

- Gender & Politics Under Scrutiny in Papua New Guinea
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**“Even the loss of a tiny island is, for us, significant”  
~ Tony de Brum, The Marshall Islands**

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### GENDER & POLITICS UNDER SCRUTINY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

General elections were held in Papua New Guinea (PNG) between 24 June and 8 July this year with some disturbing outcomes. [For the first time in 25 years](#) (since the 1992 election), no females will make up the 111-member Parliament - despite more female candidates being nominated for elections than ever before. Out of a total of 3,332 candidates, 167 were women.

[According to Julie Bukikun](#), Assistant Representative for UNDP and Head of Governance, “This is a very poor result and reflects badly on us all. This means 50 per cent of the population have no representation in the highest decision-making institution of the country.”

“It’s vital we have female leadership in PNG. Not only is it a core human right, women need to be represented to address the major challenges they face including unacceptably high rates of violence, fewer job opportunities and poor health outcomes,” Ms Bukikun said.

Startlingly, this recent election has pushed PNG back into being [one of only five countries](#) (along with Yemen, Qatar, Micronesia, Vanuatu) that do not have any female representatives in their national legislatures. The global average for female representation in national legislatures is currently at 23 percent. Historically, [PNG has never had more than three women MPs](#) in parliament since the first post-independence election in 1977. Kerry Baker from the Australian National University [argues that money has a large role to play](#) in the lack of gender diversity in PNG politics.

“What we have seen in recent elections is the increase in money politics, in vote-buying, in gifting”, Baker explains, “which just makes campaigning extremely expensive even for candidates who don’t practice money politics and so a lot of women who would otherwise be competitive have just been priced out of the game.”



[Dr Fiona Hukula](#) from the PNG National Research Institute cites flawed electoral rolls as a cause for “great disappointment for many people who have not been able to cast their vote.” Ms Rufina Peter who contested the Central Regional Seat believes that the [four main challenges to women in politics in PNG](#) are:

- the perception of many Papua New Guineans that politics is a man's world and that women are ill-equipped to be effective political leaders;
- the current political culture promotes corrupt practices – particularly significant expenditure to buy votes;
- there aren't adequate financial resources and logistical support for the entire election period; and
- the challenges women face gaining support from traditional tribal leaders to secure sufficient base votes in order to be a serious contender among the male candidates.

This election has reignited talk of reserved seats for women in the PNG parliament. In fact, in 2012 PNG's constitution was amended to allow for the possibility of 22 reserved seats for women, but the enabling legislation was not passed.

“Pushing for reserved seats will be controversial”, [says Baker](#). “And will require leadership from not just women's groups outside of parliament, but also male allies within the House. It is, however, the only way to guarantee a place at the table for women in national politics.”

**Sources:** [Time for PNG to reflect as no women elected to parliament](#), UNDP, 3 August 2017 | [No women MPs to sit in PNG's new parliament](#), SBS, 26 July 2017 | [PNG women 'priced out' of parliament](#), Radio New Zealand, 10 August 2017 | [PNG after the elections: reimagining the future by reflecting on the past](#), DevPolicyBlog, Fiona Hukula, 18 August 2017 | [Big Men, No Women: Politics in Papua New Guinea](#), The Diplomat, Grant Wyeth, 11 August 2017 | [Women in politics in PNG: A zero-sum game](#), Broad Agenda, Kerry Baker, 14 August 2017 | Photo: Papua New Guineans vote at election booths during the country's recent election © Kerry Baker. Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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## THE FACES BEHIND THE FIGHT: WHY CLIMATE CHANGE IS PERSONAL

Unless we're in the grips of an extreme weather event, climate change can seem like a very distant issue for people living in developed countries. In sharp contrast, the effects of dangerous climate change are often keenly and intimately felt by those living in the Pacific Islands. It's not just political or environmental – it's deeply personal. Nowhere is this truer than in the nation of Kiribati.

Kiribati has a population of 100,000 spread across 33 coral atolls located halfway between Hawaii and Australia. This archipelago nation has an average elevation of just 6 feet above sea level, making it particularly vulnerable to even the smallest rises in sea-level. [According to former President of Kiribati](#), Anote Tong, while the rest of the world ignores the gradual onset of climate change, the lives of Pacific peoples are already being drastically affected.

“When I gave my first address at the United Nations General Assembly in 2004, climate change struggled to attract international attention away from the global focus on terrorism. But I had no



hesitation appealing to the world about the issue that mattered most to my people. I did not have the luxury to ignore this problem.”

Residents of Kiribati [spoke openly to correspondents from CBS News](#) about the ways in which climate change is affecting their daily lives, including high tides that inundate their homes and contaminate their water and kill their crops. They're also impacted by the constant erosion of their precious land. Ironically, these communities have some of the lowest carbon footprints in the world.



The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sopoaga, recently [said there was no subject more important](#) than climate change to the people of the Pacific. "This is an issue about our existence... climate change threatens our very identities," he said.

According to Samoan journalist Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson, “Every year there is some sort of an event, whether it be prolonged dry season which throws all our crops out of whack, a cyclone that we could only prepare for 24 hours, increased rainfall and flooding that surprises us in the night, killing our children and robbing us of our homes. This is our normal, you are watching our normal in the news, the things you see in America, from Cyclone Irma and Cyclone Harvey, that’s our way of life.”

Earlier this month the 48<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting was held in Apia, Samoa. [Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi of Samoa](#) used the opportunity to call for support of Fiji's co-presidency at the next Conference of Parties at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [to be held in November](#) this year in Germany. We will keep you updated on the outcomes of these pivotal meetings within future issues of *Pacific Outlook*.

Jackson sums up the personal nature of climate change eloquently, “Climate change is real, it happens in the lives of every Pacific Islander in one way or another, the experience is so raw and so direct that one doesn't have a choice but to understand its causes and why it is becoming so frequent. Unlike our learned counterparts in developed countries, we don't have the luxury of denial...”

**Sources:** [Climate change is already destroying lives in the Pacific](#), *The Spinoff*, Anote Tong, 19 August 2017 | [Climate Refugees: Kiribati](#), CBS News, Julian Quinones, Kacey Cherry and Arijeta Lajka, 21 August 2017 | [Pacific islands face up to climate change](#), *iafrica.com*, 6 September 2017 | [On a Pacific island - we don't question climate change, we live it](#), *The Huffington Post*, Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson, 17 September 2017 | [48th Pacific Islands Forum leaders summit opens in Samoa](#), *Radio New Zealand*, 6 September 2017 | Photo: [Young girl lies on her back in seawater that has flooded the village street in Eita, Kiribati](#) © Jonas Gratzner/Lightrocket via Getty Images | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.



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## VALE TO A PACIFIC ISLAND CLIMATE WARRIOR

On 22 August the world received the sad news that Former Marshall Islands Foreign Minister, Tony de Brum, who has been credited with playing a pivotal role in securing [the Paris agreement on climate change](#), had died at the age of 72. The Marshall Islands president's office announced that he died at his Majuro home, surrounded by his family.

Tony de Brum was instrumental in bringing together a group of rich and poor countries that came to be known as the [Coalition of High Ambition](#), and it was that move that went a long way to framing the final UN Climate Change agreement. [According to Todd Stern](#), who was the United States special envoy for climate change under President Barack Obama, Mr. de Brum had been able to bridge divides among countries of different levels of wealth and responsibility and convince them that everyone must act.

He was also a passionate anti-nuclear advocate. As a nine-year-old boy, Mr de Brum witnessed the destructive power of a nuclear bomb at Bikini Atoll from the vantage point of a small fishing boat. The explosion was 1,000 times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in World War II. In 2016, Mr de Brum and his legal team were [nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize](#) after filing several lawsuits against nuclear-armed nations that failed to comply with international legal obligations to pursue negotiations for the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons.



In a nearly 50-year government career, he went on to serve as foreign minister (three times), minister of finance, minister of health and the environment, minister-in-assistance to the former president Christopher Loeak, and Marshall Islands climate ambassador. He is survived by his father; his wife, Rosalie; his daughters, Doreen, Dolores and Sally Ann; 10 grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

**Sources:** [Tony de Brum remembered as a "giant of history" by Marshall Islanders](#), Pacific Beat ABC News, 23 August 2017 | [Pacific climate change champion Tony de Brum dies](#), Radio New Zealand, 23 August 2017 | [Tony de Brum, Voice of Pacific Islands on Climate Change, Dies at 72](#), The New York Times, Lisa Friedman, 22 August 2017 | Photo: [Tony de Brum in 2015 on the island of Ebeye in the Marshall Islands](#) © Credit Josh Haner/The New York Times | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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