

**Statement delivered by Solomon Islands
At the Sixth Committee on Agenda Item 80: ‘Report of the International Law Commission on
the work of its seventy-second session’**

Thursday, 5th November 2020 (Delivered by Janice Mose – Charge d’Affairs)

[Check against delivery]

Thank you, Madame Chair,

Solomon Islands expresses its appreciation to the International Law Commission (“ILC”) for its continuing contribution to the codification and progressive development of international law. We thank the International Law Commission and the Secretariat for presenting this important oral report and in particular we wish to thank the Study Group for the first issues paper on Sea-Level Rise.

Solomon Islands aligns itself with the statements delivered by Belize on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Tuvalu on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), and Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS). Solomon Islands would like to make the following additional remarks in its national capacity.

COVID-19 has disrupted millions of lives and upended countless industries. As the world responds to and rebuilds from this unprecedented pandemic, we must not lose sight of climate change and sea-level rise. These issues continue to have detrimental effects on all of us, which are only exacerbated by COVID-19.

The issue of sea-level rise is especially important to Solomon Islands. Our oceans are deeply interconnected with the lives and culture of our people. Our economy and continued sustainable development depend significantly on our oceans. Offshore fisheries remain the largest income-generating sector, and revenue from tuna resources alone accounts for 18 percent of GDP. The continued growth and prosperity of our fisheries depends on our existing maritime zones. Diminishing these zones will have significant negative effects on our development, particularly at a time when we are in the process of graduating from LDC status. Further, uncertainty of maritime boundaries would negatively affect sustainable development projects and conservation

initiatives as the international community works towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As a large ocean State, Solomon Islands is specially affected by sea-level rise and climate change. Solomon Islands is made up of nearly 1000 islands, which are mostly low-lying islands, atolls, and reefs that are highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. Like other SIDS, we are continuing to lose islands, and our people continue to be displaced. Over half of our population lives within just 1 km of the coast and we have already lost 5 islands to sea level rise. For Solomon Islands, sea-level rise is an existential crisis.

Madame Chair, Solomon Islands believes the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) does not adequately consider rapidly rising sea levels. This ambiguity was underscored in the Study Group's issues paper. Customs developed outside of the context of climate change do not help in understanding the obligations of UNCLOS. Solomon Islands agrees with AOSIS, that "more recent State practice, made in the context of climate change and consistently rising sea levels, should be most relevant to the consideration of the Study Group."

My delegation would like to reaffirm its opinion that maritime boundaries and archipelagic baselines are fixed. Once national maritime zones are determined in accordance with UNCLOS and deposited with the Secretary-General, our interpretation of international law is that they are not subject to change, despite sea-level rise. Fixed baselines contribute to the certainty, predictability, and stability of maritime boundaries in international law. Fixed baselines ensure fair and equitable results, by preserving existing maritime entitlements which SIDS and so many other States rely on.

This stability is of great importance to Solomon Islands, as reinforced through several boundary treaties with adjacent jurisdictions, including with Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, France, and Australia. Additionally, our archipelagic baselines are delineated in accordance with UNCLOS Article 47 and codified in our national Delimitation of Marine Waters Act. Further, Solomon Islands is party to a joint submission together with the Federated States of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea, establishing the permanent outer limits of the continental shelf pursuant to

UNCLOS Article 76 paragraph 8. Consistent with international law and regional practice, Solomon Islands has deposited geographic coordinates for nearly all of its maritime zones with DOALOS. These zones are fixed and are not to be altered, despite sea-level rise.

Madame Chair, in conclusion, Solomon Islands supports the continued work of the ILC Working Group and reaffirms the role of the UN in addressing the global effects of climate change. As indicated by the report, sea-level rise is an important issue affecting the entire international community. Solomon Islands looks forward to working together in the Sixth Committee to establish equitable and certain international legal norms for maritime baselines.

I thank you.