



Edmund Rice Centre

Awareness. Advocacy. Action

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Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Edmund Rice Centre submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Edmund Rice Centre (ERC) is a non-government organisation working for social justice, human rights and eco-justice through partnership building, research, community education and advocacy. We have three primary areas of focus: Reconciliation and Rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; Refugees and People Seeking Asylum, and; Climate Justice for Pacific Island countries.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

Phil Glendenning AM
Director
Edmund Rice Centre

The Edmund Rice Centre welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an ambitious agenda that recognise the relationship between development, human rights, sustainability and climate change. There is no point implementing policies to drive global economic growth if those policies undermine the health of the planet.

This submission responds to the following term of reference for this Inquiry:

- What SDG are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program; and
- Which of the SDG is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDG.

Our submission draws on the Centre's extensive experience working for climate justice in partnership with people from Pacific Island atoll countries, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu. For many years, these countries have been putting out desperate calls to industrialised countries to mitigate climate change, and to recognise their vulnerability. The effects of climate change in the Pacific are also human rights issues and exacerbate pre-existing development challenges.

Given Australia's size and geographic location in the Pacific region, it is incumbent on us to play a leadership role in responding to climate change, in terms of mitigation, adaptation and supporting finance for loss and damage. The Government provides \$1.1 billion in ODA to the region and has a diplomatic presence in most Pacific Island Forum nations. The official currency in a number of Pacific countries such as Kiribati and Tuvalu is the Australian Dollar. In short, Australia's presence and relationship with the Pacific region should be a major consideration in policy discussions about the SDGs.

It is not possible to rank the SDGs in order of importance; one is not more important than the other because they are interrelated and interdependent. However, of critical importance for Australia in light of our position in the Pacific region is **Goal 13 – "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."** The targets of this goal are to:

- Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries;
- Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning;
- Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning;
- Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible; and
- Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and Small Island Developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities.

The United Nation's 2007-2008 Human Development Report, *Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World* argued that the international community had one decade to change course and prevent the issue of climate change.¹ The report noted that –

¹ http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/268/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf

“We are witnessing at firsthand what could be the onset of major human development reversal in our lifetime. Across developing countries, millions of the world’s poorest people are already being forced to cope with the impacts of climate change. These impacts do not register as apocalyptic events in the full glare of world media attention. They go unnoticed in financial markets and in the measurement of world gross domestic product (GDP). But increased exposure to drought, to more intense storms, to floods and environmental stress is holding back the efforts of the world’s poor to build a better life for themselves and their children.”

Ten years after this report was released, the international community has arguably failed to adequately respond to the climate crisis. This has a profound impact on the capacity of countries to achieve the SDGs. For instance, climate change affects a country’s ability to, among other things, eradicate poverty, achieve zero hunger, provide quality education, achieve gender equality and secure fresh and safe water supplies.

Food security – Climate change has a significant and adverse impact of the supply of food, as droughts become longer and more frequent. When it does rain, falls are more intense and this can cause damage to crops. Increased temperatures affect fish supplies which are a major of food for many Pacific countries, and also cause sea level rise and more intense storm surges/king tides which lead to worsened soil salinity. These impacts exacerbate the pre-existing food security challenges many countries face.

Water stress and scarcity – As temperatures rise and droughts become longer and more frequent, there is less drinking water. Heavier rainfalls, king tides and storm surges can increase sediments and pollutants in fresh water bodies. Sea level rise and more intense storm surges also diminish the size of the fresh water lens, which is the main source of drinking water in many countries such as Kiribati.

Health risks – Climate change is having an increasing impact of people’s health. Diminishing food supplies can contribute to under-nourishment, while contaminated water supplies cause water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea and dengue fever.

Impact on women– Climate change has a disproportionate impact of women. The impacts of climate change have the potential to increase the workload for women, limiting their opportunities to access education, employment and community leadership roles. For instance, in many countries, women are responsible for water collection, thus a decrease in water supply will inevitably place more pressure on women. We also know that women will assume responsibility for caring for people, especially children, with water-borne diseases.²

Security, sovereignty and migration – Many of the impacts of climate change such as increased natural disasters, sea level rise, water scarcity and prolonged drought can cause displacement and migration. Pacific Island peoples have developed sophisticated culture and spirituality systems based on connection to land and water, and these systems form the core of their identities.

Education impacts – Teachers in Kiribati advise that the quality of education is affected because students are unable to attend school due to water borne diseases. In outer islands of Kiribati, a number of schools are very close to the coast and have been damaged by storm surges and king tides which are more intense due to climate change.

² <https://www.unclearn.org/sites/default/files/inventory/unwomen704.pdf>

Economic impacts (decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure) –

Countries and communities affected by climate change face significant costs due to climate change, including loss and damage and adaptation. The impacts of climate change (such as drought, sea level rise, and depleted food and fish stocks) threaten countries' capacities to develop industries, which in turn makes it harder for people to find employment and stimulate economic activity.

The above summary is not exhaustive. It is brief overview of the way in which climate change is exacerbating the human rights and development challenges faced by many countries, especially in the Pacific. If Australia is to be serious in its commitment to meet the SDGs, it must commit to stronger action on climate change.

This point is also being made by our neighbours in the Pacific. During the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Kiribati, the Kiribati delegation –

“...reiterated that the greatest challenge remains the adverse effects of the changes to the climate system on the rights of Kiribati's people to survive: the UPR process will mean nothing if climate change is not addressed as an urgent and major challenge for human rights for all.”³

The same applies to the Sustainable Development Goals – the SDGs mean nothing unless climate change is addressed as an urgent and major challenge.

Australia's commitment to the Paris Agreement is fundamental to taking action on climate change. The Paris Agreement aims to limit global temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius, while pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees; establishes binding commitments by all Parties to prepare, communicate and maintain a nationally determined contribution (NDC), pursue domestic measures to achieve them, and prescribes mechanisms to hold Parties to account for meeting these targets; establishes a global goal on adaptation by enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reduction of vulnerability to climate change, and; enhances the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, which will develop approaches to help vulnerable countries cope with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow-onset events such as sea-level rise.⁴

Importantly, the UN states that “implementation of the Paris Agreement is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emissions and build climate resilience.”⁵ However, the international community is not on track to meet the Paris Agreement objectives, which means we are not on track to achieve the SDGs.

Inadequate INDCs

The Paris Agreement recognises the importance of “climate justice,” which refers to the fact that those countries which have caused the problem have also benefitted the most from economic development. Likewise, those countries which have done the least to cause the problem, including developing countries, have benefitted the least from economic development. Climate justice also refers to the way in which the impacts of climate change have a greater impact on countries that are less able to respond and adapt. The Paris Agreement responds to these issues by requiring parties to take climate action in a way that “reflect[s] equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.”⁶

³ https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/kiribati/session_21_-_january_2015/a_hrc_wg.6_21_l.2.pdf

⁴ <http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreement>

⁵ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change-2/>

⁶ http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf

The Australia Government has a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. This compares to the Climate Change Authority's recommendation of a 40-60 per cent reduction below 2000 levels by 2030. The Climate Action Tracker (CAT), an independent scientific analysis produced by three research organisations tracking climate action since 2009, has described this target as "insufficient" and in contradiction to the principles of fairness and equity –

*"The "Insufficient" rating indicates that Australia's climate commitment in 2017 is not consistent with holding warming to below 2°C, let alone limiting it to 1.5°C as required under the Paris Agreement, and is instead consistent with warming between 2°C and 3°C. If all countries were to follow Australia's approach, warming would reach over 2°C and up to 3°C. This means Australia's climate commitment is at the least stringent end of what would be a fair share of global effort, and is not consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit, unless other countries make much deeper reductions and comparably greater effort."*⁷

Globally, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) are not sufficient to limit global temperature rise to "well below 2 degrees Celsius". The 2017 UN Emissions Gap Report highlights that these INDCs are "putting the world on course for 3 degrees Celsius global temperature rise."⁸ The report makes clear that "if the emissions gap is not closed by 2030, it is extremely unlikely that the goal of holding global warming to well below 2°C can still be reached," and concludes that more ambitious INDCs are needed by 2020.⁹

Leaders in low-lying atoll nations in the Pacific have warned of the devastating consequences of climate change for their countries, unless global action limits global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. They have called "for the world to focus on the more ambitious target in the Paris Agreement of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius."¹⁰ This ambitious target, which is necessary for the future of Australia's regional neighbours, can only be achieved if countries such as Australia increase our INDCs.

Parties to the Paris Agreement have agreed to "convene a facilitative dialogue...in 2018 to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the long-term goal referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1 of the Agreement [limit the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels] and to inform the preparation of nationally determined contributions."¹¹ The Facilitative Dialogue will be conducted in the spirit of Talanoa, a "traditional approach used in Fiji and the Pacific to engage in an inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue."¹² The dialogue process focuses on three questions – where are we?; where do we want to go?; how do we get there? – with a view to enhancing ambition. In order for Australia to genuinely engage with the Talanoa process, it is important that we acknowledge the need for more ambitious INDCs. Put simply, more ambitious INDCs are essential if the SDGs are to be achieved.

Adaptation and Green Climate Fund

As part of the Paris Agreement, parties have committed to provide \$US100 billion annually to help developing countries finance climate action, such as adaptation. During the Paris Conference, Prime

⁷ <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia.html>

⁸ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/22070/EGR_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <https://cop23.com.fj/pacific-small-island-developing-states-statement/>

¹¹ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf>

¹² http://unfccc.int/files/bodies/cop/application/pdf/approach_to_the_talanoa_dialogue.pdf

Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced A\$1 billion to support vulnerable countries adapt and build resilience to climate change.¹³

While these developments were welcome, there is more that can be done, especially in order to achieve the SDGs. Contributions to the Fund should be in addition to existing ODA budgets. However, the A\$1 billion contribution from the Australian Government over 5 years is not new money, but rather it is drawn from our existing ODA budget.¹⁴ The amount also falls short of the \$1.5 billion estimated as Australia's fair and just contribution.¹⁵ Notably, the \$1 billion contribution over four years is significantly less than the approximately \$5 billion provided each year by Australian Governments to support fossil fuel industries, such as fuel tax credits, deductions for capital works expenditure and other subsidies.¹⁶

Furthermore, it has been argued that relocation (intra-country and inter-country) is a form of adaptation.¹⁷ The Edmund Rice Centre's partners in the Pacific have expressed their desire to remain in their country; migrating to a new country must be an absolute last resort. As a result, the Government's priority must be to ensure that people can remain in their homelands. However, Australia should work with our Pacific neighbours to ensure that we are ready if longer-term and permanent migration becomes necessary. This includes expanding education and labour access programs, as well as exploring the possibility of open access schemes (similar to programs New Zealand has with the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau and the US has with the Marshall Islands). These skills also help people build resilience through remittances and opportunities to develop skills, which in turn help communities to adapt to climate change and respond to other development challenges.

Loss and Damage

The Paris Agreement also enhanced the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, which aims to assist vulnerable countries cope with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow-onset events such as sea-level rise.¹⁸ It refers to compensating countries for the loss and damage caused by climate change. This is an important principle of climate justice, because developed countries have been the major beneficiaries of emission-intensive economic growth, while countries which have contributed the least to climate change, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, are most vulnerable.

However, there has been inadequate progress on funding for loss and damage. Delegates and observers to COP 23 have reported that representatives from a number of developed countries, including Australia, displayed reluctance to support meaningful loss and damage finance. The European Union and Australia argued that discussions on finance should not be part of the negotiations for loss and damage because "not every disaster is caused by climate change."¹⁹ It will be very difficult to achieve the SDGs unless meaningful progress is made on funding for loss and damage.

Official Development Assistance in perspective

¹³ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/cop21-turnbull-pledges-1-billion-to-battle-climate-change>

¹⁴ http://www.erc.org.au/cop21_paris_australia_fails_on_real_increase_in_support_for_most_climate_vulnerable_neighbours

¹⁵ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/cop21-turnbull-pledges-1-billion-to-battle-climate-change>

¹⁶ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9992.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://climatemigration.org.uk/migration-as-adaptation-new-briefing-paper-2/>

¹⁸ <http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreemen>

¹⁹ <http://climatetracker.blogactiv.eu/2017/11/13/cop-23-eu-australia-claim-insufficient-evidence-climate-change-singular-cause-of-extreme-weather/>

Australia is a member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which supports calls for developed countries to contribute 0.7 per cent of their GNI to ODA. However, Australia's current ODA contributions fall short of this target and recent ODA cuts further undermine the Government's commitment to achieving the SDGs. Dr Cameron Hill from the Parliamentary Library notes -

*"In cumulative terms, the ODA budget has been cut (or is projected to be cut) by almost one third (32.8 per cent) since the Gillard Government's 2013–14 Budget, which represented a high point for aid funding. The Government has indicated that the aid program is unlikely to rise in real terms until the budget returns to surplus. The freezes accelerate Australia's diminishing aid generosity: ODA as a proportion of Gross National Income (GNI) will fall to 0.22 per cent in 2017–18 and to an unprecedented low of 0.20 per cent in 2020–21."*²⁰

The Government is also providing \$300 million over four years (from 2016-2020) for climate change and resilience in the Pacific region.²¹ While this is an important contribution, it is useful to put it into some perspective. Firstly, climate finance contributions should be in addition to, not part of existing ODA budgets. Secondly, funding for climate change resilience is being undermined by the Government's ongoing subsidies for fossil fuel industries (conservatively estimated to be approximately \$5 billion per year). Over a four year period, the Australian Government is providing \$300 million to support Pacific countries build climate resilience and adapt to climate change, yet over the same period is providing \$20 billion to industries that are contributing to climate change. More money is spent to support domestic activity that contributes to climate change than to support countries cope with the impacts of climate change. This reinforces the importance of ratcheting up our emission reduction targets and transitioning industry away from emission intensive activities.

Recommendations

It will not be possible to meet the SDGs unless Australia and other developed countries take stronger measures to mitigate climate change, provide more support for vulnerable countries to adapt to climate change and provide funding for loss and damage. The Edmund Rice Centre makes the following recommendations:

- Increase Official Development Assistance to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income as soon as possible;
- Ensure that Australia's contributions to the Green Climate Fund are separate, and in addition to the country's ODA budget;
- Provide meaningful finance for Loss and Damage through the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage;
- Australia should commit to more ambitious emission reduction targets of at least 50-60 per cent below 2000 levels by 2030, as per the recommendation of the Climate Change Authority;
- Australia must play a constructive role throughout the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue process to ensure comparable developed countries "ratchet up" their INDCs; and
- Examine new and expanded migration access pathways for citizens of Pacific Island countries.

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https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201718/Official_Development_Assistance_steady_but_still_shrinking

²¹ <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/corporate/portfolio-budget-statements/Documents/2017-18-australian-aid-budget-summary-pacific.pdf>