.

"It is further proof that refugee movements and the broader issue of migration of populations ... is a global challenge that cannot be confined to a few countries," said Grandi.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-davos-meeting-refugees/world-needs-to-prepare-for-millions-of-climate-displaced-u-n-idUSKBN1ZK1Q2>

Pacific Island Countries & Territories news update

American Samoa

American Samoa's governor has extended a measles outbreak state of emergency declaration and imposed new travel restrictions in response to the coronavirus.

All foreign travelers, except for Samoa passport holders, must enter American Samoa through Hawai'i and must spend 14 days in Hawaii before entering the territory.

Travellers from affected countries must remain in an unaffected country for at least two weeks prior to entry to American Samoa and all entry permit applications will be subject to a 30-day review period.

In announcing the extension, Lolo Matalasi Moliga confirmed the Community Health Center at Leone village has been designated as a quarantine facility for any suspected cases of coronavirus.

There are no suspected cases in American Samoa but the governor and health officials are concerned due to cases in Australia, as well as those in Asian countries.

Lolo pointed out the territory now has 15 confirmed cases of measles, which remains a threat to public health.

Meanwhile, India has given \$US250,000 worth of financial support to Samoa to help the victims and families of the recent measles epidemic.

The epidemic claimed 83 lives and infected more than 5000.

The grant is the latest of a series of donations from India to Samoa, it earlier gave \$1m for the Samoa Knowledge Society Initiative, which aims to promote sustainable development in Samoa.

India has also set up a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology in Apia and has sent two personnel from its Centre for Development of Advanced Computing to provide information technology training.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/408492/american-samoa-extends-state-of-emergency>