



An Islands Initiative to
For the Promotion & Protection of
International Human Rights in the Pacific

NGO Contributions to the Stakeholder Report for UPR 38th session

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review regarding Climate Change in the Republic of Palau

PEALAU

Introduction

The Republic of Palau is a Pacific island nation with a population of approximately 20,000 people. Though Palau consists of 586 islands, only 12 islands are inhabited, and the majority of the population lives on the islands of Koror and Babeldaob. Palau is well known for its exceptional terrestrial and marine biodiversity, especially its coral reefs (UNFCCC 2013, p.7). Palau is considered the most biologically rich island group within Oceania, boasting one of the largest tropical rainforests in Micronesia, mangrove forests, seagrass beds, fringing reefs, patch reefs, barrier reefs, and marine lakes. In this regard, climate change induces damage to the environment such as coral bleaching. Damages in its biodiversity also generate negative effects for Palau's tourist sector. Tourism is the country's economic base and is an extremely important industry, contributing to 47% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Therefore, damages to these natural elements due to climate change could adversely affect this vital industry. Other economic bases include subsistence agriculture and fishing, both contributing to Palau's GDP. Increases in ocean temperatures may alter the migratory patterns of fish populations in Palau's waters, also adversely affecting this industry. (UNDP 2020).

In Palau, direct impacts from climate change are expected to include sea-level rise, more extreme weather events, changes in seasonal rainfall, temperature regime changes, and increasing ocean acidification. These direct impacts will have indirect and cumulative impacts on natural and human systems (including human health), and on Palau's economy (Government of Palau 2015, p.6). In this regard, increasing atmospheric temperatures and saltwater inundation as a result of climate change can bring important negative consequences for the Palauan population provided this can threaten freshwater supplies (UNDP 2020),

Progress

Palau has developed the Palau Climate Change Policy and Action Plan for Climate & Disaster Resilient Low Emission Development, a policy that looks for adapting to impacts of climate change, preparing for and responding to disasters, and contributing to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The vision of this Policy is "Happy, healthy, sustainable and resilient Palauan communities in a changing world," or "A Belau a kldmokl, mesisiich, moduades, e klekar." To make this vision a reality, this Policy lays out objectives to 1) enhance adaptation and resilience, 2) manage disasters and minimize disaster risk, and 3) mitigate global climate change by working towards low emission

development (Government of Palu 2015, p.6).

In 2015, Palau took a great step in improving institutional arrangements for the energy sector Management. It signed into law the Energy Act in order to create an adequate institutional framework that determines the functions and authority required for effective energy administration as outlined in the National Energy Policy 2010. This was a recommendation made in previous cycles. We are also glad to see that Palau submitted in 2015 the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution, which came into effect this year 2020 in order to achieve the objectives of the UNFCCC. The project has a duration of 5 years and aims to reduce the energy sector emissions with an additional reduction coming from the waste and transport sectors (Republic of Palau 2015). We encourage Palau to keep on working under the guidelines of the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution

In addition to the efforts already made, we recommend Palau to take additional measures to fight climate change.

Policy Recommendations

1. Reduce CO2 emissions and continue expanding renewable energy production and use

Palau is one of the countries with the highest CO2 per capita emissions in the world. Palau's energy economy relies almost completely on fossil fuels and consists of an annual supply of approximately 14.5 million gallons of diesel fuel, and 15.8 million gallons of gasoline. Almost all of Palau's diesel consumption is for power generation, with the rest being used for transport. Most of the diesel consumed for transport is used by fishing vessels and state-owned ferries, with little-used for road transport (Government of Palu 2015, p.22). We recommend the Government of Palau to expand its renewable energy production and use, and diversification to reduce its CO2 emissions and lower their levels of dependency on imported fuels to improve the security of the existing electricity supply, which also is vulnerable to changes in prices. An interesting option for this objective is the expansion into other forms of renewable energy such as wind, waste (landfill gas), hydropower, and/or marine energy (wave energy and currents) (Government of Palu 2015, p.25).

2. Revision of taxes and policies

Revision of taxes and policies to encourage the import and sale of appliances, vehicles, and boats having the highest energy efficiency; and with development of energy efficiency standards for new buildings and renovations including homes, businesses, and government premises (Government of Palu 2015, p.25)

3. Establishment of a National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles and with the full participation of civil society

Although Palau has taken preliminary steps to establish a National Human Rights Institution, the project is not yet finalized. We encourage the country to finalize this project (European Delegation to Jordan, 2019).

4. Building greater resources and cooperation in International communities to combat Climate Change

One of the most prominent challenges faced by Palau is climate change, which affected people's livelihood, access to food, water, and property. International cooperation and support in this regard are critical to address and ensure the basic human rights of the people. For instance, the Government's intention to establish a national human rights institution required specialized resources and Palau would be seeking assistance from its partners to realize this. Due to limited capacity in human resources and expertise, it is understandable that Palau continues to seek external technical and funding assistance. As it is committed to fulfilling its human rights obligations, Palau also seeks assistance from the members of the Human Rights Council, which should take into consideration the special circumstances when proposing further recommendations. We encourage Palau to keep on building relations with stakeholders, regional and international organizations and institutions, and development partners to address climate change.

1.

Issue: The government of Palau/Belau has showed a commitment to human rights. Palau has ratified numerous core international human rights treaties. It is quite an impressive record although very little has happened regarding the important step of implementation beginning with reporting and then initiating the recommendations into the daily reality of people.

It is also important for Palau to ratify the remaining international instruments.

Question: Will Palau work with regional NGOs to support trainings that can assist to better participate in the human rights treaty bodies? Will Palau also partner with institutions of higher education in Palau as well as the University of South Pacific as well as the University of Hawaii?

Will Palua be willing to host a regional human rights treaty body review like Samoa did for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the future?

Recommendation: Palua immediately call and coordinate with NGOs and universities in the region for a national meeting that will provide the skills and strategies to assist the government to catch up with its responsibilities under international human rights law. Palau also meet with experts in the region to assist with acknowledging the future responsibilities of the state to its citizens as it ratifies the remaining international instruments.

2.

Issue: Human Rights education is an important means to ensure continued cultural respect. It is important for Palau to organize and coordinate a creative curriculum that moves beyond the textbooks to culturally based popular education. It is also to use plays and other techniques that transcend traditional education.

Question: Will Palau develop a national plan of action for human rights education?

Recommendation: Palau works with regional and international NGOs to conduct trainings in human rights education. Palau also translates the various international instruments it has ratified into the indigenous languages of its citizens.

3.

Issue: Palau plays a prominent role in Micronesia. Palau can be a catalyst for a regional human rights mechanism. Palau should sponsor a regional conference focusing on the positive contribution of a regional mechanism that could create tools that ensure human rights is respected.

Question: Will Palau host a conference to assist the Working Group for a Pacific Island Human Rights Charter and Commission? Will Palau be a leader to be one of the first states?

Recommendation: Palau be one of the founding states of a Pacific Island Human Rights Charter and Commission.

4.

Issue: The environment is essential to the future of Palau. The spiritual relationship to the land must be reaffirmed by the state through laws and programs that guarantee the right to the land for each community. Palau should focus on the international instruments such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and specifically the Nationally Determined Contribution Process in the Paris Agreement.

Question: Will Palau explain its national actions to promote and protect the unique relationship to the land and ocean? Will Palau also focus on new ideas and instruments being proposed to hold corporations accountable for pollution and destruction of the environment?

Recommendation: Palau should work closely with its citizens to rededicate itself to environmental protection. Palau should also lead in international negotiations regarding climate change. PNG should also issue an open invitation to all UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures. Also, Palau host a National Determined Contribution for Paris Agreement and also UN SDGs Voluntary National Review rooted in human rights framework of participatory and inclusive with all citizens.

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