



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



Sunrise Initiative kicks off Pacific celebration of 70th anniversary of United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

For Immediate Release

16 November 2018, SUVA, Fiji – An enthusiastic crowd gathered for a sunrise ceremony to mark seven decades of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and to look forward to the next 70 years in a world facing new challenges, including the impacts of climate change.

The Sunrise Initiative on the southern shore of Fiji was organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), Alliance for Future Generations, University of the South Pacific and the Pacific Conference of Churches. It is the first of many global events planned to mark the 70th anniversary of the UDHR between now and Human Rights Day, on 10 December.

“The UDHR has provided hope and protection for untold numbers of vulnerable people and communities for seven decades,” said OHCHR Pacific Representative Chitralkha Massey. “As we in the Pacific begin to experience the all too real impacts of climate change, we will continue looking to the laws that the UDHR has inspired to protect the people who suffer most, yet contribute the least, to this global phenomenon.”

The Sunrise Initiative opened with performances by the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices, and by school children from Suva.

Also speaking at the event was PIDF Secretary General François Martel, who noted that there couldn't be genuine development without the protections afforded by human rights. “PIDF's focus on sustainable development requires the organization to also focus on environmental, economic and social rights as we work towards a model of development (which we call Green and Blue Economy) that leaves no-one behind,” he said.

Martel also called for governments to draw upon the wisdom and knowledge of civil society organizations, as the development challenges we face today need to be addressed through all sectors of society.

Climate change and small changes in sea level are having a dramatic impact on small island developing States and their efforts to achieve sustainable development. In some cases these phenomena represent the gravest threat to States' survival and viability. Indeed, a rise in sea levels endangers States' territorial integrity, freshwater resources, infrastructure, and their physical and cultural survival.

Pacific leaders are taking clear action on climate change. In the communique of the 49th Pacific Islands Forum, in September, they requested the UN Secretary-General to appoint a Special Advisor on climate change and security. They also called on the UN Security Council to appoint a special rapporteur to produce a regular review of global, regional and national security threats caused by climate change.

OHCHR too is getting an increasing number of requests from States that are affected by climate change and other environmental issues for support in addressing the human rights impacts.

In recent years, the UN Human Rights Mechanisms (Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures) have increasingly noted their concerns about the adverse impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights, and have made recommendations specifically to Pacific countries and to the wide international community.

For example, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), while considering Fiji's 5th periodic report on 23 February 2018 recommended Fiji to "take into account the greater vulnerability of rural women in the face of natural disasters and climate change when drafting disaster risk reduction and climate change policies".

OHCHR Representative Chitrlekha Massey will attend the 24th session of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in December, where among other things, she will take part in a side event being organized by PIDF on climate-induced displacement.

OHCHR recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with PIDF that will see both sides work towards making human rights more prominent in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have a strong human rights underpinning, starting with the preamble, which states that the Goals "seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls".

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the heart of the SDGs. The goals include a commitment to 'leave no one behind', special attention to marginalized and vulnerable groups and two dedicated goals on combatting discrimination and inequalities. Yet, it's increasingly evident that the impacts of climate change threaten most those who are already in danger of being sidelined from the development agenda.

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