

# Pacific fights for survival at COP17

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Brussels, 29 November 2011/ ACP Newsdesk: On an international scene fixated with the global financial crisis and the tangle of creating effective and sustainable development policies, Pacific nations join the UN's COP17 <sup>[1]</sup> climate change summit this week in Durban, South Africa with a very clear and basic focus – the survival of their peoples.

At a recent technical meeting in Brussels, delegates from Africa, Pacific and the Caribbean called for a “bold and innovative” approach to the global talks, looking towards a united ACP position on climate change.

For some Pacific members in particular, the issue is especially critical. The outcomes of COP17 - convening 28 November to 9 December - could spell significant implications on their future as independent nations.

“It is true we have to look at with development, poverty reduction and building green economies. These are very important in addressing climate change. But for us in the Pacific it’s more than that,” said Deputy Director General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme <sup>[2]</sup> (SPREP) Dr Kosi Latu, who presented the region’s position in Brussels mid-month.

“I’m talking about the survival of our peoples in the sense that due to climate change impacts, we stand to lose our land, our histories and cultures, our nationalities.”

The evacuation of entire seaside communities in Pacific countries due to climate change impacts have been widely publicised by local media, such as the cases of the Cateret Islands in Papua New Guinea <sup>[3]</sup> and Tegua Island in Vanuatu <sup>[4]</sup>, dubbed as the world’s first “climate change refugees”.

The governments of Tuvalu and Kiribati have also considered the bleak option of relocating their populations to neighbouring countries, even as increased flooding and storm surges across the region have cause damage to crops and infrastructure, as well as loss of life.

“It gives us the chills,” Samoan representative Josephine Stowers Fiu told ACP peers. “We’re talking about the lives of our people – what is going to happen in the next five, ten, twenty years. We need to push forward with a more stringent approach to seeking a legally binding agreement [on the global reduction of green house gas emissions].”



But selling the urgency of this message has been easier said than done, even amongst regional partners that make up the 79 members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States. While all agree on the need for a global binding agreement to be finalised in Durban, key differences have also emerged on a specific priority focus on the climate change debate.

“Sustainable development and poverty eradication are the priorities to Africa,” stated Tosi Mpanu Mpanu, Chair of the African Group.

Representing the largest sub-group in the ACP including 33 Least Developed Countries, the African region is primarily concerned with equitable resource sharing, climate change financing, capacity building and technology transfer.

Meanwhile in the Caribbean, the focus has been on improved disbursements of the US\$ 100 billion in climate change funding pledged by developed countries by 2020. While the region shares geographical similarities with its Pacific partners, concerns tend to focus on economic growth, rather than actual survival.

To compound this, new challenges have emerged with recent key geopolitical developments since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The global economic crisis is likely to dampen the push for more assistance. Meanwhile, emerging economies such as China, India, Russia, and South Korea are climbing the ranks as top ten global emitters. Yet under current agreements, they do not have the same emission obligations as those placed on developed nations.



"My big fear is that the financial crisis will negatively impact on the assistance we receive from developed countries. In fact, the question still remains whether these pledges will come as new funds, or simply the countries' Overseas Development Assistance repackaged as climate change funds," continued Dr Latu.

While Pacific remain under threat of climate change effects, he has modest expectations for the outcomes of the Durban talks:

"Of course the aim for the Pacific region is to get a global binding agreement that will commit everyone to cut global emissions, but I am sceptical. At the very least however, we should at least finalise a concrete date for this to happen."

The ACP climate change meeting in mid-November compiled a number of shared concerns to raise at COP17, including the need to limit the rise of the global surface temperature to no more than 1.5 degrees Celcius above the pre-industrial levels by 2100 and for all Parties work to ensure that global greenhouse gas emissions peak by 2015.

ACP negotiators also called for disbursements of climate change funds to be resolved and mechanism in place for post-2012, when the first Kyoto Commitment Period ends.

"Climate change has been accpeted as a reality - now we need the political will to make the necessary changes," added Dr Latu. "We need radical solutions, and for us who are particularly vulnerable in the ACP Group – we need to be speaking with one voice."

- Josephine Latu, ACP Press Office

(Photos: Deputy Director General for SPREP, Dr Kosi Latu; Samoan delegate at ACP COP17 preparatory meeting Josephine Stowers Fiu; ACP COP17 preparatory meeting participants in Brussels)

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**[Outcome Document: ACP Preparatory Meeting for UNFCCC COP17, 15-16 November](#)** <sup>[5]</sup>.

**[Presentations from ACP Preparatory Meeting and ACP renewable Energy Conference 14-16 November](#)** <sup>[6]</sup>

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[2] <http://www.sprep.org/>

[3] <http://irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78630>

[4] <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/a-village-flees-for-safer-ground/2005/12/22/1135032135870.html>

[5] <http://www.acp.int/content/outcome-document-acp-group-preparatory-meeting-unfccc-cop17-durban-15-16-nov-2011>

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