

UniFiji Launches New Postgraduate Institute



The University of Fiji
(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

JDP SCHOOL OF LAW

The Institute of Strategic and Defence Studies ISDS WEBINAR

Climate Change And Asymmetrical Security Issues for Pacific Islands Countries
Human rights/Food insecurity/Environmental Degradation in Climate Change

April 6th 2022 – 6PM



Lead Presenter
Dr. Fabrizio Bozzato



Moderator
Professor Isikeli Mataitoga

The University of Fiji yesterday launched its new postgraduate Institute of Strategic and Defence Studies (ISDS) by hosting an international webinar on Climate Change and Asymmetrical Security Issues for the Pacific Island Countries.

The new ISDS will be located in the Justice Devendra Pathik School of Law at the University's Samabula Campus.



Ambassador and Adjunct Professor Isikeli Mataitoga speaking during the ISDS Launch Webinar

The lead presenter, Dr Fabrizio Bozzato, Senior Research Fellow, Sasakawa Peach Foundation, Tokyo, explained that by virtue of

their shared geographic characteristics, the Pacific Islands nations had an overlapping set of shared vulnerabilities to the environmental and societal impacts of climate change.

“Direct security impacts are multifarious and include diminished access to fresh water, local food supply, coastal infrastructure damage, etc. For atoll island nations, climate-related sea level rise is an existential threat,” he said.

He further stated that the range of external players and their different interests pointed to the complexity of the power plays in the Pacific Islands Region.

“While the power plays are not as blunt as during the colonial era, the outsiders are still stronger and richer,” he said.

“The contemporary preoccupation with regional security reflects a confluence of the continuing

relevance of traditional geostrategic calculations and the emergence of new security challenges that have redefined the content and scope of order in the contemporary international system,” he said.

Dr Fabrizio Bozzato stated that non-traditional security issues (NTSI) were challenges to the survival and well-being of peoples and states that arise primarily out of non-military sources.

“These dangers are often transnational in scope, defying unilateral remedies and requiring comprehensive – political, economic, social – responses, as well as humanitarian use of military force,” he said.

He stressed that acting on climate change was a trans-generational endeavour.

“The extreme rhetoric on climate change is making political agreement on climate change

policies more difficult, while security deteriorates. We can avoid much of the political gridlock by implementing collaborative strategies that are sci&tech enhanced, lift people out of poverty and make them more resilient to climate change,” he said.

Dr Bozzato stated that ecopoetics/ecopolitics dimension was important for designing and conducting climate diplomacy and policies towards/with the Pacific Island nations.

“In the Pacific Islands it’s not just a matter of what you may say, but also of how you say it. It helps aligning one’s climate security discourse and priorities with those of the Pacific Islanders, thus it builds confidence, shared vision & values, and a “community of destiny” identity-based trust,” he said.

Ambassador Solo Mara, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Development Forum, based his comments on how to build community resilience in the face of the increasing impacts of climate change.

He deliberated that during a village consultation session, a villager shared that in the legal system, if someone robs you off your property, it is a crime and related this with the impacts of climate change which is similar in the sense that they are being robbed off their villages and existence.

“Our leaders recognize climate change as an existential threat and this is reflected well in the

outcomes of the meeting documents in the recent past and the UN has registered the same as a security threat. Pacific Island Countries like Vanuatu and FSM are soliciting a legal opinion on the rights of current and future generations impacted by climate change,” said Ambassador Solo Mara.

Ambassador Mara explained that most of the Pacific SIDS are low lying atolls and the following climate change events affects the Pacific disproportionately; raise in sea level exacerbate land security issues in coastal locations and impacts livelihood security through loss of agricultural land and salination of soil and plants, impacts access to fresh water due to changes in weather pattern and salt water intrusion into fresh water sources and wells, increases the dependency and water demands which inevitably lead to scarcity of water resources and therefore become a security challenge.

“As a region, we need to look at frameworks for relocation, agreed principals for people to migrate with dignity, their basic human rights and identities remain protected when faced with this implosive threat from climate change,” said Ambassador Solo Mara.

Ambassador Solo Mara deliberated on environmental security issue related to infrastructure development on small pacific island nations which sets back development gain by several years

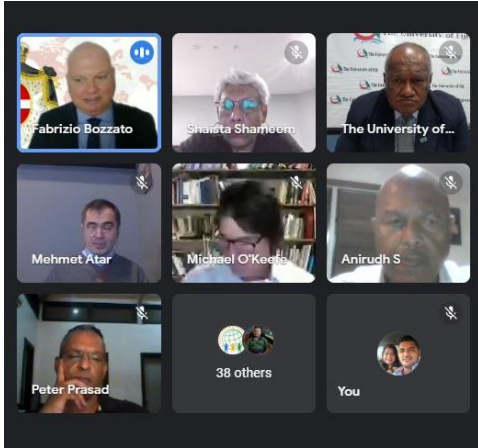
to decades depending on the severity of climate change impacts.

Linking the Corona virus pandemic to climate change, he explained that one of the key points that has been evident during the recent pandemic was how resourceful and innovative the Pacific SIDS were when responding to the health crisis and dealing with the natural hazards such as the Tonga crisis, recent cyclones in Vanuatu and Fiji, and Tuvalu and Kiribati coastal inundation brought by king tides.

“Pacific SIDS are now faced with the doting task of recovering from the pandemic while also meeting their long-term development aspirations such as meeting the SDGs and building resilient communities to adopt to the current climate crisis. A green recovery pathway is an emerging theme in the planning to rebuild post-pandemic for Pacific SIDS and the global community. This pathway is centered around the green economy which the PIDF is focused on,” said Ambassador Solo Mara.

He concluded that overall, Pacific SIDS should invest in expanding institutions and programmes for knowledge creation such as traditional knowledge and its dissemination regarding mitigation and adaptation responses. “Education and awareness of skills necessary to participate in global scientific and policy communities must be encouraged at all levels. Support from the international community for education and adaptation will enable Pacific SIDS

to grow Blue Green economies,” said Ambassador Solo Mara.



Participants at the ISDS Launch Webinar

Michael O'Keefe, School of Humanities and Social Sciences Postgraduate Coordinator, Director of the Master of International Relations, La Trobe University said that we are in furious agreement about climate change being existential threat to the Pacific and the people who have done the least to deserve these impacts are the most impacted.

He explained about the background assumptions of climate change and impacts of climate change were not shared by Pacific's key diplomatic partners. He highlighted that COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inability for Pacific Island economies to be integrated in a balanced way into the neo-liberal economic system. It highlighted that there was unity of the Blue Pacific but there was also great division.

He stressed that there was opportunity for far better collaboration, where the individual security issues can be connected to geopolitics.

Mr. Pene Baleinabuli, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Forestry, said that in a fisheries context, 'Blue Economy' would also envelop processes and initiatives that were seeking to bring a strong balance between economic development and conservation which would require sound management for sustainability, for ocean and for regional security.

"The concept of the Blue Economy is also one that can be summarised as the concept of ensuring that the current sustainable resource-usage practices meet the needs of the current generation, but does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet theirs. When you consider this against the fact that we still have a highly productive and biologically diverse ocean which covers approximately 70% of the earth's surface, you can agree that the responsibility to address the inevitable pressures around continuingly declining fish stocks should be high," he said.

Mr. Baleinabuli further explained that excessive fishing – and unscrupulous practices like IUU fishing which both have long-term sustainability and therefore security of the region.

"Firstly, the 'I' or 'Illegal' element. In this element, we are contending with the fact that legally binding national and regional instruments are not being adhered to. There needs to be a concerted effort in ensuring that fishing activities are managed in states within their jurisdictional authorities and according to their

national legislation and other, including regional, instruments and measures. Simply, compliance to the letter of the law is the ideal being pursued. Governments and stakeholders have a responsibility to this need," he said.

"On the 'U' or 'Unreported' element. Fishing operators need to fulfil all reporting requirements, and not partially but fully. Reporting requirements address issues of monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement, and include the capture of important catch data for scientific and other analyses and projections. This information must be complete and accurate," he further stated.

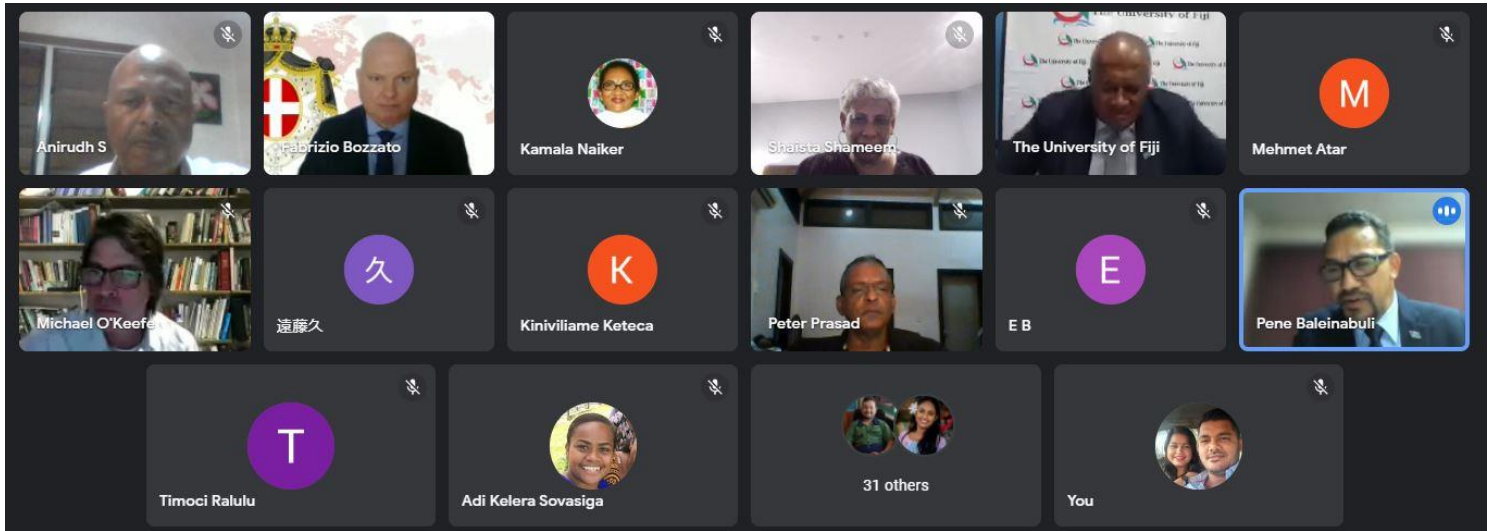
"On the second 'U' or 'Unregulated' component. Laws and binding instruments must exist and be designed in such a way to ensure coherence between national and regional linkages such as through regional fisheries management organisations. But in any event, Governments must ensure that they have national laws that sufficiently incorporate measures and requirements that adhere to good practices that are widely known globally, particularly those incorporated accordingly into regional measures and national laws of other responsible States," he said.

In her closing remarks, Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem stated that climate diplomacy had reached its expiration date. There was now a need for strong legal actions to be taken in response to climate

change, and she hoped that ISDS would be a place where this could

be done. She stressed that media and the youth had a major role to

play in the advocacy for climate change.



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