New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations
Te Aka Aorere

United Nations General Assembly: Request for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on obligations of States in respect of climate change

New Zealand Statement delivered by Chargé d’Affaires a.i., Mr. Justin Fepuleai

29 March 2023

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
Thank you, Mr. President,

New Zealand associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Tonga on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members with a presence at the United Nations and the Cook Islands as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Mr. President, Aotearoa New Zealand is pleased to be a member of the Core Group supporting the ICJ advisory opinion and commends Vanuatu for its leadership in this important initiative.

The sheer volume of co-sponsors reflects a growing international consensus that climate change requires us to develop global solutions.

The best available science is unequivocal. Human influence is warming the atmosphere, ocean and land. This is causing wide-ranging harmful impacts, from sea-level rise to increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

New Zealanders are acutely aware of the devastating impacts such events can have. Just last month Cyclone Gabrielle caused widespread damage and displacement across our country, leading to New Zealand declaring a national state of emergency for just the third time in our history.
In our broader region, the Blue Pacific, climate change remains the single greatest threat to livelihoods, security and well-being. And globally, over three billion people live in contexts highly vulnerable to climate change.

Addressing these pressing challenges requires the collective ambition of all countries. It is critical that the international community employs all the tools at our disposal.

Utilising the advisory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice is one such tool. New Zealand considers that an advisory opinion can play a helpful role by bringing clarity and coherence to international climate law. In doing so, it can help to ensure ongoing compliance with international obligations, lift ambition and inspire action.

The request for an advisory opinion is not about the merits of climate science – the science is unequivocal. Rather it is about States obligations at international law.

The question before you reflects months of careful deliberation by the membership of the Core Group, in consultation with a wide range of other UN member states. This group holds a diverse range of interests and perspectives, but a common goal of finding global solutions to climate change.
The scope of the question is intended to empower the Court to consider the full slate of relevant international law, consistent with its mandate.

The question is broad, but climate change is broad too. It impacts every aspect of the world we live in.

In this context, Aotearoa New Zealand is pleased that the resolution was adopted by consensus. Here today, we have taken an important step towards a safer, more prosperous and more sustainable future.

Thank you.