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# STATEHOOD AND SEA-LEVEL RISE: SCENARIOS AND OPTIONS

*By Michael B. Gerrard\**

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## INTRODUCTION

Sea-level rise may make some low-lying nations uninhabitable by the end of this century, if not before. If a country is under water, is it still a state? Does it still have a seat in the United Nations? What is the citizenship, if any, of its displaced people?

These questions take on increasing urgency as the world continues doing too little to avert catastrophic climate change. Many climate policy analyses agree the goal should be to keep global average temperatures within 1.5°C (2.7°F) above pre-industrial temperatures.<sup>1</sup> That is the level that the small island states have demanded, as a matter of survival, at the annual United Nations climate conferences since the 15th Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in 2009. However, the world appears to be on a path to between 2.6°C and 2.9°C by 2100.<sup>2</sup> An increase of 2.5°C would likely lead to a rise of global mean sea level of fifty-eight centimeters—or about two feet—with an uncertainty range of between thirty-seven and ninety-three centimeters by 2100, with sea levels continuing to rise after that.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that, under continued high greenhouse gas emissions levels, sea-level rise approaching two meters by 2100 and five meters by 2150 “cannot be ruled out due to deep uncertainty in ice-sheet processes.”<sup>4</sup>

Four nations are especially vulnerable because they consist entirely of atolls—the coral reefs rising from the rims of extinct volcanoes. These are Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu in

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1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], *Global Warming of 1.5°C* (2018), [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2022/06/SR15\\_Full\\_Report\\_LR.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2022/06/SR15_Full_Report_LR.pdf); Bjoern Soergel et al., *A Sustainable Development Pathway for Climate Action Within the UN 2030 Agenda*, 11 NATURE CLIMATE CHANGE 656 (2021).

2. *Temperatures*, CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER (Nov. 11, 2022), <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/>.

3. D.J. Rasmussen et al., *Extreme Sea Level Implications of 1.5°C, 2.0°C, and 2.5°C Temperature Stabilization Targets in the 21st and 22nd Centuries*, IOPSCIENCE (Mar. 15, 2018), <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aaac87/pdf>.

4. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*, at SPM-28 (2021), [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf).

the Pacific Ocean and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.<sup>5</sup> Most of these atolls have maximum elevations of three to five meters with mean elevations of one to two meters.<sup>6</sup> Sea-level rise has been increasing two to three times faster in parts of the Pacific than the global average.<sup>7</sup> But these islands will become uninhabitable before they are completely submerged due to flooding, fed by storm surge and high tides, that already challenges life on these islands. Waves already wash across these islands, rendering any surface water and much underground water too salty to drink and the soil too salty to grow crops. Due to this salination, on Majuro, the capital atoll of the Marshall Islands, the principal source of drinking water other than rooftop rain collection systems is now rain runoff captured from the airport runway. Sometimes there are droughts with little or no rain,<sup>8</sup> and at other times the ocean overtops the runway, cutting off physical access to the outside world.<sup>9</sup> Roads are often submerged and impassable.

The title of one 2018 scientific study tells the story: “*Most Atolls Will Be Uninhabitable by the Mid-21st Century Because of Sea-Level Rise Exacerbating Wave-Driven Flooding.*”<sup>10</sup> There is a

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5. ALEJANDRA TORRES CAMPRUBI, STATEHOOD UNDER WATER: CHALLENGES OF SEA-LEVEL RISE TO THE CONTINUITY OF PACIFIC ISLAND STATES 103 (2016). Tokelau is also an atoll nation endangered by sea-level rise, but as a territory of New Zealand, its continuity as a state is not at stake. *Id.* at 46.

6. Pac. Coastal and Marine Sci. Ctr., *The Impact of Sea-Level Rise and Climate Change on Pacific Ocean Atolls*, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURV. (June 27, 2022), <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/pcmssc/science/impact-sea-level-rise-and-climate-change-pacific-ocean-atolls>.

7. *Id.*

8. TODD K. PRESLEY, U.S. DEPT OF THE INTERIOR & U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURV., SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATIONS REPORT 2005–5098, EFFECTS OF THE 1998 DROUGHT ON THE FRESHWATER LENS IN THE LAURA AREA, MAJURO ATOLL, REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS (2005), <https://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2005/5098/pdf/sir20055098.pdf>; see *Protecting Drinking Water from Drought and Sea Level Rise*, RELIEF WEB (June 4, 2014), <https://reliefweb.int/report/marshall-islands/protecting-drinking-water-drought-and-sea-level-rise>.

9. See Bill Jaynes, *Moon and Swells Cause More Grief for Marshall Islanders*, KASELEHLIE PRESS (July 1, 2013), [http://www.fm/news/kp/2013/july01\\_2.htm](http://www.fm/news/kp/2013/july01_2.htm) (discussing a flood that shut down the airport).

10. Curt D. Storlazzi et al., *Most Atolls Will Be Uninhabitable by the Mid-21st Century Because of Sea-Level Rise Exacerbating Wave-Driven Flooding*, 4 SCI. ADVANCES 1 (2018), <https://www.science.org/doi/pdf/10.1126/sciadv.aap9741>; see Own Mulhern, *Sea Level Rise Projection Map – Marshall Islands*, EARTH.ORG (Aug. 6, 2020), [https://earth.org/data\\_visualization/sea-level-rise-by-2100-](https://earth.org/data_visualization/sea-level-rise-by-2100-)

ray of hope, however, because these atolls' coral reefs tend to grow vertically as well as horizontally. Growth rates for coral reefs are affected by the ocean's acidity, temperatures, upland sediment runoff, wave and storm activity, and other factors. Thus, the extent to which this growth can keep up with sea-level rise is a major question and will vary considerably from place to place.<sup>11</sup>

These atoll states are all considering how to survive. They are discussing and sometimes undertaking actions like erecting sea walls, raising the ground surface, building on stilts, and installing desalination plants. However, these countries are generally too poor to afford much of this without massive international assistance, too little of which is forthcoming. The preference of all these states is to stay in place; none has adopted a policy of relocation, though a good deal of informal relocation is already happening. But the physical realities are such that the issue of the survival of these states must be confronted.

#### REQUIREMENTS FOR STATEHOOD

There is no universally accepted definition of what it takes to be a state.<sup>12</sup> The most often cited definition is found in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, negotiated under the auspices of the Organization of American States.<sup>13</sup> The Montevideo Convention only has nineteen state parties, all of them in Latin America except the U.S., but its four requirements have been frequently acknowledged: permanent population, defined territory, government, and "capacity to enter into relations with other States."<sup>14</sup> The Restatement of the Law, Third, The Foreign Relations Law of the United States, embodies

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marshall-islands/ ("High-end sea level rise projections put the majority of . . . [the] land area [of Majuro, the capital atoll of the Marshall Islands,] underwater by 2050.").

11. Pac. Coastal and Marine Sci. Ctr., *Sea-Level Rise and Climate Change Impacts to Reefs*, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURV. (Aug. 10, 2020), <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/pcmssc/science/sea-level-rise-and-climate-change-impacts-reefs>.

12. Thomas D. Grant, *Defining Statehood: The Montevideo Convention and its Discontents*, 37 COLUM. J. TRANSNAT'L L. 403 (1999).

13. *Id.*

14. See Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, art. 1, Dec. 26, 1933, 49 Stat. 3097, 165 L.N.T.S. 19 (outlining the definition).

the same ideas: “Under international law, a state is an entity that has a defined territory and a permanent population, under the control of its own government, and that engages in, or has the capacity to engage in, formal relations with other such entities.”<sup>15</sup> These four requirements are discussed below.

### *Permanent Population*

The state would be expected to have families living there, with such structures as schools, houses of worship, health facilities, and businesses. Temporary caretakers such as military guards or lighthouse keepers would probably not suffice, though it is possible that other states would tolerate this as sufficient.<sup>16</sup> There is no minimum specified population size; the smallest population that has received some recognition is that of the Pitcairn Islands, which has a population of about fifty—the descendants of the mutineers of the HMS *Bounty* (1789) and their Tahitian companions. Pitcairn Islands are a British Overseas Territory, not a state. The United Nations has repeatedly acknowledged the right of the Pitcairn inhabitants to become a sovereign state,<sup>17</sup> though it has been suggested that if the Pitcairn Islands were to seek admission to the U.N., “States might re-examine the relationship between the principle of sovereign equality and common sense.”<sup>18</sup> Vatican City is the world’s smallest fully independent nation—state by both population and area. It has 0.44 square kilometers and about 1,000 residents,<sup>19</sup> most of whom are priests, nuns, and others who do not have children, but by one count thirteen families live there—mostly the families of certain employees and of members of the Swiss Guard.<sup>20</sup> Vatican City is generally accepted for some

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15. RESTATEMENT OF THE L.: THE FOREIGN RELS. L. OF THE U.S., § 201 (AM. L. INST. 2023).

16. JENNY GROTE STOUTENBURG, *DISAPPEARING ISLAND STATES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW* 274 (2015).

17. *Id.* at 269.

18. DAVID FREESTONE & DUYGU CICEK, *LEGAL DIMENSIONS OF SEA LEVEL RISE: PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES* 20 n.119 (2021).

19. *Explore All Countries Holy See (Vatican City)*, CIA.GOV (July 11, 2023, 12:35 PM), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/holy-see-vatican-city/>.

20. Alina Mrowiaska, *Behind the Walls: What It’s Like to Live Inside the*

purposes as a state with the Holy See as its government.<sup>21</sup>

By definition, a place cannot have a permanent population if it is uninhabitable. Different individuals will have different tolerances for living conditions.<sup>22</sup> Many people live—sometimes by choice, sometimes not—in places that others would find intolerable because of heat, cold, overabundance or shortage of water, or other conditions. For statehood purposes, the question would be whether families actually reside there.

Under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, islands that “cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own” are considered “rocks” and have “no exclusive economic zone.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Defined Territory*

A state must have land; water can be part of the territory but water alone is not enough. A state could have sufficient defined territory based on land that is protected by coastal defenses such as sea walls; land that was formerly above water, was submerged, and has been raised so that it is now above water again at high tide; and platforms built on land that was formerly above water. However, statehood would not be conferred by an artificial island—unless it supplements prior existing territory—a floating island, or a platform built on the seabed.<sup>24</sup>

Some countries consist of large numbers of islands. The Republic of the Marshall Islands has thirty atolls and five single coral islands. Kiribati has thirty-three islands, only twenty of which are inhabited.<sup>25</sup> For purposes of statehood, one island that

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*Vatican, for a Woman*, WORLD CRUNCH (Feb. 26, 2013), <https://worldcrunch.com/the-next-pope/behind-the-walls-what-it-039s-like-to-live-inside-the-vatican-for-a-woman>.

21. RESTATEMENT OF THE L.: FOREIGN RELS. L. OF THE U.S. §201 n.7 (AM. L. INST., 2023). For a more detailed discussion of the complex issues involved in considering Vatican City to be a state, see JAMES CRAWFORD, *THE CREATION OF STATES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW* 221–33 (2d ed. 2006).

22. Mark H.N. Stege, *Atoll Habitability Thresholds*, in *LIMITS TO CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION* 381 (Walter Leal Filho & Johanna Nalau eds., 2018).

23. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, art. 121.3, Dec. 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. 397.

24. James Crawford, *Islands as Sovereign Nations*, 38 INT'L & COMP. L.Q. 277, 279 (1989); STOUTENBURG, *supra* note 16, at 255.

25. *Kiribati*, THE COMMONWEALTH, <https://thecommonwealth.org/our->

is still inhabited should be sufficient. (The loss of other islands could have implications for a state's maritime zones, as discussed below.) If one island in an atoll nation was built up with sufficient engineered protections that families could and would still live there safely despite storm surge and other hazards, that should satisfy the requirement for both permanent population and defined territory.

Tuvalu has rejected an offer from Chinese companies to build artificial islands. This offer appears to have been related to China's geopolitical ambitions in the region and its efforts, already partially successful, to induce some of the island states to switch their alliances from Taiwan to Beijing.<sup>26</sup> The artificial islands would not satisfy the Montevideo requirement for defined territory.

### *Government*

A state must be able to set and enforce rules governing its population and territory. One definition of "failed state" is "a nation in which the government has lost political authority . . . and is unable to fulfill the basic responsibilities of a sovereign state."<sup>27</sup> Another is "the absence or near-total ineffectiveness of central government."<sup>28</sup> The converse would be an effective central government. It must have government offices, though those offices might not necessarily be located within the territory. However, as found by the International Court of Justice, "[n]o rule of

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member-countries/kiribati#:~:text=Kiribati%20is%20an%20island%20country,ring%2Dshaped%20coral%20reefs) (last visited July 20, 2023).

26. Yimou Lee, *Tuvalu Rejects China Offer to Build Islands and Retains Ties with Taiwan*, REUTERS, (November 21, 2019, 12:49 AM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-diplomacy-tuvalu-idUSKBN1XV0H8>; see Derek Grossman, *PIF Fragmentation May Alter U.S.-China Competition in the Pacific*, RAND CORP.: THE RAND BLOG (October 14, 2020), <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/10/pif-fragmentation-may-alter-us-china-competition-in.html> (discussing the geopolitical tensions in the region).

27. *Failed State*, DICTIONARY.COM, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/failed-state> (last visited July 20, 2023).

28. Hannah Woolaver, *State Failure, Sovereign Equality and Non-Intervention: Assessing Claimed Rights to Intervene in Failed States*, 32 WIS. INT'L L.J. 595, 602 (2014).



international law, in the view of the Court, requires the structure of a State to follow any particular pattern, as is evident from the diversity of the forms of State found in the world today.”<sup>29</sup>

*Capacity to Enter into Relations with Other States*

A state would be expected to be able to send and receive ambassadors, enter into treaties, and otherwise maintain international relations.

James Crawford, a leading scholar on the meaning of statehood, wrote that the Montevideo Convention’s “definition does not take us very far.”<sup>30</sup> He reformulated the matter this way:

Essentially the idea of statehood is that a particular territorial community is accepted as a separate entity with a sufficient degree of independence in international relations[] and is not subject to the government or authority of another State. Thus, apart from special cases, there are two essential elements to statehood: the existence of a separate territorial community with its own system of government, and the independence of that territorial community from all others.<sup>31</sup>

According to the decision in the Island of Palmas Arbitration, “Independence in regard to a portion of the globe is the right to exercise therein, to the exclusion of any other State, the functions of a State.”<sup>32</sup>

CONTINUATION OF STATEHOOD

There appears to be a presumption under international law against the extinction of states and in favor of the continuity of states.<sup>33</sup> Some go so far as to say there is a “ratchet effect,” and that once statehood is achieved, it is difficult to lose.<sup>34</sup> Jane

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29. Western Sahara, Advisory Opinion, 1975 I.C.J. 12, ¶ 94 (Oct. 16).

30. Crawford, *supra* note 24, at 280.

31. *Id.*

32. STOUTENBURG, *supra* note 16, at 293.

33. Derek Wong, *Sovereignty Sunk? The Position of ‘Sinking States’ at International Law*, 14 MELB. J. INT’L L. 346, 362 (2013).

34. Michel Rouleau-Dick, *Competing Continuities: What Role for the Presumption of Continuity in the Claim to Continued Statehood of Small Island States?*, 22 MELB. J. INT’L L. 1 (2021).

McAdam, a prominent expert on population displacement from climate change, has written, with respect to the Montevideo criteria:

While all four criteria would seemingly need to be present for a State to come into existence, the absence of all four does not necessarily mean that a State has ceased to exist. This derives from the strong presumption of continuity of States in international law, which presumes that existing States continue even when some of the formal criteria of statehood start to wane.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Article 6 of the Montevideo Convention states, “Recognition is unconditional and irrevocable.”<sup>36</sup>

The idea of perpetual existence of states is in some tension with the fact that the statehood of most of the Pacific-island states is relatively recent. Most were colonies until the post-World War II era of decolonization, which began in 1945 and extended into the 1990s. In the Pacific, this era saw

The division of over 20,000 islands into twelve independent political entities, scattered over an immensely wide oceanic space and surrounded by disproportionately big continental territories . . . . In spite of their recently acquired statehood, the limited extent of the territory of these states—coupled with the considerable distances between the islands that form their respective territories, and with their economic underdevelopment—make them a good example of ‘weak players’ resulting from decolonisation.<sup>37</sup>

Even after independence, many of these small states rely on their former colonizers for economic and political support.<sup>38</sup>

Though having a government is one essential element of becoming a state, the loss of an operating government does not make the state cease to exist. At times there was no functioning government in Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, yet the

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35. Jane McAdam, *Disappearing States?*, BROOKINGS (Mar. 30, 2013), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/disappearing-states/>.

36. Seventh International Conference of American States Held at Montevideo, art. 6, Dec. 26, 1933, 49 Stat. 3097, 165 L.N.T.S. 3802.

37. CAMPRUBI, *supra* note 5, at 33.

38. *Id.* at 39–41.

international community considered those states to still exist.<sup>39</sup> Other governments have ceased to function during wartime while occupied by foreign powers but resumed operations after the war, though often wars lead to the elimination of some states and the creation or redrawing of others.

#### DETERMINATION OF THE END OF STATEHOOD

Several states have ceased to exist as a result of political or military events, but no state has ever ceased to exist because of physical occurrences, so there is no precedent for the situation discussed here.

Some towns no longer exist because they were intentionally submerged by the construction of dams (including the ironically named Neversink and Bittersweet, which were drowned to construct a reservoir for New York City drinking water).<sup>40</sup> At least one subnational unit has been rendered permanently uninhabitable for physical reasons but has maintained its legal identity: Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The U.S. military evacuated it in 1946, and between then and 1958 the U.S. detonated twenty-four nuclear weapons there. The residents were sent to other islands in the Marshall Islands. So much radiation remains that Bikini will be essentially uninhabitable for an unknown number of years; it is mostly visited now by scuba divers exploring sunken warships and beautiful coral reefs.<sup>41</sup> The Republic of the Marshall Islands was formed in 1986, with twenty-nine atolls and four islands. Bikini is one of the atolls. A building labelled Bikini Town Hall stands on the capital island of Majuro,

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39. See Pablo Moscoso de la Cuba, *The Statehood of "Collapsed" States in Public International Law*, 29 *AGENDA INTERNACIONAL* 121 (2011), <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/6302323.pdf> (discussing the complex aspects of statehood's recognition).

40. *Immersed Remains: Towns Submerged in America*, THE CTR. FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION 5 (Spring 2005), <https://clui.org/newsletter/spring-2005/immersed-remains-towns-submerged-america>.

41. See Sam Scott, *What Bikini Atoll Looks Like Today*, *STAN. MAG.* 1,3 (Nov. 20, 2017), <https://medium.com/stanford-magazine/stanford-research-on-effects-of-radioactivity-from-bikini-atoll-nuclear-tests-on-coral-and-crab-dna-48459144020c>.

largely for the purpose of disbursing government benefits.<sup>42</sup> The displaced residents of Bikini and their descendants elect a mayor and council, as well as a senator to represent them in the national parliament, the Nitijela.

No member state has ever been expelled from the United Nations. (In 1971 the U.N. declared that the state of China was represented by the government in Beijing, not the government in Taiwan, but that was not to expulsion of a state.) The only language in the U.N. Charter regarding expulsion provides, “A Member of the United Nations who has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”<sup>43</sup> This provision has never been employed. Arguments could be made that Russia should have been expelled after its brutal invasion of Ukraine in 2022 in flagrant violation of international law, but as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia could and would have vetoed such a recommendation had it been advanced.

The U.N. Charter is silent on the issue of the extinction of a state, and it has no provisions for the automatic loss of U.N. membership. An affirmative act by the U.N. would be required to take away membership. Declaring a new state to be a member requires a majority vote of the U.N. General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council;<sup>44</sup> arguably the same procedure would be required to declare that a member no longer exists as a state and has lost its membership.

Membership in the U.N. is not identical to recognition by other states. Some countries, such as Taiwan, Kosovo, and Palestine, are not U.N. members but are recognized by some other states. Other countries, including Israel, North Korea, and Cyprus, are U.N. members but are not recognized by some states. The U.N. has two

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42. This has not gone well. See Pete McKenzie, *\$59 Million, Gone: How Bikini Atoll Leaders Blew Through U.S. Trust Fund*, N.Y. TIMES (May 3, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/03/world/asia/bikini-atoll-resettlement-fund.html>.

43. U.N. Charter art. 6, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

44. U.N. Charter art. 4.2, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

non-member observer states: Palestine and Holy See. Switzerland became a country in 1848 and was universally recognized as a state, but due to internal political debates it did not join the U.N. until 2002.<sup>45</sup>

Even without any action by the U.N., some states could declare they no longer recognize a particular uninhabitable island nation as a state. There is no clear line as to how many states would have to make such a declaration before statehood would be lost as a matter of international law, and this may also vary with the different powers that accompany statehood, as partially listed below.

#### ALTERNATIVES IF A COUNTRY BECOMES UNINHABITABLE

If sea-level rise renders a country so uninhabitable that it no longer has a permanent population and possibly no land that is always above water, it will have lost one or two of the four Montevideo requirements for statehood. Its population will have gone elsewhere to whatever places will take them. If physical adaptation measures to allow the population to remain in place are not possible or (more likely) there is not enough money available to pay for them, there seem to be five alternative methods for arguably maintaining some form of statehood: moving the population; moving the state; association with another state; government in exile; and deterritorialized state. (Although construction of artificial islands and floating islands could be possible as an engineering matter, under current international law they could not constitute a state.)<sup>46</sup>

#### *Moving Population*

Under this scenario, much or all of the population would move *en masse* to another place. The receiving state would delegate administration to the displaced state. It might also convey ownership of the land. However, the land would continue to be part

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45. See Simon Hug & Simone Wegmann, *Ten Years in the United Nations: Where Does Switzerland Stand?*, 19 SWISS POL. SCI. REV. 212 (2013).

46. Andrea Caligiuri, *Sinking States: The Statehood Dilemma in the Face of Sea-Level Rise*, 91 QUESTIONS INT'L L. 23 (2022).

of the sovereign territory of the receiving state. The agreement between the sending and the receiving state would need to specify such matters as the nationality of the people who have moved; whether they have voting and other political rights; and responsibility for governance, policing, public works, sanitation, and the like.<sup>47</sup>

There are several examples of the populations of severely degraded islands moving *en masse* to other islands. The results have been mixed. One example was recounted by Rosemary Rayfuse:

During the 1870s tens of thousands of Icelanders were driven out of Iceland as a result of crushing poverty exacerbated by a devastating volcanic eruption that destroyed half the island. The Canadian government entered into an agreement with these settlers granting them a suitably large piece of land for their new colony, providing them with funding and livestock to assist in their resettlement, and guaranteeing their rights both as citizens of Canada and of Iceland for themselves and their descendants. The colony of New Iceland was run by a government committee elected from amongst the settlers. Located in what is now southern Manitoba, New Iceland eventually joined the province of Manitoba becoming fully integrated into Canada.<sup>48</sup>

Another example involving the near physical destruction of an island concerned Banaba, the westernmost point in Kiribati. Starting around 1900 British interests began excavating guano—the fossilized excrement of seabirds—that covered the island, selling it as fertilizer in Australia and New Zealand. They stripped about 90% of the island’s surface bare, leaving it almost impossible for the indigenous inhabitants, the Banabans, to grow food. The Japanese occupied the island in 1942 and killed many of the

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47. U.N. Gen. Assembly, Int’l L. Comm’n, Sea-level Rise in Relation to International Law: Second Issues Paper by Patricia Galvao-Teles and Juan Jose Ruda Santolaria, at 49–50, U.N. Doc. A/CN.4/752 (April 19, 2022), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/276/29/PDF/N2227629.pdf>.

48. Rosemary G. Rayfuse, *W(h)ither Tuvalu? International Law and Disappearing States* 1, 8 (UNSW Law Research Paper No. 2009-9, 2009), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1412028](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1412028) (click “Open PDF in Browser”).

Banabans. After the end of World War II, the British forcibly removed most of the surviving Banabans to Rabi Island, which British interests had purchased. Rabi Island is in what is now Fiji. Most of the Banabans still live on Rabi Island, but they do not have the same rights of other Fijians.<sup>49</sup>

One planned relocation induced mostly by climate change did not go so well. The Carteret Islands Atoll in Papua New Guinea, just 1.5 meters above sea level, was suffering from flooding, cyclones, droughts, and other natural disasters.<sup>50</sup> A plan was developed to move most of the 1,700 residents to Bougainville, about ninety kilometers away. This relocation received much international attention and was the subject of a 2011 documentary film, *Sun Come Up*. However, Bougainville (which had its own political problems) was not as welcoming as anticipated, and some of the families, struggling to adjust, moved back to the Carteret Islands.<sup>51</sup> Several prior attempts to relocate families from the Carteret Islands had also failed.<sup>52</sup>

At various times the leadership of some threatened island states have expressed interest in acquiring land in other countries, possibly for the purpose of relocating the population if the need arises: the Maldives in Sri Lanka or India, Kiribati in Fiji, and

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49. See LILIAN YAMAMOTO & MIGUEL ESTEBAN, ATOLL ISLAND STATES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: CLIMATE CHANGE DISPLACEMENT AND SOVEREIGNTY 192–99 (2014); MASLYN WILLIAMS & BARRIE MACDONALD, THE PHOSPHATEERS: A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH PHOSPHATE COMMISSIONERS AND THE CHRISTMAS ISLAND PHOSPHATE COMMISSION 342, 345 (1985) (discussing forced Banaban relocation to Rabi Island); Joshua McDonald, *The Island with No Water: How Foreign Mining Destroyed Banaba*, GUARDIAN (June 8, 2021, 4:00 PM EDT), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/09/the-island-with-no-water-how-foreign-mining-destroyed-banaba> (discussing Banaba's decline in habitability and the subsequent Banaban diaspora).

50. Wonesai Workington Sithole, *Carteret Islands: When Migration is the Last Option of Surviving the Impact of Climate Change*, INT'L ORG. FOR MIGRATION DEV. FUND (October 2015), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319830780>.

51. See *Sun Come Up*, IMDB, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1621975/> (last visited Sept. 9, 2023); Darren James, *Lost at Sea: The Race Against Time to Save the Carteret Islands from Climate Change*, WORLD, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-04/the-race-against-time-to-save-the-carteret-islanders/10066958> (Apr. 24, 2023, 9:23 PM).

52. Julia B. Edwards, *The Logistics of Climate-Induced Resettlement: Lessons from the Carteret Islands, Papua New Guinea*, 32 REFUGEE SURV. Q. 52 (2013).

Tuvalu in Australia. But nothing much came of these.<sup>53</sup>

The potential supply of land available for relocation is being steadily decreased by the acquisition of land for extractive industries. One industry that has received relatively little attention in this regard is tourism. There are several documented cases where resident populations have been displaced—often by eviction or deceit—to make way for resort hotels or retirement villages. These are often coastal areas or entire islands.<sup>54</sup>

### *Moving State*

This is like the moving population method, except that the receiving state would not only convey ownership but also cede sovereignty over the territory. This would be accomplished by a treaty of cession. That is how the United States acquired the Louisiana Territories from France in 1803 and what is now Alaska from Russia in 1867, and how the Holy See formally acquired Vatican City from Italy in 1929.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from the difficulty in finding a government that would be willing to cede some of its territory, one of the many issues that would arise with both the moving population and moving state scenarios would be what happens to the people who already live there. Most habitable places on the planet are currently inhabited. (Making an uninhabitable place habitable, such as by pumping water into a desert, would create its own great environmental problems, which would be deeply ironic in view of the underlying cause of the population displacement.) Could the current residents stay, or would they be forced out? If they stayed, what would be

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53. YAMAMOTO & ESTEBAN, *supra* note 49 at 190–91; CAMPRUBI, *supra* note 5, at 106–09.

54. See Andreas Neef, *Tourism, Land Grabs and Displacement: A Study with Particular Focus on the Global South*, TOURISM WATCH (Feb. 2019), [https://www.tourism-watch.de/fileadmin/tourismwatch/999\\_import/Neef\\_Tourism\\_Land\\_Grab\\_Study.pdf](https://www.tourism-watch.de/fileadmin/tourismwatch/999_import/Neef_Tourism_Land_Grab_Study.pdf); Charles Haviland, *Mega Projects 'Displace' Landowners*, BBC SINHALA (September 7, 2011, 10:32 GMT), [https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2011/09/110906\\_landdemo](https://www.bbc.com/sinhala/news/story/2011/09/110906_landdemo).

55. See James Brown Scott, *The Treaty Between Italy and the Vatican*, 23 PROC. AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. 13 (1929), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25656757> (detailing the process by which the Holy See gained its independence).



their political status in the displaced state? Would they be culturally and religiously compatible? As one historical analogy, the movement of Jewish immigrants from Europe and the Middle East to Palestine in response to the Nazi horrors and other persecution did not go smoothly, and there are still tensions today, seventy-five years after the formation of the State of Israel.

#### *Association with Another State*

Some states have associated with others through merger, confederation, or various hybrid arrangements. Aspects of this were formalized in 1978 with the Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties.<sup>56</sup> For example, in 1964 the small island state of Zanzibar, in the Indian Ocean, merged with the much larger nearby Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania. In 1990 the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen merged to become the Republic of Yemen. In 1976, the Republic of Vietnam—South Vietnam—and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam merged to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In 1990 the German Democratic Republic—East Germany—merged into the Federal Republic of Germany, which had formerly just been West Germany. All of these resulted from political and not environmental developments.

The association can lead to a variety of governance systems. Some states are completely absorbed into others. Others have a degree of independence. For example, the Cook Islands, though considered to be in the “realm” of New Zealand, has been self-governing since 1965. However, residents of the Cook Islands are still considered to be citizens of New Zealand and carry New Zealand passports.

#### *Government in Exile*

The government of a state could establish itself in another location. This sort of thing has happened many times, typically during times of war or other armed conflict, with the exiled

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56. See Ronald J. Klein, *Consensual Merger as a Means of State Succession and Its Relation to Treaty Obligations*, 13 CASE W. RES. J. INT'L L. 413 (1981).

government returning home if it was victorious. A classic example is the Forces Francaises Libres established by Charles de Gaulle in London in 1940. But this form has traditionally been seen as temporary. And during this period, while the government is elsewhere, much of the population remains at home, and the “state” still exists even though the government does not have control of its territory.

### *Deterritorialized State*

The idea has been posited of a “Nation *Ex-Situ*”—a state that has no permanent territory, still exists in some form, but lacks some of the Montevideo characteristics.<sup>57</sup> The U.N. might establish some form of trusteeship to govern this new kind of entity.<sup>58</sup>

There is also discussion of creating a virtual version of a state that has gone under the seas, largely for the sake of the memories of the diaspora. A former attorney general of Tuvalu was quoted as saying,

When that finally happens, . . . Tuvalu has disappeared and all they have is this virtual world . . . we should always be able to remember Tuvalu as it is, before it disappears . . . I think the idea then is to preserve it, conserve it in a state so that generations of Tuvaluans can look into it.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, Tuvalu’s foreign minister said, “Our land, our ocean, our culture are the most precious assets of our people and to keep them safe from harm, no matter what happens in the physical world, we will move them to the cloud.”<sup>60</sup>

The closest analogies to a sovereign entity without territory

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57. Maxine Burkett, *The Nation Ex-Situ*, in THREATENED ISLAND NATIONS: LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF RISING SEAS AND A CHANGING CLIMATE 345 (Michael B. Gerrard & Gregory E. Wannier eds., 2013).

58. See YAMAMOTO & ESTEBAN, *supra* note 49, at 206–08.

59. Tory Shepherd, *Could a Digital Twin of Tuvalu Preserve the Island Nation Before It’s Lost to the Collapsing Climate?*, GUARDIAN (Sept. 29, 2022, 13:30 EDT), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/29/could-a-digital-twin-of-tuvalu-preserve-the-island-nation-before-its-lost-to-the-collapsing-climate>.

60. Lucy Craymer, *Tuvalu Turns to the Metaverse as Rising Seas Threaten Existence*, REUTERS, <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/tuvalu-turns-metaverse-rising-seas-threaten-existence-2022-11-15/> (Nov. 16, 2022 23:18 EST).

are the Holy See, between 1870 and 1929, and the Knights of Malta.<sup>61</sup> But these were not states; they were “non-State sovereign entities.”<sup>62</sup>

Several of these alternatives listed here run counter to accepted concepts of international law. As Melissa Stewart has written:

Only the ability to remain within the territory through climate change adaptation measures or the merger or association with another state aligns with historical precedent for statehood. All other proposals to avoid the extinction of the sinking states—the creation of entirely new territory through artificial means; the acquisition of new territory in an existing state through purchase or remedial territory through reparations; or the continuity of the state without a territory or permanent population—involve redefining our historical conceptions of statehood.<sup>63</sup>

#### KEY ISSUES WITH ALL ALTERNATIVES

States, and (generally) states alone, can do certain things under international law, including but not limited to: becoming members of the United Nations; issuing passports; providing citizenship; establishing a military and police forces, and using deadly force<sup>64</sup> (though often this is a function of subnational governments like provinces, states, and cities); conscripting people into military service; suing and being sued in international tribunals such as the International Court of Justice; entering into binding international agreements (treaties); sending and receiving ambassadors; establishing ship registries; and having maritime

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61. Rayfuse, *supra* note 48, at 10. For a broader view of the effect of the emergence of digital technologies on the nature of statehood, see Katharina Pistor, *Statehood in the Digital Age*, 27 CONSTITUTIONS 3 (2020).

62. Emma Allen & Mario Prost, *Ceci n'est pas un Etat: The Order of Malta and the Holy See as Precedents for Deterritorialized Statehood?* 31 RECEIL 171, 176 (2022).

63. Melissa Stewart, *Cascading Consequences of Sinking States*, 59 Stan. J. Int'l L. (forthcoming 2023).

64. Cf. MAX WEBER, *ESSAYS IN SOCIOLOGY* 77–78 (H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills eds., Oxford 1946) (“[The] state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”).

zones.

Citizenship is especially relevant. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has declared that “[s]hould a state cease to exist, citizenship of that state would cease, as there would no longer be a state of which a person could be a national.”<sup>65</sup> The International Law Commission made a similar statement.<sup>66</sup> The UNHCR, which has a mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness and to protect stateless persons, has stated:

Ideally, multilateral comprehensive agreements would provide where, and on what legal basis populations [in states that may become uninhabitable due to climate change] would be permitted to move elsewhere and their status. To prevent temporary statelessness, acquisition of an effective nationality should be foreseen prior to the dissolution of the affected State. Dual nationality may therefore need to be permitted at least for a transitional period. As well, a waiver may be required of formal requirements for renunciation or acquisition of nationality which might be difficult to fulfil for affected populations. Such arrangements would need to provide *inter alia* for the right of residence, military obligations, health care, pensions and other social security benefits.<sup>67</sup>

The issue of maritime zones is also of particular pertinence. The U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines a state’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as extending a nautical 200 miles from a baseline; for countries with archipelagoes—like most Pacific island states<sup>68</sup>—the baseline is drawn from the outermost

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65. *Climate Change and Statelessness: An Overview*, U.N. HIGH COMM’R FOR REFUGEES (May 15, 2009), <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4a1e50082.pdf>.

66. Int’l L. Comm’n, Rep. on the Work of its Fifty-First Session, at para. 48, U.N. Doc. A/54/10 (1999), <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4512b6dd4.html> (“When a state disappears by dissolution, its nationality also disappears . . . .”) reprinted in [1999] 2 Y.B. Int’l L. Comm’n 23, U.N. Doc. A/CN.4/SER.A/1999/Add.1(Part 2).

67. *Climate Change and Statelessness: An Overview*, *supra* note 65, at 3; see also Antonio Joseph DelGrande, *Statelessness in the Context of Climate Change: The Applicability of the Montevideo Criteria to ‘Sinking States,’* 53 INT’L L. & POL. 152 (2021).

68. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, art. 46, Dec. 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. 397 (defining an archipelago as “a group of islands, including parts of islands, interconnecting waters and other natural features which are so closely

points of the outermost islands.<sup>69</sup> Within the EEZ, the state has important rights with respect to fisheries, mineral extraction, energy production, and other activities of environmental and economic importance. So, the question arises: if a coastline recedes because of sea level rise, does the associated EEZ move back as well?<sup>70</sup> The “ambulatory theory” of baselines, accepted by many commentators, says yes. Some others, and advocates of the small island states that would be most harmed by this theory, say no; the baselines are, or should be, fixed.<sup>71</sup> With the help of the Pacific Maritime Boundaries Programme, many of the Pacific states have filed maps indicating their current baselines with the UNCLOS secretariat.<sup>72</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the maritime baselines should be fixed as a matter of climate justice.<sup>73</sup> This way, even if an island is gone, use of its EEZ could provide ongoing revenues for its state and its displaced population. If the state had merged with another, the merged state would enjoy the benefits of the EEZ.<sup>74</sup>

The size of these EEZs is immense. Kiribati has only 313 square miles of land,<sup>75</sup> slightly more than New York City’s total

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interrelated that such islands, waters and other natural features form an intrinsic geographical, economic and political entity, or which historically have been regarded as such.”).

69. A.H.A. Soons, *The Effects of a Rising Sea Level on Maritime Limits and Boundaries*, 1990 NETH. INT’L L. REV. 207, 211 (1990).

70. See generally CAMPRUBI, *supra* note 5, at 47–103.

71. See Frances Anggadi, *Establishment, Notification, and Maintenance: The Package of State Practice at the Heart of the Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones*, 53 OCEAN DEV. & INT’L L. 19 (2022); Frances Anggadi, *What States Say and Do About Legal Stability and Maritime Zones, and Why It Matters*, 71 INT’L & COMPAR. L.Q. 767 (2022); Rosemary Rayfuse, *Sea Level Rise and Maritime Zones*, in THREATENED ISLAND NATIONS: LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF RISING SEAS AND A CHANGING CLIMATE 167 (Michael B. Gerrard & Gregory E. Wannier eds., 2013).

72. The variety of legal methods for establishing maritime boundaries as fixed rather than ambulatory is discussed in FREESTONE & CICEK, *supra* note 18, at 44–48.

73. Michael B. Gerrard, *Maritime Boundaries, Sea Level Rise and Climate Justice*, COLUM. L. SCH.: CLIMATE L. SABIN CTR. BLOG (March 25, 2019), <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/climatechange/2019/03/25/maritime-boundaries-sea-level-rise-and-climate-justice/>.

74. Soons, *supra* note 69, at 230.

75. Barrie K Macdonald & Sophie Foster, *Kiribati*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kiribati> (Jun. 20, 2023).

area of 300 square miles,<sup>76</sup> but it has an exclusive economic zone of about 1.4 million square miles,<sup>77</sup> a little under half the size of the contiguous United States (roughly 3.1 million square miles).<sup>78</sup> Thus, the revenue that could be derived from fishing or mineral extraction there is very considerable, giving Kiribati a great incentive to remain a state. However, the possibility of fishing and mining for free possibly provides other countries an incentive for Kiribati's statehood to end, even though UNCLOS and other international agreements impose certain restrictions on such activities.

#### RESOLVING THE ISSUES

A resolution by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) affirming the principle of the perpetual existence of states regardless of sea-level rise or other natural disasters might be ideal. A declaration by the United Nations Security Council would also be very helpful. The Security Council has held several meetings and debates on climate change, but the veto power of the United States and China (the world's two largest emitters) and Russia (which has posed difficulties on addressing the climate issue in the UN) would likely be an obstacle.<sup>79</sup>

On March 29, 2023, the UNGA voted by consensus to send several questions about climate change, first presented by Vanuatu, to the International Court of Justice. The questions did not include one about statehood. However, the consensus vote could be seen as encouraging for a vote on statehood, though the vote on the climate questions came after more than a decade of campaigning.

Several efforts are under way to address how sea-level rise

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76. *QuickFacts New York City, New York*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newyorkcitynewyork> (last visited July 22, 2023).

77. Macdonald & Foster, *supra* note 75.

78. *Contiguous States*, WORLD POPULATION REV., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/contiguous-states> (last visited July 22, 2023).

79. Mark Nevitt, *Climate Change and the Specter of Statelessness*, 35 *Geo. Env't L. Rev.* (forthcoming 2023) (manuscript at 15–16), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4223806](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4223806).

may affect conceptions of statehood. The UNGA established the International Law Commission (ILC) in 1947 to promote the codification of international law. In 2019, sea-level rise and international law was added to ILC's agenda. Two ILC study groups have presented preliminary issue papers, but the ILC has not yet proposed any rules on how sea-level rise would affect statehood. In 2022, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands launched an effort called the Rising Nations Initiative to try to protect the sovereignty, rights, culture, and heritage of the Pacific atoll countries.<sup>80</sup> Tuvalu is also pursuing diplomatic efforts to push other nations to recognize continued statehood.<sup>81</sup>

On August 6, 2021, the Pacific Islands Forum issued its Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea Level Rise.<sup>82</sup> It has been joined by eighteen countries. A March 2023 paper from the Pacific Community, which describes itself as “the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region, proudly supporting development since 1947” with 27 country and territory members,<sup>83</sup> stated that this declaration is “[o]ne of the strongest and most influential” messages about maritime zones and “makes clear the regional collective intention to maintain maritime zones, once established and notified to the UN, without reduction.”<sup>84</sup> One approach, short of a UNGA or Security Council resolution or ILC

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80. *Rising Nations Initiative*, GLOB. CTR FOR CLIMATE MOBILITY, <https://climatemobility.org/rising-nations-initiative/> (last visited July 22, 2023).

81. Jonathan Watts, *We Could Lose Our Status as a State: What Happens to a People When Their Land Disappears*, GUARDIAN (June 27, 2023, 06:00 EDT), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/27/we-could-lose-our-status-as-a-state-what-happens-to-a-people-when-their-land-disappears>.

82. *Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise*, PAC. ISLANDS F. (Aug. 6, 2021), <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Declaration-on-Preserving-Maritime.pdf>.

83. *About Us*, PAC. CMTY., <https://www.spc.int/about-us> (last visited July 22, 2023).

84. Mary Powers & Malakai Vakautawale, *Pacific Maritime Zones Status Update*, PAC. CMTY. ¶14, [https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/9f/9f8288a87a090408b1150fc14c897440.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=XxurDC2x8eBd37kYt%2Bcfv6rfDeRWyYZGga2SSmOwo8g%3D&se=2023-10-12T04%3A24%3A09Z&sp=r&rscc=public%2C%20max-age%3D86400%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22HoF15\\_IP13\\_EN.pdf%22](https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitalibrary-docs/files/9f/9f8288a87a090408b1150fc14c897440.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=XxurDC2x8eBd37kYt%2Bcfv6rfDeRWyYZGga2SSmOwo8g%3D&se=2023-10-12T04%3A24%3A09Z&sp=r&rscc=public%2C%20max-age%3D86400%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22HoF15_IP13_EN.pdf%22) (last visited July 27, 2023).

finding, might be to prepare a declaration, similar to the one from the Pacific Islands Forum on maritime zones, on perpetual statehood, and to try to obtain as many signatories as possible. Indeed, the Forum has begun exploring this idea.

#### CONCLUSION

No one knows what decade, or even what century, any of the small island states will be completely uninhabitable. But unless the world takes a sudden and radical turn away from fossil fuels, deforestation, and other sources of greenhouse gases—a turn suggested by no current physical trends—that time will almost surely come. When that time does come and when global sea levels are several meters above where they are today, small island states will not be the only places under water. Many of the world's largest cities and most of its heavily inhabited coastlines will be experiencing several hardships, and many people—perhaps hundreds of millions of them—will have to move.<sup>85</sup> These problems will overwhelm the difficulties of the four atoll nations, whose populations now total about 600,000,<sup>86</sup> though by then, many of these people will already have fled. In that dystopian world, the statehood of the small island nations will be very low on the list of global problems demanding attention. Therefore, the statehood issue should be addressed and resolved sooner rather than later, while these nations are still inhabited.<sup>87</sup>

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85. See World Bank Group [WBG], *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration* (2021), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/2c9150df-52c3-58ed-9075-d78ea56c3267>.

86. According to the CIA's World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>, these countries have the following populations: Kiribati, 115,372; Maldives, 389,568; Marshall Islands, 80,966; Tuvalu, 11,639.

87. On September 25, 2023, as this article was going to press, the White House released a statement that addresses these issues. This is the pertinent text:

For some States, particularly low-lying island States in the Pacific Ocean, increasing sea levels pose an existential threat. Today, the President announced that the United States considers that sea-level rise driven by human-induced climate change should not cause any country to lose its statehood or its membership in the United Nations, its specialized agencies, or other international organizations. The United States is committed to working with those States and others on



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issues relating to human-induced sea-level rise and statehood to advance these objectives.

*Fact Sheet: Enhancing the U.S.-Pacific Islands Partnership*, THE WHITE HOUSE (September 25, 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/25/fact-sheet-enhancing-the-u-s-pacific-islands-partnership/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20is%20committed%20to%20partnering%20with%20the%20Pacific, stability%3B%20and%20continued%20support%20for.>