

Climate Change, Small Island States and their Coastal Areas

Number 8/15

Fact Sheet

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Climate Change

International concerns

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The *July 1988 Meeting of the South Pacific Forum* and the *1989 Langkawi Declaration on Environment by the Heads of Commonwealth Governments* expressed concern over, and supported efforts to, protect coasts against sea level rise. Statements issued from these Meetings address the concerns of developing countries and, while having no legal force, they have influenced the contents of future climate treaties.

The *Male Small State Conference on Sea Level Rise*, held in the Maldives on 14 - 18 November 1989, recognized climate change and its adverse effects as a **common concern for mankind**. This Declaration stressed the serious consequences of sea level rise for low lying coastal areas and small island states, and addressed the special responsibilities of the industrialized states.

The Male Conference developed a programme for action. It formed an Action Group from the Caribbean, South Pacific, Mediterranean, Indian Ocean states to develop and co-ordinate joint strategies. It also called on all states to adopt immediate measures in energy efficiency, coastal management and protection, and re-forestation.

The Conference supported the work of the IPCC and urged industrialized countries to give financial and technical assistance to developing countries. It also proposed to establish broader monitoring network consisting of WMO, UNEP and UNESCO.

Pacific concerns

The *1991 Noumea Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development* addressed the effects of climate change on the South Pacific islands. This was adopted by 27 SPREP member governments in 1991. This declaration highlighted the special vulnerability of these states, the importance of using appropriate energy-efficient technologies, the further need for scientific research into sea level rise monitoring, and the need for technical and financial assistance to Pacific Island states to address this issue.

Ministers also expressed their commitment to control GHG emissions, manage natural resources sustainably, encourage international co-operation and implement their own National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS).

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is also concerned about possible adverse effects of sea level rise on low lying islands and coastal areas. In December 1989, a UNGA resolution welcomed international concern over this problem and urged all states to help the countries concerned. It also recommended this issue be considered by the IPCC, the drafting committee of the FCCC, and UNCED.

In April 1991, the United Nations Secretary-General submitted an extensive report to UNGA for global action at all levels. It called for support for low lying states. This was reiterated by the Governing Council of UNEP in May 1991 when it asked its Regional Seas Programme to help build up the capacities of small states and low lying areas to respond to threat of sea level rise.

The threat to low lying coastal areas and small island states is an important issue in the current negotiations for the FCCC. The IPCC took special interest, and the 2nd World Climate Conference in 1990 saw the "Group of 77" and Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) countries form a coalition to demand immediate action to curb global warming and, in particular, to mitigate sea level rise. The INC/FCCC also addressed this problem where the Convention agreed to account for the special needs of small coastal and island states.

