



# **Climate Change and Migration in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs)**

**Ximena Flores-Palacios**

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Culture and Society (AUT)

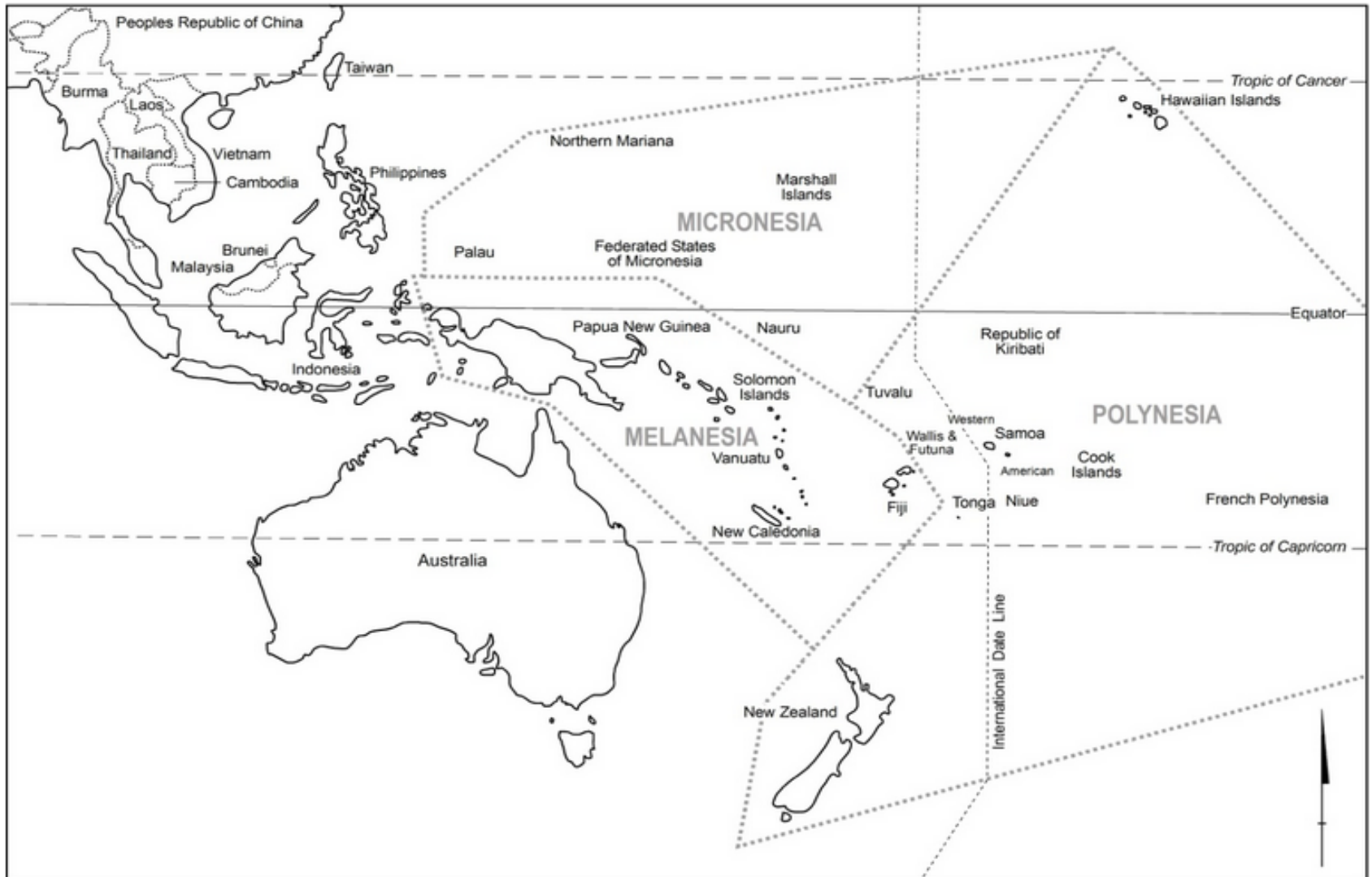
Refugee Research Symposium

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# Outline of the presentation

1. Overview of the PICTs
2. Recent research on 'environmental migration'
3. Climate change and migration in the Pacific Island Countries (PICTs)
4. Climate refugees in PICTs
5. Issues to consider at the policy level

# Pacific Island Countries and Territories



# Climate Change and Migration in PICTs

- Climate change is one of the most serious problems the world is facing today and the PICTs are particularly vulnerable to it
- Climate change in PICTs is an observable phenomenon and it is happening now
- PICTs rank among the most vulnerable in the world to natural disasters
- There is evidence that climate change is causing population movements: people turn to migration as one strategy of adaptation

# Climate Change in the PICTs

- Sea level rise
- Sea temperature increases
- Ocean acidification
- Altered rainfall patterns
- Overall temperature rise

# Climate Change Impacts

- Impacts on communities, infrastructure, water supply, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, fisheries, agriculture and human health
- More than 50% of the PICTs population live within 1.5 km of the shoreline
- Atoll countries are most at risk

# Climate change narratives and realities in the PICs

## The New Zealand Herald

Search key

National World Business Sport Technology Ente

National Next Article: Fear amid h

### Sinking islands call for NZ action

By Isaac Davison @Isaac\_Davison

5:30 AM Tuesday Sep 3, 2013

☆ Save 183 18 i

A tiny Pacific island state that is being submerged by rising oceans will tell New Zealand that it is not disposable and urge Prime Minister John Key to show leadership on climate change at a summit beginning today.



+ EXPAND

The Marshall Islands, a series of 29 coral atolls and islands halfway between Australia and Hawaii, sit just 2m above sea level on average and are vulnerable to rising sea levels and increasingly intense storms and droughts.

Sea levels on the Marshall Islands have risen 7mm a year since 1993. The global average is 0.4mm. Photo / AP

### Global warming relocation plan

Low-lying Pacific nation of Kiribati must plan to relocate population if seas rise due to global warming, said President Anote Tong



SETHY MELENAMU, VANUATU

FRONTLINE TRUTHS

Photo by Issa Nihmei

# Recent research on environmental migration

- Research remains dispersed and poorly coordinated
- There is ongoing debate on terminologies, definitions and conceptualization of the linkages between **human mobility** and climate change, the environment and natural disasters
- There is debate on the disciplinary domains
- There are some “working definitions”



# Environmental Migration

- Refers to human migration where environmental risks or environmental change plays a significant role in influencing the migration decision and destination. All migration decisions are multi-causal, and hence it is not meaningful to describe any migrant flow as being solely for environmental reasons. (IPCC, 2014, p. 179)



# Climate refugees

- IOM (2015b) recommends avoiding the use of the terms climate or environmental refugees because people migrating for environmental reasons do not fall into any one particular category provided by the existing international legal framework
- Leaders of the PICTs have rejected the term “climate refugee”. They have suggested calling the international movements of people due to climate change as “migration with dignity”
- Migrants should not be perceived as victims of climate change, but rather as resourceful agents of their own adaptation

# Typologies of Environmental Migration

- Voluntary migration
- Displacement
- Planned relocation

# Voluntary Migration

- Internal migration: Rural - urban; rural -rural; circular
- External migration: Short, long term, circular

# Displacement

- Displacement in the region is mainly internal following sudden-onset disasters
- People generally able to return to their homes relatively soon after the disaster, although displacement may last months or years pending a durable solution

# Planned relocation

- Planned relocation might be seen as a failure to adapt to changes in the environment
- For Pacific people relocation of communities should be a strategy of last resort

# Environmental migrants in PICTs

- First case: Mr Ioane Teitiota, an I-Kiribati national, lost his asylum appeal in New Zealand in May 2014 in a case that would have made him the world's first-ever "climate change refugee"  
=> the Court of Appeal called them "novel" but "unconvincing"
- Second case: A Tuvaluan family won New Zealand residency appeal in 2014. The family has been granted New Zealand residency after claiming it would be affected by climate change if it returned home  
=> humanitarian grounds

# Main Impacts of Environmental Migration

For villagers and migrants

- economic
- social
- cultural
- spiritual
- environment
- political



# Key Issues to Address at the National Level

- It is necessary a synergy of different knowledge systems to understand the linkages between climate change and population movements
- Traditional knowledge has to be integrated into climate change adaptation policies
- Environmental migration has to be incorporated at the policy level in Samoa
- Policies on environmental migration have to start at the village level