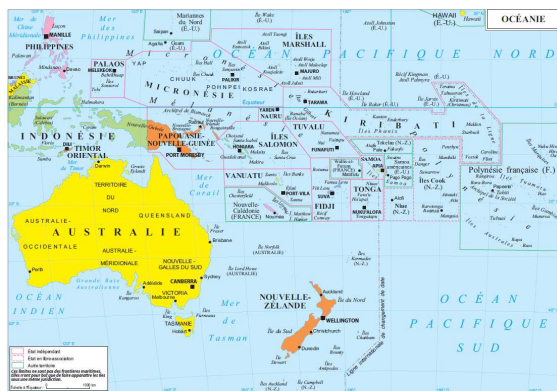


CLIMATE CHANGE: IMPACT ON THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Summary of the conference organised by the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands inter-parliamentary friendship group

June 9, 2015

With an opening speech by Mr Gérard Larcher, President of the Senate, and sponsored by the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands inter-parliamentary friendship group, the "Climate change: impact on the Pacific Islands" conference brought together around one hundred people at the Palais du Luxembourg on June 9, 2015.



Mr Tommy Remengesau, President of the Republic of Palau and guest of honour, Ms Catherine Procaccia, President of the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands friendship group, Mr Hervé Maurey, President of the Committee on Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development, and Mr Vladimir Ryabinin, Executive Secretary of the intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, representing Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, subsequently proceeded to deliver their opening statements.

The President of the Republic of Palau, Mr Tommy Remengesau, thanked France for committing with the Pacific Island States to fight against climate threats. He stressed the crucial importance of the "Climate Paris 2015" Conference, the so-called COP21, in December 2015.

President Remengesau wished to recall that the Pacific Islands may be small island territories, but that they are primarily located in the heart of the largest ocean on the planet. In order to make the most of such an exceptional resource, the **Republic of Palau** has taken the initiative to **make its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) a "National Marine Sanctuary"**. As a result, only 20 % of this area can be exploited for eco-tourism and commercial fishing, while any removal from the remaining 80 % is prohibited.

He also stressed *"the need to place the ocean at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations"*. He said that the COP21 must address objectives and challenges not only to the scale of Oceania, but to that of the entire planet.



Mr Tommy Remengesau, President of the Republic of Palau, and Ms Catherine Procaccia, President of the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands friendship group

In her address, Ms Catherine Procaccia welcomed the presence of many Pacific Islanders who could tell of the tangible effects of climate change on their daily lives. She recalled that the small Pacific Island States, who are the first victims of the impact of global warming, yet only represent **0.03 % of global carbon emissions**.

She said that the multiple issues related to climate change were:

- **environmental**, since climate change is threatening biodiversity ;
- **economic**, since the rise in sea level causes the loss of fertile land and infrastructure, resulting in a negative impact on agriculture and tourism development ;
- **social**, since climate change are generating the first "climate refugees", forced to leave their living areas after losing their livelihoods and having difficult access to fresh water, which also has a negative impact on their health.



Mr Hervé Maurey, President of the Committee on Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development

Mr Hervé Maurey recalled that the Senate has committed to fight against climate change, and will host the parliamentary section of the COP21 on December 6, 2015, under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Appointed rapporteur of the World's Parliaments' Statement reviewed at the Senate for the occasion, Mr Hervé Maurey applauded the mobilisation of various bodies of the High Assembly: standing committees, delegations, friendship groups, all of which have embarked on a vast amount of climate-related work.

In the perspective of the COP21, he stressed the need to reach an ambitious, universal and legally binding resolution, which would take into account the wishes especially formulated by the Pacific Islands to **limit global warming to 2°C**.

The two round tables were respectively dedicated to the **future of the Pacific Islands in the face of climate change** and the **challenge of reconciling the growth and protection of ocean ecosystems**, and brought together institutional stakeholders and scientific experts from Oceania.

Speakers at the round tables

- H.E. Mr Christian Lechery, Permanent Secretary of France for the Pacific, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the Pacific Community ;
- Mr Anthony Lecren, member of the Government of New Caledonia ;
- Mr Lam Dang, Director of Legislation to the Parliament of the Federated States of Micronesia ;
- Ms Isabelle Autissier, President of WWF France ;
- Mr Jean-Michel Dasque, former Ambassador, President of the Pacific Institute ;
- Mr Nicolas Imbert, Executive Director of Green Cross France and Territories ;
- H.E. M J. Rimarkindu Kalinoe, Ambassador of Papua New Guinea to Belgium ;

The round tables were led by Mr Serge Massau and Mr Steeven Gnipate, journalists from Outre-mer Première.

Besides the President of the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands friendship group, Ms Catherine Procaccia, Senators Robert Laufoaulu, Deputy President of the Fiji Islands group and Daniel Raoul, Vice-President of the group, also shared their visions of the situation of small Pacific Island States in the face of climate change.

1. The Pacific Islands are the first victims of the effects of climate change

Despite growth promoting the development of primary industries (raw materials, mineral products and agricultural products), the economies of small Pacific Island States still largely depend on fisheries resources. According to recent studies by WWF (World Wide Fund), ocean assets based on value may make it **the world's 7th largest economy**, without even considering oil present at great depths.

Ms Isabelle Autissier stressed the importance of preserving such fisheries resources. This exceptional wealth is now threatened by the effects of climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions and consumption patterns leading to resource depletion: 90 % of

fish stocks are overexploited or on the verge thereof; 50 % of coral, 30 % of mangrove and 39 % of the marine biodiversity have disappeared over 40 years.

Regarding the **increase in extreme events**, Mr Robert Laufoaulu, Senator of Wallis and Futuna, mentioned the feeling of insecurity of coastal dwellers, who are now forced to find refuge inland. The frequency of the *El Niño* phenomenon is an especially serious climate threat to populations of the Pacific. *El Niño* used to occur on average every 10 years, and now tends to be more frequent, approximately every 3 years. Such changes in sea currents have a significant impact on the development of corals, fish migration and climate. For example, Mr Lam Dang pointed out that Micronesia was hit by a hurricane and a tropical storm two months after Typhoon Maysak had hit the archipelago.

Mr Vladimir Ryabinin presented scientific methods to foresee the formation of tropical cyclones and their impact on the Pacific Islands. Maritime space planning was developed by the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission in order to anticipate hazardous events and thus mitigate potential damage. According to him, it seems to be an effective solution to the ever greater number of extreme weather events.

Mr Vladimir Ryabinin also expressed concern about the **rising sea levels** in the warm waters of the Pacific. Linked to the melting of polar glaciers, it is three times higher than that seen in the rest of the world over the past thirty years. In Micronesia, a rise of a mere 10 cm would be enough to contaminate the archipelago's freshwater reserves, making them undrinkable due to the addition of saltwater. In this respect, Mr Robert Laufoaulu stressed that: *"Freshwater is life; control measures against contamination by the infiltration of toxic or harmful products can be effective. But preserving groundwater against the rise of sea level is virtually impossible."*

Another, hardly expected, consequence : the **control of the 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the Pacific territories** has become a cause for concern for small Island States. In particular, Mr Lam Dang explained how the disappearance of some Islands due to rising sea levels could lead to a reduction in the EEZ of Micronesia, in the absence of land territories to guarantee its expansion. As a consequence, the economies of small Pacific Island States, which are based

mainly on fishing and fisheries revenues, are directly threatened by the rising waters.

Finally, climate change is now killing people, said Mr Anthony Lecren, member of the Government of New Caledonia, citing **Cyclone Pam, which devastated nearly 80 % of Vanuatu**. Ancestral knowledge and ancient traditions are thus being endangered.

II. Innovative proposals in the fight against the effects of climate change

Mr Christian Lechervy paid tribute to an *"extremely methodical preparation and a very sophisticated organisation"* by the Pacific Islands for the COP21. The Pacific States carry out many negotiations on the issue of climate change in the framework of international summits, such as the United Nations Convention for Asia and the Pacific, regional summits, such as the triennial summit between Japan and the Pacific States, or even subregional ones, such as the Oceania 21 or the Pacific Islands Forum meetings currently chaired by Mr Tommy Remengesau.



However, the determination of the Pacific Islands is not only evident in the context of COP21 negotiations. The Pacific States have already introduced initiatives to promote a new development model that is more respectful of biodiversity.

Mr Lam Dang said: *"In Micronesia we do not just want to be victims, we will fight"*. For this reason, the Micronesian Parliament has shown innovation by including the fight against climate change into its national legislation: All departments are required to include this priority in their budget.

In New Caledonia, the Government launched in 2012 the *"One tree, one day, one life"* programme, an appeal to *"consider life before profit,"* according to Mr Anthony Lecren. The appeal has federated 17 Pacific Island countries, except Australia and New Zealand. Their commitment resulted in the Oceania 21 summit and the Declaration of Lifou, which calls for *"an international revolution in the way the world is facing climate change"*.

This revolution is already underway in the Pacific Islands. As observed by Ms Isabelle Autissier, **in terms of protection of marine areas, the Republic of Palau is indeed a pioneering State.**

The effectiveness of such measures was demonstrated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) : within ten years, protected marine areas have seen their biodiversity increase by 19 %, their species density by 121 % and their biomass by 250 %. Protecting marine areas also produces economic benefits, since one dollar invested returns at least three, and up to twenty in best cases.

A symbol of the climate emergency, the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea, which were deserted by their inhabitants also generated the *"green economy"* development models. As part of the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Papua New Guinea has adopted the "REDD+" national strategy, which emphasises the role of forest conservation, sustainable management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks by reducing CO2 emissions.

Mr Daniel Raoul, Vice-President of the friendship group, added that due to the demographic and economic development of emerging countries, fighting climate change was a challenge for all of humanity. He applauded the many existing initiatives:

"From digging mangroves in the Pacific to limit the effects of rising sea levels to reforestation, such initiatives should be supported, and experiments in this field should be extended and generalised. The funds allocated to the transition towards lower-carbon economies should be expanded."



Mr Michel Magras, Ms Karine Claireaux, Mr Daniel Raoul, Mr Maurice Antiste, Ms Catherine Procaccia, Mr Jérôme Bignon, Mr Robert Laufoaulu and Mr Nicolas Hulot

In his closing speech, Mr Nicolas Hulot insisted that the credibility and success of the COP21 depended on the Parties' ability to develop practical tools to shift development paradigms and **step away at last from the "carbon economy"**. He also stressed: *"This is not a purely environmental issue. It is a profoundly human one which affects the most vulnerable populations."* He concluded by stating that since the effects of climate change are now being felt by the whole world population, *"we are bound by a common destiny with the Pacific Islands."*

Senators who spoke at the conference



Ms Catherine Procaccia

President of the France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands friendship group
(The Republicans)



Mr Hervé Maurey

President of the Committee on Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development (Union of Democrats and Independents – UC, UDI-UC)



Mr Robert Laufoaulu

Deputy President of the friendship group for Fiji
(The Republicans)



Mr Daniel Raoul

Vice-President of the friendship group
(Socialist and Republican group)

Conference proceedings :

http://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/reactions_internationales/Groupe_d_amitie/Actes_colloque_Pacifique_9_juin.pdf