Rising seas must not erase countries from the map

DanChurchAid welcomes landmark UN protection of statehood and maritime rights but calls for finance to protect vulnerable communities



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NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, September 25, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Countries threatened by rising seas should retain their statehood, sovereignty, UN membership and established maritime zones even if parts of their physical territory disappear.

This is the landmark message in the first UN Declaration on Sea Level Rise, adopted by governments at the UN General Assembly on Thursday.

“For small island states, this is a vital affirmation that their nationhood, international standing and rights do not disappear with their land,” said Mattias Söderberg, Global Climate Lead at DanChurchAid.

> The sea may redraw coastlines, but it must not erase countries from the map.”
>
> *Mattias Söderberg, Global Climate Lead at DanChurchAid*

The declaration recognises that sea-level rise is already threatening freshwater, farmland, homes, infrastructure, livelihoods and cultural heritage. Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries are among those facing the gravest and potentially irreversible consequences.

It also calls for scaled-up, accessible and predictable adaptation finance, including support for locally led action. However, it contains no new financial pledge or concrete funding target.

“Legal rights matter, but they do not keep saltwater out of drinking wells or protect homes from storm surges. Wealthy countries are already investing heavily in seawalls, drainage and early-warning systems. Vulnerable countries need the same opportunity to protect their communities,” said Söderberg.

The recent UNEP report Limiting Overshoot concludes that temporarily exceeding the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C limit is now unavoidable. Even its most optimistic pathway sees warming peak at around 1.8°C before temperatures can decline. Every additional fraction of warming increases the risks associated with rising seas.

“This declaration is an important legal and political milestone. But legal continuity must be matched by physical security. Governments must now cut emissions faster and provide the finance needed for adaptation and for losses that can no longer be prevented,” Söderberg concluded.

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