

# Healthy oceans, safe climate imperative for small islands to survive, Pacific island leaders tell UN

20 September 2017 – As the high-level segment of the United Nations General Assembly continued today, Baron Divavesi Waqa, President of Nauru, expressed deep sorrow and condolences to those who have suffered from the recent successive hurricanes in the Caribbean and United States and earthquakes in Mexico, stressing that “your suffering and grief is shared by us all.”

Mr. Waqa agreed that the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) be at the centre of the coming year’s work, underscoring that the five words – ‘people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership’ – which guide the goals, are broad enough to encompass collective ideals, while accommodating tremendous diversity.

“In the case of Nauru, our status as a small island developing State underlies every aspect of the lives of my people,” he said.

Noting that Nauru was among the first countries to ratify the [Paris Agreement](#), the President pointed out that “more than most, our prospects depend on a stable planet, including a safe climate and healthy oceans.”

“Climate change will be the defining security challenge of the century and we are simply not prepared for life on a hotter planet,” Mr. Waqa asserted. For that reason, Nauru supports the appointment of a UN Special Representative on Climate and Security.

He also urged that the mounting threats to the health of the world’s oceans be tackled ambitiously. Pointing to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as a great threat and economic loss to his country’s small economy, he emphasized that “security of our Oceans is a problem which must also be tackled by us all.”

[Full statement available here](#)



Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama of the Republic of Fiji addresses the general debate of the General Assembly’s seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

Also taking the podium, the Prime Minister of Fiji, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, said his people share a special sense of solidarity with those affected by the recent hurricanes and earthquakes, recalling that Fiji lost 44 individuals and a third of its economy last year when struck by the

biggest cyclone ever to make landfall in the southern hemisphere.

As the incoming president of the 23rd session of the States parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Mr. Bainimarama is deeply conscious of the need to lead a global response to the underlying causes of these events. "The appalling suffering in the Caribbean and the United States reminds us all that there is no time to waste," he said.

"Unless we tackle the underlying causes of climate change, we already know that some places will become unlivable and others will disappear altogether," he stressed, noting that Fiji has offered refuge to the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu, its neighbours at risk.

Climate change affects Fijian lives, whether it is entire villages being moved away from rising seas; the loss of ancestral burial grounds; salinity affecting crops; or the constant threat of destruction to homes and infrastructure.

Noting that 2018 will mark 40 years that Fiji has helped to make the world more secure through its contribution to UN Peacekeeping, Mr. Bainimarama expressed his determination that his country would make a successful contribution to the wider security of the planet through its leadership of the next climate change conference.

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