

# Fiji ranked 15th most vulnerable

BONN, Germany - Many nations have become less vulnerable to natural disasters ranging from cyclones to earthquakes because of improved preparedness, but Pacific Island states remain most at risk, a study showed on Tuesday.

Climate change is raising risks by increasing the numbers of severe downpours, storm surges or heat waves, according to the report issued on the sidelines of UN talks on climate change in Germany.

But "on a global scale, vulnerability to extreme natural hazards has declined," said Peter Mucke, director of the World Risk Report and head of Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, an alliance of German aid agencies.

"Many countries have learnt from previous disasters and are improving disaster preparedness," he said of the findings in the annual report, published with the UN University and other groups.

The report assesses the risks that an extreme natural event will lead to a disaster in 171 nations in the period 2012-16. It listed Vanuatu, Tonga, the Philippines, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Solomon Islands and Costa Rica as the most vulnerable.

Fiji, which is presiding over a November 6-17 meeting in Bonn on ways to strengthen the 2015 Paris climate agreement, ranked 15th most vulnerable. As a region, Europe was least vulnerable.

The report said there were many ways to make societies less vulnerable to disasters, from cyclone shelters to flood barriers on rivers.

"Mangroves can reduce flood risks to people and property," said Michael Beck of the Nature Conservancy.

The report assesses both risks such as from storms, where rising sea levels linked to melting glaciers play a role, and earthquakes and tsunamis that are unaffected by man-made climate change.

■ REUTERS



Nananu villager Elijah Matanisigadrau, 6, plays on this coconut tree affected by climate change in Tailevu.

# Pacific region takes spotlight at COP23

By AVINESH GOPAL

THE Pacific region's advances in renewable energy took the spotlight during a side event held by Solar Head of State and the Pacific Islands Development Forum on the first day of COP23 in Germany.

A statement from PIDF said the event in the Fiji pavilion featured speakers from the governments of Tonga, Niue, Tokelau and Palau and representatives from Greenpeace and ClimateWorks Australia to discuss the various successes of renewable energy in the region and transformative solutions, and the benefit it is bringing to residents.

It said the side event was intended to assist Fiji's vision for a Pacific COP and demonstrate that the Pacific Islands are central to forming the Grand Coalition needed to fight climate change, as the voice of moral leadership.

The event also highlighted the ambition of Pacific SIDS (Small Island Developing States) for surpassing their emissions targets and demonstrating climate leadership with renewable energy.

In a symbolic move to showcase the island nation's ambitious goals, Tonga an-

nounced the installation of solar panels for the Royal Palace as part of the Solar Head of State program.

The installation will be the first of its kind in the Pacific as a national leader takes the personal step to use solar power for their official residence.

The Tongan King will also become the world's first monarch to use solar power, sending the message that Buckingham Palace should perhaps follow suit, the PIDF statement said.

"We have been tasked by Pacific leaders in their support of the Paris Agreement to pave the paradigm shift to a low carbon future," said PIDF secretary general Francois Martel.

"And Pacific countries and territories have shown interest in this project to facilitate the installation of solar energy infrastructure to power residences of heads of state and in some cases Parliament buildings across the islands."

Mr Martel said the installation of panels on the national leader's official residence was symbolic of the wider leadership on renewable energy by SIDS, and would serve as physical embodiment of Pacific Lead-

ership's commitment to fighting climate change.

"Noting the PIDF Leaders' concerns on the impacts of climate change and their support for the Paris Agreement, renewable energy is playing a key role in shaping the planets long-term energy future and is critical to delivering policy goals of secure, clean and affordable energy supplies," he said.

According to the PIDF statement, the Pacific continues to demonstrate strong leadership by virtue of its ambitious renewable energy goals, including Tonga's aim to reach 50 per cent renewable energy by 2020.

This includes a landmark 2MW solar PV system commissioned last month, the largest of its kind in the country.

Solar Head of State director James Ellsmoor said, "our model draws attention to renewable energy through highly visible solar installations on public buildings and associated public engagement strategies such as competitions for students and community events."

"High profile installations on buildings such as the Royal Palace highlight the economic, environmental and political impor-

ance of the use of renewable energy," he said.

The leader of the Tongan delegation, Paula Ma'u, signed an agreement at the event to work with Solar Head of State and the PIDF to carry out the installation.

Islands across the world are making headlines for ambitious renewable energy projects.

The Pacific nation of Tokelau became the world's first country to be 100 per cent solar powered in 2012 by launching a pioneering project to ditch its diesel habit and this was four years before the Paris Agreement's pledges, said the PIDF.

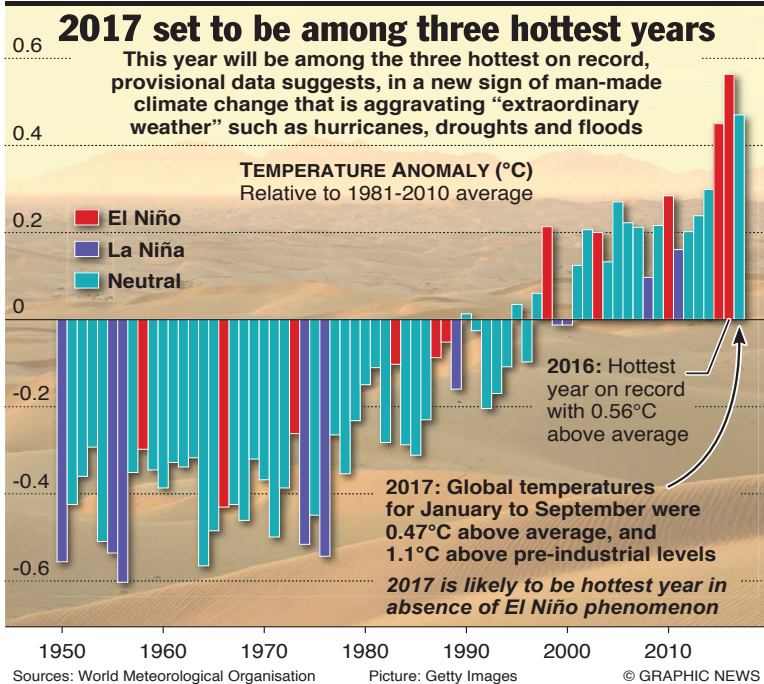
Furthermore, it said Fiji's leadership of COP23 was a first for SIDS, and an opportunity to demonstrate the very real threats faced by these nations.

Tonga's Paula Ma'u (left), Solar Head of State James Ellsmoor and PIDF secretary-general, Francois Martel sign the memorandum of understanding after the COP23 side event at the Fiji Pavilion in Bonn, Germany. Picture: SUPPLIED



Many countries have learnt from previous disasters and are improving disaster preparedness

PETER MUCKE director of the World Risk Report



## Syria plans to join Paris agreement

BONN, Germany - Syria said on Tuesday that it intends to join the 2015 Paris agreement for slowing climate change, isolating the US as the only country opposed to the pact.

Syria, racked by civil war, and Nicaragua were the only two nations outside the 195-nation pact when it was agreed in 2015. Nicaragua's left-wing government, which originally denounced the plan as too weak, signed up last month.

"I would like to affirm the Syrian Arab Republic's commitment to the Paris climate change accord," deputy Environment Minister Wadah Katmawi told a meeting of almost 200 nations at November 6-17 climate talks in Bonn, Germany.

Membership for Syria under President Bashar al-Assad would isolate the United States, the world's biggest economy and second largest greenhouse gas emitter behind China, as the only nation opposed to the accord.

US President Donald Trump, who has expressed doubts that man-made greenhouse gas emissions are the prime cause of global warming, announced in June that he intended to pull out and instead promote US coal and oil industries.

"We need everybody on board," Ronald Jumeau, of the Seychelles, told Reuters. "We want the United States in too. We take no pleasure in the United States being out."

The UN welcomed Syria's statement as a declaration of intent to adhere to the Paris pact. But it said Damascus had not yet filed any of the official documents to sign up.

Sarah Baashan, a Saudi diplomat chairing the meeting at which Syria spoke, told the session that she welcomed the "good news". There was no applause, however, at a conference where Assad's government has few allies.

"Syria's decision shows the breadth of support for the Paris agreement," Alden Meyer, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, told Reuters.

Mr Meyer said businesses, mayors, cities and other groups were also stepping up actions to limit greenhouse gas

emissions that scientists link to more droughts, heat waves, floods and rising sea levels.

Washington still has a seat at the table in Bonn because the rules mean a formal pullout can only take effect in 2020. Many delegates said they hoped Trump would reconsider.

David Waskow, of the World Resources Institute think-tank, noted that Mr Trump's climate views had previously isolated him from other leading economies in the Group of Seven and the Group of 20.

"Now he'll be isolated from all nations," he said.

Mr Trump has said he will pull out of the Paris agreement unless Washington can secure more favorable terms for American businesses and taxpayers.

But he has been vague about what that means, especially since the pact gives all nations power to set their own goals.

Overall, the Paris agreement seeks to limit a rise in temperatures to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times, ideally 1.5.

The UN weather agency said on Monday that this year was on track to be the second or third warmest since records began in the 19th century, behind a record-breaking 2016, and about 1.1 degrees Celsius (2°F) above pre-industrial times.

The Bonn meeting is seeking to write a detailed "rule book" for the Paris agreement, including details of how to report and check all nations' greenhouse gas emissions.

■ REUTERS

Ronald Jumeau.  
Picture: enb.iisd.org



Picture: JONA KONATACI



# ting elderly citizens, says Bhatnagar

anyone who has attained the age of 65 years and is not receiving any pension or is not financially supported through any other scheme is eligible to be part of the senior citizen allowance of \$100 per month," she said.

"They need to contact us with their birth certificates and we will do our assessment before we recommend them for the assistance.

"People need to be mindful that we are also in charge of several other assistance schemes as the pension scheme and it takes us within three months to process applications."

Assistant Minister for Women Veena Bhatnagar, second from left, speaks to members of the public in Valebasoga in Labasa. Picture: LUKE RAWALAI



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## Lifestyle

# Diabetes affects young people

By AVNEEL CHAND

THE average age of people living with diabetes is gradually decreasing from 30 to 20s, according to the Diabetes Care Unit.

Unit project manager, Viliame Qio said previously the average age for a person living with diabetes was 35, which had now reduced to 30 and the trend was showing a decrease.

"Before it was around 35 and now it has gone down to 30. We have recently identified cases coming down to 20s. Our youngest is 13, but the most common ones are those coming from 30s. Slowly we are seeing a trend that it is moving to 20 now," he said.

Mr Qio attributed stress as one of the major factors alongside poor lifestyle for this.

He said often stress was not considered as a factor when in reality it played a big role.

"It's the poor lifestyle that has attributed from poor eating habits, lack of physical activities and stress which is neglected by most. Stress is the biggest factor too and lack of constantly getting a routine medical check," he said.

Mr Qio said in a lot of cases people were not aware of the signs and symptoms of diabetes and thus, presented late to the hospitals for checks.

"We are living in a society where people don't know they are living with diabetes.

"They are also not aware of the signs and symptoms of diabetes. So when they usually present themselves to hospitals with signs or a wound that is not healing, it is usually at a late stage," he said.

## BRIEFLY

### Support for Fiji

BONN (DEPTFO NEWS) - Germany will stand by Fiji and support its presidency of COP23 — the largest and ongoing UN negotiations on climate change. This was put to the Prime Minister and newly-elected president of COP23 Voreqe Bainimarama by Germany's Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety Barbara Hendricks.

### Citizenship service

PORT MORESBY (LOOP PNG) - The Papua New Guinea Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority, is calling on all West Papuans living in the Niugini Islands region to get in contact with them. This is in regards to PNG Citizenship registration for West Papuan Refugees. Assistant manager for the West Papua section, refugee division, Elizabeth Gavara told Loop PNG that her office needed to find out the number of West Papuans living in the NGI region before they could work out dates and venues for the registration exercise.

### Pacific is still alive

TARAWA - A Russian businessman who unsuccessfully tried to revive the Romanov Empire in Kiribati says the project for his "Alternative Russia" in the Pacific is still alive. Anton Bakov made the comment in a long interview with Russia's investigative newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* which is portraying candidates for the Russian presidential election in March.

### Ash fall continues to rain

PORT VILA (VANUATU DAILY POST) - Ash fall continues to rain on West Ambae, and as of late, reports by Pastor William Bice stated that the volcanic ash is now showering the North side of the island as well. Pastor Bice explained: "At the moment, there is a lot of ash fall, which is spoiling cabbages and taro, and water. The ash fall is very big, that was Sunday night, it was very big."

■ PACNEWS