

Pacific Calling Partnership at Tarawa Climate Change Conference - November 2010

ERC Director Phil Glendenning and ERC's Eco-Justice coordinator, Jill Finnane attended the Tarawa Climate Change Conference at the invitation of the Government of Kiribati as the delegates of the Pacific Calling Partnership.

Although a conference of Government delegations Pacific Calling Partnership was particularly honoured as one of only ten organisations from outside of Kiribati invited to participate with official observer status.

Jill Finnane has prepared the following reflection on the context and process of the conference and on the content of the Ambo Declaration - bringing together also the reflections of other Pacific Calling Partners.

Opening Prayer: 'It is us who have spoiled this paradise'

The opening prayer thanked God for

the land that you have given us to be our dwelling place. The land you've created so perfectly to become our paradise of happiness and freedom. It is us who have spoiled this paradise.

The prayer went on to confess:

We regret that we have failed in our job to look after creation and regenerate good things out of it, as you expected us to do....

It then went on to ask for help to find good solutions praying:

Unite us as one in our thoughts to work together to find a common solution to the problems brought about by climate change.

It is likely that all faiths and none were represented there as the prayers challenged us with cautionary reminders of the immensity of the task ahead and embraced us with hope.

Opening Address Kiriabti President Anote Tong

In a similar vein, President Tong, in his opening address encouraged assembled delegates to take responsibility for climate change:

We only have one planet - rich country or poor country, a country of millions or of thousands - we all breathe the same air and share the same resources.

He then reminded delegates that it was unmitigated greed and misguided consumption that is pushing the planet towards climate change and said that lifestyle changes were the most important action needed.

Tarawa Climate Change Conference

Ambo is a small village on the island of Tarawa where the Kiribati Government has its Parliament House. Last week Ambo hosted the Tarawa Conference, a conference that may prove to be important turning point in the history of climate change negotiations, not just because it produced the Ambo Declaration but also because of the respectful and cooperative atmosphere in which those negotiations were conducted. Throughout the conference there was a clear willingness among all the signatories to keep talking and listening.

This cooperative approach was remarkable because not only were Small Island states at the frontline of climate change gathered there but also some big polluting states like Australia and China were there. From the very beginning they agreed that their purpose in being there was to meet together to highlight and consolidate points that could be agreed upon in the lead up to the UNFCCC Climate Conference in Cancun which begins later this month.

They also repeatedly reminded each other that the focus for the negotiations was the urgency of addressing the impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable states. As the New Zealand statement declared 'We don't need to repeat the debates of 2009: now is the time to take the Copenhagen consensus forward, to lay the path for a legally binding agreement that effectively reduces greenhouse gas emissions and ensures that no Party requiring assistance is left behind'. Over

and again the deliberations came back the point that the 'package' they were calling for was a consensus to prioritise the key needs of vulnerable states for action on adaptation, access to finance and assistance in capacity building.

Therein lies the ultimate importance of the Ambo declaration. It is not a statement of what the frontline states would ultimately like to happen. Those statements are elsewhere. It is a statement that came from recognizing that while it is important to continue to discuss the main points of difference between nations, those points of disagreement should not prevent what can be agreed and acted upon now.

Signatories and Observers

Besides Australia, other signatories were Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

The European Union, France, India, United Kingdom and United States decided to only send observers. Civil Society observers included Kiribati Association of Non Government Organisations (KANGO), Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN), Pacific Calling Partnership, Pacific Conference of Churches, UNFCCC, South Pacific Regional Environment Program and the World Bank.

About The Ambo Declaration

A Declaration shaped in the Pacific Way

While a couple of observer nations seemed doubtful about the ultimate value of the declaration, most other nations saw the declaration as a valuable achievement that will contribute two things in particular to climate change negotiations.

Firstly, it will add strength to the movement towards them giving a special focus on the needs of vulnerable frontline countries (especially for adaptation, capacity building and access to the necessary finance) and secondly, the Pacific Way in which the deliberations proceeded gave a living lesson on how to go about moving towards a legally binding agreement by focusing firmly on where the nations are agreed and building on that.

Fiji's Environment Minister Colonel Samuela Saumautua spoke of the way in which the negotiations took place. He said, 'the spirit of discussion was very helpful, very Pacific. And it's a far cry from Copenhagen, and here people suggested things, instead of saying you can't have that, they said it may be better to look at it this way. So that's the spirit of things.'

At the outset, President Tong urged delegates to take inspiration from the fact that there is already a global consensus on the urgency of climate change and on the need for action now to address it. Key players who helped to move along the negotiations in search of consensus were Kiribati, Maldives, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. As an Australian, I found it very pleasing to see the constructive and serious role that Australia played.

Speaking at a press conference after the extended deliberations finally came up with a document, all could agree on what President Anote Tong of Kiribati said:

It's a set of declarations which we'll be taking to Cancun. What is particularly encouraging is it includes not only the small islands and states, the vulnerable countries, but also the developed countries in the region, including Australia and New Zealand. I'm also very happy to say that China is also part of the declaration, and this is particularly welcome given the fact that the position of China has been one that is very difficult to pin down in terms of the wider negotiations.

Most of the issues, some of which were common ground, some of which were as the minister just said, very sensitive issues indeed, and the issues which up to now, I mean the conference, the UNFCCC has not been able to resolve. Our expectation is these declarations will contribute hopefully to some positive steps forward namely at Cancun in Mexico.

Concerns expressed by the ordinary people of Kiribati

As delegates traveled to the conference they witnessed sea walls that are crumbling from the repeated onslaught of storms, the beginnings of one new deeper, broader, taller sea wall that will hopefully withstand waves for fifty years, eroded shorelines and new plantings of mangroves on the lagoon side at parts of where the waters are quieter. They saw people about their daily lives getting water from a

well, walking to school, caring for their children, laughing, washing, singing, playing. As delegates drew close to the Parliament building, local people lined the road in both directions waving placards urging delegates to consider their future. Children and young people sang welcoming songs that urged action on climate change. One of the young speakers told about how as a small child she had seen white fish all along the shore line near her home but now at the age of fifteen the fish are no longer there. She put to the delegates an appeal and a reminder that the outcome of their decisions would determine the fate of her future, saying 'We each have a right to live in our own country. What if this right is taken away from us?'

During the lunch break the business community of Tarawa presented speech after speech asking for a good agreement that would help lead to an outcome at Cancun that would lead towards saving their country and enable certainty in business.

Church representatives spoke and or prayed about the effects of climate change at every ceremony and were visibly present as observers during the whole of the deliberations. They urged fast-tracking the way forward by focusing on common grounds critical to ensure the survival of peoples.

Agents not victims

Courage is a striking characteristic of these frontline countries. As the statement delivered by the Maldives made clear they did not at any time portray themselves as victims but as agents. 'Agents who would not wait to be saved, but save themselves; who would be examples to the rest of the world: show them that it is the size of ambition, not geographical size that really matters.'

The courage of this gathering taking place on a wee small island in the outer reaches of the Pacific was rewarded with the serious participation of the 12 signatories, the engaged observations of the observer nations and the huge efforts that the observer bodies, such as our own Pacific Calling Partnership, took to get there and to witness the deliberations and spread the word about what happened.

The declaration will be presented to the next round of UN climate change talks to be held in Mexico later this month.

The Ambo Declaration

Read the Ambo Declaration:

<http://www.thecvf.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Ambo-Declaration-2010.pdf>

In summary, the Declaration recognizes that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and expresses: alarm at the impacts climate change is already having, grave concerns over recent scientific findings on the worsening state of global climate change, and deep concern over the slow pace of UNFCCC negotiations.

It acknowledges that there are elements of common ground which when implemented will reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of developing countries, in particular, the most vulnerable States on the frontline, especially Small Island States, Least Developed Countries and those countries susceptible to drought and desertification.

The Declaration declared a resolve to move forward with a collective commitment to addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.

It called for an 'urgent package' to be agreed at COP16 to assist vulnerable States on the front-line to respond to the challenges posed by the climate change crisis.

It welcomed the growing commitment to increase resources for climate change financing but called on parties to make financial resources available that are new, additional, adequate, predictable and sustainable... , to establish a disaster mechanism, to strengthen institutions, to build resilience and to develop strategies directed protecting people displaced as a result of climate change extreme events.

It called on developed countries to implement capacity building and technology transfer priorities of developing countries with priority to vulnerable States on the frontline. It called on all states to aim for concrete decisions at COP16 towards a legally binding outcome.

The Pacific Calling Partnership's Role

The PCP has worked hard since it began in 2006 to listen to the calls from the Pacific about the threats of climate change and to encourage Australians and the world to respond taking a partnership approach.

Organisations like the Edmund Rice Centre, the Good Samaritan Sisters and the Catholic Education Office at Wollongong along with over 300 individuals including such names as Geraldine, Mark, Mahesh, Maria, Louise, Susan and Fred, Claire, Claude, Kennzy, Amanda, Ameria, Annevi, Pelenise, Tangaroa, Marita, Phil, Sulu, Akii, Tafue, Kirsty..., have all been partners in this struggle to get a hearing for the needs of Pacific Islands States in the face of climate change.

It was with an awareness of all this dedication, that Phil Glendenning and I represented the PCP as observers at the Tarawa Climate Change Conference last week. I was excited at the possibility of finding common ground and leverage points towards placing the urgency of the frontline situation high on the agenda of COP16 in Cancun.

Concluding Reflections...

In the lead up to COP15 Summit in Copenhagen last year, the Maldives called the first Climate Vulnerable Forum. The Tarawa Climate Change Conference carried on the spirit of the Maldives initiative.

The importance of this kind of gathering led by small players was expressed beautifully in the Maldives comment that the Tarawa conference brought together 'countries that are most affected by the changing climatic conditions, countries whose voice is usually lost in the din of the world.'

What did the Tarawa Climate Change Conference achieve? What effects will the Ambo Declaration have? In one sense only time and history will tell. It looks now as though hope, prayer, an immense amount of work by the Kiribati government together with the cooperation and support from governments and NGOs brought an ambitious vision to reality.

It is just possible that it could be the beginning of establishing a new more cooperative and urgent way of approaching the climate change crisis with a priority for those most affected.

Jill Finnane

Civil Society presence around the Tarawa Climate Change Conference

Reflections from Pelenise Alofa

Pelenise Alofa, President of KiriCAN - a PCP partner in Kiribati - has distributed the following reflection about the civil society actions that took place on Tarawa during the Tarawa Climate Change Conference. We reproduce it here with Pelenise's permission.

We have just finished the following activities to coincide with the TCCC:

1. Erecting of the "highest point on South Tarawa" 3 metres at Eita District. (funded by WWF)
2. Two days climate change workshop (co-funded by PIANGO, WWF and 350.org)
3. A Climate change display booth at Parliament House (funded by WWF)
4. A rally/march to Parliament with a Side Event consisting of CC speeches, dramas, dance and songs. More than 800+ joined the march from more than 20 NGOs, churches, private sectors and some from Govt ministries. This was the highlight. (funded by WWF)

The PAC CAN was represented by Bernolina Hedson from FSM and David Ngatae from Cook Islands.

Greenpeace came to create the Waves on ANZ Bank and made quite an impact.

Some of our partner International NGOs came not knowing what our programs were on Kiribati and were quite overwhelmed but enjoyed participating in all these activities.

We have built a good working relationship with KANGO...they helped us to facilitate our workshop and we know that future climate change responsibilities will fall on the KiriCAN. This is our aim and we have achieved this. This was communicated to me this morning.

Thank you all for your support and a big thank you to our sponsors, especially Ben Namakin and Diane for arranging the WWF sponsorship and to Berno and David from PAC CAN and to Brian Reed and Aaron...and the British High Commission.

We were so proud that our partner organisation, Pacific Calling Partnership, was invited to the TCCC and could negotiate on our behalf.

I want to invite you all to the Side Event of the Pacific Calling Partnership on 9 Dec in Cancun. Please check the Side Events programs.

And furthermore I am requesting that we take something Pacific to Cancun to wear for this Side Event because we may take part in this. We will show the *Human Face of the Pacific* at this Side Event.

And we may need to get together to practice a song or dance for this....please give your suggestion....

Ben, you will dance for all of us!

The feedback from government for all the support we have given Kiribati is very very positive. Future doors will certainly open to PCP and KiriCAN and PAC CAN to advocate for Kiribati. I want to thank my team members, Toanii Bension and Claire Anterea for their support and team spirit.

And lastly, but very important and special, is the contribution by Dr Teweiariki Teaero from USP, Fiji. I will attach the climate change poems he wrote for the TCCC. If you wish to comment on his work please contact him on email: "Teweiariki Teaero" email teaero_t [at] usp.ac.fj I will send you photographs of pictures he drew for climate change "The last bubbles at twilight". Tevi, thank you so much.

Thank you again all, and we will stay in touch....See you in Cancun!!!

Pelenise Alofa

President

Kiri CAN (Kiribati Climate Action Network)

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Climate change could kill my islands' culture

Statement by Pelenise Alofa

9th November 2010 -- <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Water supplies are contaminated and sea levels are rising – and the rainy season is more extreme than ever. This is the reality of life on a small island as the climate changes.

On the 9th of November 2010, the Tarawa Climate Change Conference (TCCC) began, with over 40 international guests witnessing the unique dances of Kiribati following their arrival at the venue.

Kam na mauri! Warm Pacific greetings. My parents were born on the island of Banaba, which is a part of the Republic of Kiribati. Like nearly everyone on that island, my parents were forced to relocate to Rabi, Fiji because the British mined it so badly and extensively for phosphate that they could not live there any more.

Kiribati:

- Population 98,045
- Percentage of population in rural areas 56%
- CO2 emissions per capita 0.35 metric tons
- Percentage of land covered by forests 3%
- Percent of population with internet access 2.1%

Source UN statistics division and the World Bank's 2009 World Development Indicators report

I was born in Rabi, but I now live in South Tarawa, which is home to 50,000 people – about half the total population of Kiribati. It wasn't always like this – in the last 20 years, the population of Tarawa has grown from about 11,000 people.

Many people have come in from the outer islands in search of education, employment and for hospital visits. This has put a lot of pressure on our environment and infrastructure. Many of our people live in poverty because we lack the basic infrastructure to support such a large population in such a small space.

We cannot go swimming along most of the coast because it is too polluted from people using it as a toilet. So for these reasons, our people are very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Water is our biggest problem, and is a major barrier to development. There are three sources of water – from boreholes, rain and water purified at the government plant. But no one wants to drink the water from the borehole because it is contaminated from people burying their dead all over the island, and from our waste.

We're also seeing the gradual salinisation of the bore water with sea-level rise. At the moment it is only affected by the king tides, but in the coming years it will get worse. Rainwater supply is not very widespread because most people don't have an iron roof or cannot afford a storage tank.

With an average of only one money-earner between each extended family earning about AUS\$60 a week, most people cannot afford to connect up to the government water supply either. The government does deliver water, but it takes such a long time – I ordered some two weeks ago and I'm still waiting!

As a result, a lot of families turn to the borehole, which makes them very sick, and many end up in hospital. This is really costly for our society because the little money that we do have gets spent on bus fares to and from the hospital.

As well as the lack of water, we also now face the problem of too much water in the wet season. Last year our wet season was more intense than I ever remember – it rained every day for four months.

And in places there was flooding, and climate change will only make it worse.

As a result of all these problems, our government has started to develop plans to relocate most of the population to Christmas Island, which is higher, larger and cleaner than Tarawa. I am glad that our government is now starting to be proactive about climate change, and I hope that we can make the most of the opportunities at the Tarawa climate change conference this week.

My message for the delegates at the Tarawa climate change conference (TCCC) is that they must give us hope. They must give i-Kiribati – my countrymen and women – the hope that we can continue to live on our islands. They are negotiating on an issue that is a matter of life and death. When I say death, our people will not die, but our culture and way of life will die and that scares me.

The government should be seeking adaptation funds quickly. Currently the government is only working on climate adaptation projects on public property. The government should be seeking community adaptation through the UNFCCC processes, and the funding should reach the people who are suffering at the grassroots level.

That is why I've been working with the climate change campaigning organisation, 350.org, and other NGOs to run a youth and community climate leadership workshop over the last few days. The workshop will end with a support march of hundreds of locals to the TCCC, where we will urge the government to continue to stand strong and call for an international climate treaty that will limit warming to 1.5C, and sets a target concentration of carbon emissions to 350parts per million, because that is what is safe for our people.

If the TCCC can achieve these things then it would be a step in the right direction for our people.