



# Warming up: Pacific island nations need Hawaii's support

**Editorial | Insight**

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As part of the 14th annual Pacific Risk Management 'Ohana (PRiMO) meetings earlier this month, heads of state from two Pacific island nations came to Honolulu to discuss the effects of our changing climate.

Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of Tuvalu and former President Anote Tong of Kiribati shared their deep concerns about sea level rise, climate change, displacement and the associated health and human security risks facing Pacific islanders. It became abundantly clear that Hawaii and the U.S. must do more about climate change.

The loss of fresh water and agriculture and the decline of fisheries due to global warming, salt water intrusion, coral reef degradation and ocean acidification have been well documented. The spread of disease and the burdens on public health and social systems, coupled with the loss of livelihoods and predatory behavior of multinational firms engaged in resource extraction, create real challenges for governance and management. With exposure to earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and storms, this region is clearly at risk from multiple hazards and threats.

Kiribati is one of our closest neighbors. Many climate refugees from Kiribati, Tuvalu and other islands in the Pacific end up in Hawaii. Conditions in island states are worsening, with grave implications for not just for those in peril but for the receiving communities as well. The two first ladies, Madame Meme Bernadette Tong and Madame Salilo Enele Sopoaga, reminded us that a disproportionately large share of climate impacts fall on women and children.

While the world has fixated on out-migration from Syria and other failed states, the compound problems associated with climate change in the Pacific demand our full attention.

Hawaii needs to "up its game" in the Pacific. Other nations have done so. As part of the most powerful, wealthy nation in the world, Hawaii needs to support, facilitate and lead development and implementation of just, equitable and lasting solutions to climate change. As an island state, Hawaii not only understands the challenges, but must be part of the solution. It's important to share our efforts to develop adaptation policies related to land use, building codes, infrastructure systems and public services with other islanders.

We need to foster deeper dialogue, deliberation and exchange between nations connected by the Pacific Ocean. There are competing geopolitical agendas, related to trade, defense, environmental protection and international relations. We also need stronger commitments and frameworks as to how best to accommodate and support islanders forced to migrate because of rising waters and degraded ecosystems.

Hawaii's expanded role also should involve technology transfer. We need innovative solutions such as proposed by Henk Rogers and other entrepreneurs who understand the critical needs in the Pacific, and how to bring new technologies such as energy storage and clean, renewable sources of power to remote islands. Alternative energy and sustainable resource management will increase human security. All people have basic rights to affordable power, clean water, public health and economic opportunity.

We must invest more in education, training, and cultural exchange.

We need robust partnerships between not just schools and universities in Hawaii and the Pacific islands, but across the Asia-Pacific region. We have the technology, resources and experience to do much more. PRiMO has long recognized the value of indigenous knowledge and adaptation to environmental change. We need to integrate cultural knowledge, practices, protocol and expression as part of learning exchange networks. This will help to bridge the gaps between climate science and society.

We need to bring together researchers, government agencies, policy-makers, NGOs and the military to build resilience and security for all.