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Palau seeks UN World Court opinion on damage caused by greenhouse gases



President of Palau Johnson Toribiong

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The Pacific island nation of Palau announced plans today to seek an advisory opinion from a United Nations court on whether countries have a legal responsibility to ensure that any activities on their territory that emit greenhouse gases do not harm other States.

President Johnson Toribiong [told](#) the General Assembly's annual general debate that, along with the Marshall Islands, Palau will call on the 193-member Assembly to urgently seek an advisory opinion – which would be non-binding – from the International Court of Justice ([ICJ](#)), also known as the World Court.

Palau is one of several Pacific island countries that have repeatedly spoken out at the General Assembly about the impact of climate change, with rising sea levels resulting from the emissions of greenhouse gases threatening to swamp their islands.

Mr. Toribiong said it was vital that urgent action is taken to combat climate change, given the immediacy of the threat.

“The case should be clear,” he said, referring to Palau’s plan to seek an ICJ advisory opinion. “The ICJ has already confirmed that customary international law obliges States to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction and control respect the environment of other States,” he said.

“Similarly, Article 194(2) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides that States shall take all measures necessary to ensure that activities under their jurisdiction or control do not spread and do not cause damage by pollution to other States. It is time we determine what the international rule of law means in the context of climate change.”

In his address Mr. Toribiong also warned about the damaging effects of over-fishing in the waters around his country and that of other Pacific nations.

He said a regional meeting to be held in Palau in December will consider whether to establish a special zone to conserve tuna.

“For too long, the exploitation of tuna has overridden its conservation. This imbalance is not sustainable and must be reversed through the creation of a tuna conservation zone.”

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