



OHCHR PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE (PRO)

Regional Representative's opening remarks

Human Rights, Climate Change and Business in the Pacific:

A Civil Society Capacity Building Program

Suva, Fiji | 23 June 2025

The Honourable Minister for Lands, Mr Filimoni Vosarogo,

Ms Emeline Siale Ilolahia, Executive Director of Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organisations, PIANGO

Ms Vani Catanasiga, Executive Director at Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) / Mr. Vipin Maharaj, representing FCOSS

Mr Patrick Earle, Director of the Diplomacy Training Programme

Professor Surya Deva, Professor at Macquarie Law School, Director of the Centre for Environmental Law and B&HR Access to Justice Lab at Macquarie University

Mr. Joshua Cooper, Lecturer at the Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights, University of Hawai'i

Ni sa bula Vinaka, Namaste and Good morning.

Human rights are at risk – globally, norms, standards, values and institutions are being undermined in a way that we never thought possible. And yet we know there is consensus and commitment among many that human rights keep people safe and render their lives dignified in a world that experiences conflict after conflict, disaster after disaster.

Not long ago, the disaster that is climate change was framed as a problem of parts per million – carbon, degrees, sea levels. That framing was incomplete, because behind every degree of warming there are people losing their homes, their livelihoods, and their connection to the land their families have inhabited for generations.

The shift to climate-as-human-rights did not happen through diplomacy alone — it happened because communities on the frontlines, including across the Pacific, rejected the idea that their futures were negotiable.

Human rights provide a powerful framework for shaping just, inclusive, and sustainable responses to the climate crisis. They remind us that people must be at the centre of all development efforts, including climate action and economic decision-making.

This is the context in which this training takes place. The overlapping crises of global conflicts, climate change, environmental degradation, and economic inequality continue to deepen vulnerabilities and disproportionately affect those already at risk of marginalisation – women and girls, Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ persons, older persons and youth.

And yet we also need to acknowledge empowerment that comes through crisis. Civil society plays an essential role in responding to these challenges and in empowering people. You are on the frontlines, advocating, mobilising, informing, and holding power to account.

These efforts are not vain. As a result of these efforts, the UN system and important institutions such as the International Court of Justice have acted in recent months affirming the legal obligations of States in their actions and omissions to address climate and environmental related issues.

This training aims to support your efforts, strengthen your skills, and foster connections across the region. It is an opportunity to explore the intersections between business practices, climate justice, and the human rights of all Pacific peoples.

Throughout the week, you will engage with practical strategies, tools, and frameworks – from regional standards to global treaties, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the emerging legal landscape in climate advocacy. You will also explore how these standards can be applied meaningfully in the Pacific context, and how to engage with the UN to promote and protect rights.

The UN Human Rights Office remains committed to supporting civil society actors in your crucial work. This is why we are engaged in trainings such as these that have meaning and impact beyond the initial workshops. I must at this point commend DTP for its alumni network. Wherever our Office goes in the Pacific, there is bound to be someone who is a DTP alumni, ranging from civil society to Foreign Ministers.

We jointly believe that a human rights-based approach to climate and business policy is not only possible, but necessary. It means recognising and protecting the rights of affected communities, enabling meaningful participation in decision-making, and ensuring accountability when harms occur, whether caused by States, companies, or other actors.

As you continue through the week, I invite you to hold in mind some questions that underpin the frameworks and the law.

What does it actually take to sustain the kind of advocacy that moves institutions towards better protection for human rights – and how do we ensure that human rights defenders, civil society organisations, and legal advocates have the standing, resources, and protection to do so?

What translates a legal or policy development into a changed reality for communities already affected by priority issues, such as development and climate change?

And what does it mean to genuinely centre the agency of the most affected – not as beneficiaries of solutions designed elsewhere, but as their authors, as co-creators?

These are not questions to which we have easy answers. But they are the right questions to bring into this room, this week, with the people gathered here.



This training forms part of a broader UN effort to support peacebuilding, social cohesion, and inclusive governance in the region. We are grateful for the collaboration of all our partners who have made this training possible, and to you for taking the time to be here.

We hope that the discussions ahead will be honest, thought-provoking, and empowering. As climate change reshapes the future of the Pacific, so too must we shape the response, which should be grounded in human rights, guided by community wisdom, and fuelled by collective action.

And when you go back to your countries, I hope that you will take some time to stand up for human rights. As mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, human rights are at risk everywhere so we hope you will join us in defending them.

Our High Commissioner recently announced a Global Alliance for Human Rights at the latest Human Rights Council meeting, and we will soon be engaging more with partners on it. We hope that you will all join – whether Government or civil society human rights defender.

Thank you very much, and I wish you all a productive and inspiring training during these five days.

Vinaka vakalevu, Dhanyavad, and thank you.