



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

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### **Simplistic Labels Not Enough on Climate Change - UNHCR**

The UN Refugee Agency says the protection of people affected by climate change is a complex problem that cannot be solved with simplistic explanations, labels, or approaches.

Richard Towle, UNHCR Regional Representative, was speaking ahead of a Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Side Event on Climate Change to be held on 6 August, where he will present UNHCR's views on some of the key challenges facing states in protecting people who face forced displacement as a result of climate change and degradation of the environment.

Mr Towle said that human displacement can be caused by a number of complex and inter-related factors - ranging from environmental, climatic, geological, and demographic, including increased urbanisation. These factors can cause community tension and even conflict, particularly where land and natural resources are scarce.

"We need to avoid simplistic explanations and the convenient but inappropriate tendency to label all these issues as a single category of 'climate change'," he said.

"Although people displaced by climate change and environmental degradation are not classified as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention, they are clearly people whose human rights need to be protected."

"We need to consult directly with affected populations about their coping mechanisms and practical measures to protect their homes, lands and livelihoods."

"The protection of people affected by these complex factors must be part of a broader, human rights focussed response to human security and ensure social and economic development for all people in the region."

This week's Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting is also a unique opportunity for leaders to reaffirm the central role of international law in maintaining human rights and good governance for the victims of forced displacement in the region.

UNHCR is working with Pacific Island Countries on steps toward ratifying the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, and other international standards for the protection of refugees and other victims of forced displacement in the Pacific.

"A credible legal framework, within which refugee movements and other complex migration issues can be assessed, is a crucial building-block in this process," Mr Towle said.

"We look forward to discussing with a number of Pacific states ways in which the rights of people forcibly displaced in the region can be better protected."

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