

ACTION ALERT AA 19-8: CLIMATE EMERGENCY – SUPPORTING PACIFIC VOICES

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

September 2019

This Alert draws attention to the recent Pacific Islands Forum and the concerns of Pacific nations about how seriously climate change is affecting them and their future. It suggests action within Australia to support those concerns.

The Challenge

In 2008, Australian Quakers issued an Earthcare Statement which included the following statement:

We are called to consider the world as an en-Spirited whole, to accept no boundary to repairing and sustaining the Earth for the future, and to appreciate more deeply the creative energy in all living things and life processes. We seek to mend what has been hurt, and to strengthen our courage to discern and bear witness to this spiritual care for the Earth.

In July 2019, the Yearly Meeting of Australian Quakers issued an Epistle on Earthcare, covering the harm done by our past and current actions as humans, and the need to seek greater spiritual energy to respond creatively individually and collectively. It mentioned in particular the impact of rising sea levels on the islands of the Pacific. The full YM epistle can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y6ycaxm6>

Pacific Perspectives and Comments

The annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum was held in Tuvalu in mid-August 2019. The Declaration prepared by the Smaller Island States (SIS) acknowledged a climate crisis, encouraged countries to revise the emissions reductions targets and called for a rapid phase-out of coal use. After lengthy negotiations, during which Australia and New Zealand expressed different reservations, the final Communique indicated that not all leaders agreed with the Declaration.

The result was a call for all parties to meet or exceed their nationally determined contributions on emissions, to note concerns about coal, and continue efforts to meeting international funding commitments including the green climate fund.

Enele Sopoaga, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, who chaired the meeting, expressed disappointment, and reported that he and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison had strongly divergent views. He said "you are concerned about saving your economy in Australia....I am concerned about saving my people in Tuvalu" (*ABC News*, 16 August). Scott Morrison said he understood the sensitivities in the region but that he was accountable to the Australian people.

Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, said: "We came together in a nation that risks disappearing to the seas, but unfortunately, we settled for the status quo in our communique. Watered-down climate language has real consequences like water-logged homes, schools, communities, and ancestral burial grounds" (*Al Jazeera Asia Pacific News*, 16 August).

Ralph Regenvanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Vanuatu, the next venue for the Forum, reflected on the meeting and said Australia should prepare well ahead for the 2020 Forum and come with real, tangible commitments on climate change. He recalled that the 2018 Forum has said that climate change was the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of Pacific people. "Australia must understand that relationships in the region are not just about the funding of projects...the Pacific is asking for leadership on real action on climate change" (*The Guardian*, 20 August).

Anote Tong, former Kiribati president, spoke at a public meeting sponsored by The Australia Institute in Canberra on 22 August. In a report (*The Canberra Times*, 23 August) he was quoted as saying "Australia is like an abusive family member knowingly doing damage to future generations by refusing to take meaningful action on climate change". He continued that Pacific nations would look to others including China for leadership unless Australia commits to phase out coal.

The Pacific Islands Development Forum, held in Fiji on 30 July 2019 (made up of only Pacific Island countries) issued a Nadi Declaration which included the following:

- Expresses concern at the lack of commitment by developed nations about the impending grave consequences of the climate crisis for vulnerable Pacific Island small states, which contribute negligible amounts of greenhouse gases.
- Supports the IPCC Report on Oceans which shows the degradation caused by climate change.
- Seeks a United Nations Resolution to establish a legal framework to protect the rights of people displaced by climate change.
- Urges fossil fuel producers to put an end to fossil fuel development and phase out coal.
- Urges the reduction of greenhouse gases from the shipping industry.

Climate Justice

The South Pacific nations emit far below 1% of the total global greenhouse gases responsible for rising temperatures (World Wide Fund for Nature). Yet low lying islands face disproportionate negative impacts from sea level rise, saltwater

intrusion, increased evaporation rates, and changing rainfall patterns which threaten flood-prone catchments and drought-prone atolls.

Women are also disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, so an integrated approach to climate action, which values women's leadership and empowerment, is recommended.

United Nations Summit

The climate emergency is the defining issue of our time and now is the defining moment to do something about it. There is still time to tackle climate **impacts**, but it will require an unprecedented effort from all sectors of society. To boost ambition and accelerate actions to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, UN Secretary-General António Guterres will host the 2019 Climate Action Summit on 23 September to meet the climate challenge. The Summit will showcase a leap in collective national political ambition and it will demonstrate massive movements in the real economy in support of the agenda. Together, these developments will send strong market and political signals and inject momentum in the "race to the top" among countries, companies, cities and civil society that is needed to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. (Source: UN Website)

Action

1. Advise your MP/Senator of your concern that Australia is paying insufficient attention to the voices of the Pacific that are urging immediate moves to phase out coal and increase emissions targets.
2. Urge them to press the Government to include in its preparations for the UN Summit in September a full and supportive response to the concerns of Small Island States.
3. Actively support climate strikes by young people to draw attention to the crisis.
4. Take part in other public events to urge more effective policies by Australia in meeting the Paris Agreement targets.
5. Encourage Australian aid to consider renewable energy and water catchment needs for the region.
6. Continue to work with Friends in your Meetings to follow through the Yearly Meeting Earthcare Epistle.

Canberra
September 2019