



Side Events Name: **Living at the Water's Edge: Strengthening environmental rule of law, health and access to justice in environmental matters across the Pacific**

Date: 27 August 2025

Time: 0900-1100

Venue: Hotel Crowne Plaza, Nadi, Fiji

Concept Note

1. Background

The Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Environmental Law Programme) promotes the development and implementation of environmental rule of law, strengthening the related capacity in countries and contributing to the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda. The promotion of public participation, access to information, and access to justice in environmental matters is a strategic activity of the Programme and is also instrumental in achieving the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss, and pollution.

Pacific Island Countries face many common challenges in accessing justice on climate and environmental matters. The Pacific region is at the frontlines of the climate crisis, where the steady rise in sea levels threatens not only land and livelihoods but the fundamental health and justice of its communities. Increasingly, sea-level rise is emerging as a central environmental and justice issue in the Pacific. With global sea levels projected to rise between 0.5 and 1.2 meters by 2100, low-lying countries face compounding threats to ecosystems, public health, food security, cultural identity, and legal sovereignty. These realities raise profound questions around the right to health, land tenure, and long-term access to justice in the face of displacement and environmental degradation. The impacts of sudden onset disasters, including displacement, place immense pressure on health systems and disrupts access to essential services—especially for Indigenous peoples, women, and low-income families. These impacts deepen pre-existing inequalities, making climate change not just an environmental challenge, but a profound justice issue. In this context climate resilience is also intricately linked to human rights including the right to health, land, and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent highlights the importance of urgent action to address the three interconnected environmental crises, particularly climate change, and embraces the promotion of all human rights. The Implementation Plan for the strategy points regional collective actions to strengthen the implementation of regional policies, frameworks, and declarations on human rights, gender equality, equity and social inclusion (see Goal 3). In this context, the proposed side event will bring together Pacific Island Country representatives, alongside other legal stakeholders in the Pacific, to discuss and share experience on emerging access to justice matters in the Pacific subregion. This will include an introduction to the region's legal recognition of environmental rights, challenges and barriers faced by Pacific Island Countries related to access to justice in environmental and health matters, and discussions around legal pluralism, integration of customary practices into formal adjudication systems, and responses to sea-level rise. The event will also introduce the forthcoming Lancet Commission on Sea-Level Rise, Health and Justice, led by WHO ACE.

2. Objective

The side event seeks to.

- Enhance knowledge and understanding of key substantive and procedural dimensions of access to justice on environmental matters, with a focus on the Pacific subregion.
- Foster the exchange of experiences and best practices in promoting access to justice between Pacific Island Country experts and other legal stakeholders,
- Identify key priorities to advance environmental rule of law and environmental justice in the



Pacific, including in the context of the Montevideo Environmental Law Programme and in response to sea-level rise.

- Align regional efforts with the forthcoming Lancet Commission on Sea-Level Rise, Health and Justice and explore how integrated legal, environmental, and public health frameworks can drive equity and resilience in frontline communities.

3. Proposed Participants

- High-level representative from Vanuatu (TBC)
- High-level representative from Republic of Korea (TBC)
- Representative from Fiji (TBC)
- OHCHR, Fiji (TBC)
- Dr Sandro Demaio, Head of the WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in the Western Pacific Region
- Ms. Maria-Goreti W. Muavesi, UNEP consultant
- Fred Patterson, SPREP (TBC)