



## **G20 Interfaith Forum Webinar**

### **“ECOLOGICAL RACISM AND DEEP-SEA MINING IN THE PACIFIC”**

**10 AM Fiji Time FEB 17<sup>th</sup> 2022; 8 AM PNG Time FEB 17<sup>th</sup>; 9 AM Vanuatu Time FEB 17<sup>th</sup>; FEB 16<sup>TH</sup> 5 PM EST Time; 11 PM European Central Time.  
90 minutes with five panelists and ensuing dialogue.**

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### **Brief History of Deep Sea Mining**

The deep seabed may become one of the last mining frontiers on our planet if the International Seabed Authority (ISA) authorizes mining in the Blue Pacific continent. This is called deep-sea mining (DSM). DSM concentrates on the minerals that are found in the ocean bed in the Pacific ocean known as polymetallic nodules normally formed slowly over millions of years found near hydrothermal vents or in rock fragments in the deep ocean. These minerals are found in the Clarion Clipperton Zone in the Pacific ocean.<sup>1</sup> Some Pacific island countries such as Tonga, Kiribati, Cook Islands, and Papua New Guinea, have already sealed sponsorship deals with mining companies to mine these minerals. In June 2021, Nauru has already informed the International Seabed Alliance (ISA) of its intention to start mining the seabed by 2023 through a Canadian mining firm. While Nauru has asked the ISA to finalise the mining regulations for mineral exploitation by mid-2023, no mining license has yet been granted by the ISA. Community engagement and discussions around whether or not seabed mining should start can still influence the direction of policy. So far, the ISA has granted over 30 exploration contracts but these are only for exploration for minerals, not for actual mining.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Impacts**

The desperate “race to the bottom”<sup>3</sup> with scientists still unclear of what lives in that ecosystem that will be affected, what is resounding is that such move will rearrange the structure of ocean life, with consequences and far-reaching impacts in addition to climate change impacts. Many from the Pacific and around the world are arguing that while the move could be beneficial to the popularized clean green economic shift to solve the climate crisis, it will be detrimental not only to the ocean but in particular to communities who depend wholly on the ocean for their

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<sup>1</sup> Joann Muller, “The Future of EV Batteries Could be Found under the Sea,” <https://www.axios.com/undersea-mining-lithium-electric-vehicles>

<sup>2</sup> Email communication on January 5, 2022 between Dr. Aline Jaeckel, UNSW Law and Justice and Dr. Sherrie Steiner, Purdue Fort Wayne.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Watts, “The Race to the Bottom: The Disastrous Blindfolded Rush to Mine the Deep Sea,” <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/27/race-to-the-bottom-the-disastrous-blindfolded-rush-to-mine-the-deep-sea?>

daily sustenance and livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> Amid the calls by religious leaders, ocean scientists, civil societies, politicians, and ordinary communities for a precautionary pause on the fledgling activity, that it needs more research conducted into this very little-known space, with warning of the potential biodiversity loss and irreversible harm to the deep sea environment, and with risks and liabilities to be pushed on to small island nations, it seems DSM is likely to happen whether the other members of the Pacific Aiga (household) gives consent or not.

## Ecological Racism

Racism in its traditional definition clusters around the notion of prejudice, discrimination, or hatred that unfairly disadvantages people because of color of their skin or ethnic and national origin.<sup>5</sup> However, racism takes many forms, in particular if it flows through hierarchical and anthropocentric systems and structures. Pacific islanders and many other vulnerable indigenous communities have long suffered from systemic racism imposed by hierarchical economic structures and policies created in another context by another race, that normally extract and remove resources from one race or ethnicity to benefit them. Ecological racism is when one race, Earth included, is unfairly disadvantaged based on someone else's economic terms and interests.

The root cause of ecological racism is 'greed' hidden within our approved economic systems and structures, which threatens the legitimacy of regional stability. DSM is a process of extracting resources and life from one race to benefit another. Hence, DSM goes against everything that the Pacific stands for expressed in its 'whole of life' indigenous knowledge systems, philosophies of life, and ecological spiritualities. The following are important to consider when it comes to understanding what we mean by ecological racism in the Pacific.

- a. Pacific life is structured around the notion of ecological kinship, that everything is genealogically connected and related. The land, ocean, peoples, mountains, rivers, trees, are *flesh, bones, and blood*. In other words, the Earth is family, an ancestor to be respected.<sup>6</sup> This therefore problematizes the notion of 'human race'. In kinship genealogy, Pacific islanders see all of these as multiple living races or faces forming an inextricable Aiga (household). The antidote therefore for ecological racism is to accept and embrace the full dignity and sacredness of ecology, a home for Pacific indigenous communities.
- b. Because of kinship, everything is interconnected. Life can only be genuinely defined through a 'whole of life' perspective. Therefore, the ocean is an interconnected system. It is an extension of the land and people. This means that when we meddle with the ocean, it will have systemic implications to all of life. Destroying the ocean is an intentional annihilation of a particular race.
- c. Because of kinship, the health of the ocean is inseparable from the health of the land and vice versa. The health of the people is inseparable from the health of the ocean. This is premised on the belief that "we are the ocean" and the "ocean is us."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Blue Ocean Law and the Pacific Network for Globalization, "Resource Roulette: How Deep-Sea Mining and Inadequate Regulatory Frameworks Imperil the Pacific and its Peoples,"

<http://www.savethehighseas.org/resources/publications/>

<sup>5</sup> American Psychological Association, "Racism, Bias, and Discrimination Resources,"

<https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination>

<sup>6</sup> Upolu Luma Vaai and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, eds., *The Relational Self: Decolonizing Personhood in the Pacific* (Suva: The University of the South Pacific and Pacific Theological College, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Epeli Hauofa, ed. *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993).

## **Objective**

It is clear from the above discussion that racism is not just a human issue. It is also an ecological issue, at least from a Pacific island kinship perspective. In other words, there is a potential link between DSM and ecological racism.

The webinar aims to open up critical conversations and facing with honesty and courage the challenges of DSM in the Pacific. It also aims to raise awareness as much as possible. This is done through reflecting and responding to the following questions but not limited to these:

1. Is there a potential link between DSM and racism?
2. Is it ethical to sacrifice the bottom of the ocean that belongs to one race to benefit a renewed development focus driven by a particular privileged race?
3. The DSM debate is framed around moving to clean green renewable economy to solve the climate crisis. Are the environmental risks of DSM worth the environmental benefits of solving the climate crisis? Who (what race) really benefits from DSM?
4. If the world moves ahead with DSM, would that mean we're going to do away with land-based mining?
5. How would the Pacific Aiga deal with this issue, regionally and nationally, given that some countries of the Pacific household are now moving ahead with DSM?
6. Some are raising the importance of having an urgent DSM moratorium to protect the ocean and peoples. Is this enough?
7. To what extent the awareness and publicity this issue needs to have?

## **Outcomes**

The webinar should provide the following outcomes:

- a. The participants and ARI/G20 are provided useful and necessary information to strategically and collectively respond to the DSM issue and ecological racism.
- b. The link between DSM and ecological racism in the Pacific is identified and articulated with ways on how ARI/G20 could engage with systemic nature of ecological racism.
- c. The economic benefits and risks of DSM to the Pacific and international community is critically assessed from different perspectives.
- d. Proper protocols are identified to give central prominence on the potential biodiversity and environmental risks including liabilities of DSM on the Pacific and international community.
- e. Identify actions paths on how ARI/G20 could influence policy making both in the Pacific and the international community through widely promulgated documents and proposals that will spur appropriate actions.

## **Talanoa Methodology**

To learn from the wisdom of the panelists on DSM, the webinar will be conducted through a 'talanoa' style. In the Pacific, talanoa is a collective story telling and dialogue centered around stories, experience, questions, or events that are central to communities' development and

growth. The moderators will guide the talanoa into the intersection of DSM and ecological racism through questioning and probing to unveil the sidelined stories, hidden agendas, and the painful struggles of marginalized communities.

## Panelists and Statements

Two Anti-Racism Initiative (ARI) members of the G20 Interfaith Forum will be co-moderators and five (5) panelists/speakers are invited from the Pacific and other parts of the world to speak on *Ecological Racism and Deep-Sea Mining in the Pacific*. The speakers must be familiar with the issue of DSM in particular the Pacific and its relation to ecological racism. The strategic selection of the five speakers aims for a wider coverage of the connection between DSM and ecological racism, from a faith-based, political, civil society, legal, and scientific perspectives.



**Panelist 1 –His Eminence Sir John Cardinal Ribat, MSC, DD, KBE.** Cardinal John Ribat, is the Metropolitan Archbishop of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1957 in Volavolo, Rabaul District, East New Britain in the Archdiocese of Rabaul. He studied Philosophy and Theology at the Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana and was ordained Priest on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1985. From ordination until 1991 he exercised his pastoral ministry in various parishes in the diocese of Bereina; he then followed a Formation Training Course at SAIDI Centre in Manila, and was Master of Novices from 1992 to 1996. In 1997, he served as Parish Priest and from 1998 to 2000 was MSC Master of Novices in Suva, Fiji. He

received the Episcopal Ordination on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2001 and appointed Bishop of Bereina on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2002. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2002, Pope Benedict XIV appointed him as Co-Adjutor Archbishop of Port Moresby and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2008, he became the Archbishop of the Metropolitan See. He served as President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of PNG and Solomon Islands from 2011 to 2014. Since 2012, he has held the role of Chairman of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBO). Moreover, he has been the Chairman of the PNG Christian Leaders Alliance since its launching on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 up to the present. He is Papua New Guinea's first Cardinal; created and proclaimed Cardinal by Pope Francis in the Consistory of 19 November 2016, Titular Church of San Giovanni Battista de' Rossi. He is engaged with Global Climate Justice and working closely with other advocates in challenging Deep Sea Mining in the Pacific.

*“The prophetic role of the Church since its very beginning is to articulate the Christian faith in the public sphere by assisting grassroots communities to question and call out any development strategy that destroys life. Deep Sea Mining is one such strategy that will cause ecological devastation in a mass scale and could drive the Pacific people who depend solely on the ocean into the edge of extinction. Land mining has destroyed Pacific lands. Now we are moving to the deep ocean which is*

*something that we're not yet familiar with. This is a deliberate discarding of our rights to exist as a people and race."*



Panelist 2 – **Hon. Ralph Regenvanu** was Vanuatu's Minister of Lands and Natural Resources in June 2014 when he announced at the opening of a regional workshop on the social impacts of deep sea mining that his country had previously issued 145 licenses for deep sea mineral prospecting without public knowledge and without any proper regulatory framework. He then initiated a national awareness-raising and consultation program which culminated in the first-ever Deep Sea Mining Consultation Conference in late 2014. In October 2017, all peak national NGO's submitted a petition to Government requesting a ban on all deep sea mineral prospecting and mining. In September 2021, during the final

consultation meeting on a draft National Mines and Minerals Policy convened by the Geology and Mines Unit of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, the peak national NGO's re-submitted their petition calling for a ban. Ralph has been the Leader of the Opposition in Vanuatu since a change in Government after the 2020 general elections. Currently serving his fourth term as the Member of Parliament for Port Vila, Ralph has a background in cultural heritage management, and was Co-chair of the National Sustainable Development Plan Core Group which was responsible for developing Vanuatu's 'National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030'.

*"The people of Vanuatu have clearly articulated that they do not agree to deep sea mining now or ever. As a Member of Parliament, I have a duty to push for a permanent ban".*



Panelist 3 – **Catherine Coumans, PhD** serves as Research Coordinator and Pacific Program Coordinator (Asia) at MiningWatch based in Canada. She provides expert support for MiningWatch's research and publications. She has written reports and academic articles on mining since conducting her Ph.D. research in the Philippines (1988-1990). Catherine also monitors national and international government and industry initiatives, supporting participation of MiningWatch members and partners in consultations and negotiations, and preparing and/or co-ordinating written briefs and submissions. Her community-level human rights work and work with Indigenous peoples affected by Canadian

mining companies is focused on the Asia-Pacific region.

*“Canadian mining companies are on the forefront of efforts to extend mining and its harmful impacts into the world’s oceans. The Canadian government has been missing in action in international negotiations about the rules for mining of the seabed in parts of the ocean known as the Common Heritage of Humankind. All of humanity will suffer the impacts of further degradation of the ocean’s ability to sustain life on Earth, but the most immediate impacts on food security will be felt by many of the world’s most vulnerable island and coastal communities. MiningWatch joins scientists, governments, and Pacific and global citizens in calling for a moratorium, or ban, on deep seabed mining.”* (<https://miningwatch.ca/blog/2022/1/20/canada-s-role-deep-seabed-mining>)



Panelist 4 – **Kristina M. Gjerde, J.D.**, is Senior High Seas Advisor to IUCN’s Global Marine and Polar Programme. Kristina received her Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law with a focus on comparative and international law, and practiced admiralty law for several years in a New York City law firm. For the past 30+ years, Kristina has focused on the nexus of law, science, and policy relevant to sustaining marine biodiversity. Kristina has co-founded four science-policy partnerships: the [Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative](#), [The Sargasso Sea Project](#), the [High Seas Alliance](#) and the [Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative](#) (DOSI). In addition to advancing a new UN treaty for marine life beyond boundaries, she has authored or co-authored more

than 150 publications. Kristina is an Honorary Fellow of the University of Edinburgh School of Geosciences, an adjunct professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, California, and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

*“The legal regime for deep seabed mining in the international seabed Area is a rare example of the international community joining forces to regulate a potential new industry in the interests of humankind as a whole. Despite this legal framework and its vision of equity, common interest, environmental health and prosperity for all, evolving scientific evidence has revealed the contradictions between deep sea mining and protection of ocean life. What is becoming clear is that as currently managed by the International Seabed Authority, any benefits from deep sea mining will accrue to only a very few companies while leaving lasting impacts borne by humankind and oceankind for generations. A moratorium on deep sea mining is urgently needed if we are to avert wide scale destruction and loss of ocean life that will be irreversible for many generations to come.”*



Panelist 5 - **Maureen Penjueli** is currently the Coordinator for the Pacific Network on Globalisation. She has over two decades of experience working in the Pacific region promoting indigenous peoples right to be self-determining (politically, economically as well as socially). Over 20 years of experience in the Non-profit sector working mainly in the field of environmental, economic, political and social justice in the Pacific region. She and her team work as a network to support,

organize and mobilize grassroots groups, indigenous leaders and communities, community groups, civil society actors, social movements at the national level supporting their rights to be self determining (politically and economically). She also works closely with networks of academics, lawyers, economists, and the media to elevate and amplify an oceanic world view. Linking through research and analysis to lobby and advocate policy making at the national, regional and global level.

*“The Pacific Ocean has long been viewed as an empty blue void in which global experiments have been done under the narratives of world peace and for the good of all mankind. Under such narratives the Pacific ocean became a proving ground for nuclear weapons and tests with over 300 tested. Deep Sea Mining is the newest threat promoted heavily as necessary to address the climate crises and to ensure the world transitions to a greener world. Pacific people are once again drawing a blue line against those that seek to exploit the ocean floor and its resources and those that promote the protection of the ocean.”*

## Moderators



**Rev Professor Dr Upolu Luma Vaai** – A Pacific islander who is instrumental in advocating for a ‘whole of life’ relational approach to change the Pacific development story premised on the role of indigenous knowledge, philosophies, spiritualities, and faith-based approaches for the sake of ecological wellbeing. His research and advocacy focus on the intersection between theology, development, ecological and economic justice. He is currently the Principal of the Pacific Theological College in Fiji.



**Dr Athena Peralta** –serves as programme executive for economic and ecological justice at the World Council of Churches. Previously she worked with the National Economic and Development Authority of the Philippines as senior economic development specialist. Her research and advocacy focus on the intersections between economic, ecological and gender justice.