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**Pacific church Leaders join two-hundred Australians Christians in Parliament to discuss what it means to be a part of the 'Pacific family'**

Over two hundred Australian Christians, joined by 15 Pacific Church leaders, are in Parliament today to share their support for Australian Aid and discuss what the Pacific Step Up means for Pacific people.

Led by Tim Costello, almost 100 face-to-face meetings with the nation's politicians, including Senior Ministers, will be held as a part of the *Voices for Justice* Conference, hosted by Micah Australia.

"We are here to say - 'Let's do the *Pacific Step Up* in a smart and inclusive manner, that puts people and relationships at the centre.'" said Mr Costello.

"We know how you do this. It's by coming together and actively listening to the issues our Pacific brothers and sisters say need addressing most – like work on gender equality, development partnerships and climate change. That's why we are here and what we are doing in Parliament with our delegation."

The group was officially welcomed to Parliament by Prime Minister Scott Morrison during the '*Friends of the Pacific*' launch, a new parliamentary group Co-chaired by Dave Sharma MP and Pat Conroy MP, Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Rev James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, said the Pacific leaders want to encourage conversations about how Australia can best love its Pacific neighbours.

"Our journey with our Australian Christian brothers and sisters is an example is the kind of partnership the Pacific is looking for from Australia."

"The truth is we don't want a 'hand out', or even a 'hand up'. What we want is genuine consultative partnership. It is this kind of partnership that we know has two-way benefits in leading to the deeper connection and flourishing of Australian and Pacific societies and their people."

"We're grateful for the opportunity to meet with Australia's decision makers and to discuss what it means to be a part of the 'Pacific family'."

The delegation is here on the back of news there will be an upcoming aid review, which has been welcomed by Micah.

The 200 delegates will be calling on the government to ensure the new aid policy empowers local communities in the Pacific to lead their own inclusive and sustainable development as well as recognising the needs of the most vulnerable though often resilient members of our Pacific family - women and children.

Delegates will also highlight the impact of climate change in the Pacific and the need to ensure the Pacific Step Up is not at the cost of 'stepping down' elsewhere in the world.

“At a time when our region needs Australia more than ever, we have cut aid to the lowest level ever in history,” said Mr Costello.

“We believe that as a blessed nation we have a moral obligation to ensure Australian aid is generous and is supporting the world’s most poor vulnerable and oppressed, beyond just their ‘strategic’ value.”

“In the geopolitical competition for the Pacific, we must ensure poverty reduction is not lost. We must retain our focus on improving the lives of our Pacific friends and neighbours.”

**Available for Interview:**

Tim Costello – Executive Director Micah Australia

Rev James Bhagwan - General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches

Ends



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Micah Australia is a coalition of churches and Christian organisations raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty.

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