

Climate, State, and Sovereignty: Self-Determination and Sea Level Rise

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June 30, 2021

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Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University

SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

Climate change and sea-level rise are existential threats to low-lying island States, which face the looming submergence of their territory and the correlative depopulation and severe restrictions on their governmental capacity, at a national and international levels. Four States are particularly endangered because they are exclusively (or almost exclusively) composed of coral islands and atolls below 10 or even five meters of altitude. They are Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean, and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. In its Fifth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change foresaw an average rise of sea level of 98 cm by 2100.¹ This prospect, often regarded as conservative, in fact represents a possible death sentence for these States. As a result, low-lying island States are considering and deploying legal and physical strategies to protect their continuity as States, sparking new debates on the potential evolution of the law on Statehood and the international law of the sea.

Read the full paper [here](#).

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