

Outcome Statement from the First VUW Pacific Climate Change Conference

“In the Eye of the Storm”

Preamble:

The conference organisers and participants thank Victoria University of Wellington for generously supporting, hosting, and making the conference possible. Our thanks to Victoria University Vice Chancellor Grant Guilford for his support and encouragement. The organisers also offer sincere thanks to the wide variety of participants, representing a truly diverse mix of voices, who made the conference such a great success.

Conclusion and summary statement:

This Pacific Climate Change Conference at Victoria University recently brought together one of the most diverse groups of people both culturally and in terms of the professions to hear and engage in discussion and debate. Experts in climate change science, international law, indigenous rights, advocacy and activism, politics, civil society, sustainable development, communications and other disciplines shared their knowledge and wisdom following a powerful key note address from Anote Tong – the President of the Republic of Kiribati who said:

We (in Kiribati) are on the frontline now, but we will all be on the frontline soon.

This statement, endorsed by the majority of conference participants, is a collective response stressing the urgency for action on climate change issues,

- *Recognising* that today's poor and today's youth will bear increasing and disproportionate impacts of climate change,
- *Recognising* that environmental integrity is fundamental to the well-being of humanity and all species on the earth,
- *Recognising* that the Pacific, home to the people of Tagaloa, is on the frontline of climate change, in 'the eye of the storm', bearing the brunt of climate change impacts even though the people have made only a negligible contribution to the problem,
- *Affirming* the goals laid out in the Paris Agreement of December 2015, and *Acknowledging* that the Paris Agreement occurred, thanks in no small measure to input from Pacific leaders,
- *Recognising* that climate change intersects with other social and ecological crises such as imperialism, poverty and class-, race- and gender-based inequalities because of the way it is structurally rooted in existing social and economic systems,
- *Acknowledging* that climate change concerns human rights, especially the right to self-determination, to health and to development. It concerns also the rights of indigenous peoples and of local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations, as well as impacting on gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,
- *Also acknowledging* that there is alarm across the Pacific that climate change is the most critical issue facing the region and the globe,
- *Recognising* that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and many living species and thus requires the widest possible cooperation by all countries, and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, with a view to accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions,

- *Also recognising* that deep reductions in global emissions will be required urgently in order to keep the world's climate safe for humanity and the natural world upon which it depends,
- *Expressing grave concerns* that the current pace of change is not enough to address or resolve the problems faced by the Pacific, particularly in relation to sea level rise and ocean acidification, and increasing intensity of extreme weather events, even in light of the Paris Agreement,
- *Emphasising* with serious concern the urgent need to address the significant gap between the aggregate effect of current actions and countries' mitigation pledges in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and the aggregate emission pathways needed to hold the increase in the global average temperature to at most 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels,
- *Recognising* the urgent need to facilitate the provision of finance, technology and capacity-building support by developed countries to enable more effective pre-2020 action by the countries of the Pacific in a manner that respects the self determination of indigenous people and Pacific nations,
- *Emphasising* the enduring benefits of ambitious and early action, including major reductions in the cost of future mitigation and adaptation efforts, and the extraordinary costs of inaction, including the additional burden delayed action places on Pacific countries as a result of escalating climate impacts,
- *Emphasizing* the urgent need to identify and implement relevant national and regional policy responses across the Pacific to help coordinate efforts to address climate change-induced displacement, migration and planned relocation,
- *Stressing* the need to uphold and promote regional and international cooperation in order to mobilise stronger and more ambitious climate action by all countries, indigenous nations, civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities, and local communities,
- *Also stressing* the need to consider spiritual and cultural dimensions when addressing climate mitigation and adaptation,
- *Recognizing that* special attention needs to be paid to the protection and restoration of Pacific island; terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Because if they disappear, many endemic species will be lost forever,
- *Recognising that* measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change will very likely help alleviate related current as well as future environmental problems,
- *Also recognising that* all sectors of society, including governments and the corporate/private sector, must work together to address climate change.

The conference participants recognise that the Paris outcome has been positive, but stress there is much yet to do in terms of further negotiation on the details of the Paris agreement. We resolve and declare that:

- There is a strong moral imperative to act urgently on climate change – for our very survival – at all levels: personal, community, national and global.
- Action must be underpinned by a deep understanding of culture and indigenous worldviews (including indigenous science and traditional knowledge), and by strong support for scientific

inquiry. Addressing climate change will also require different groups within and across societies to come together and support each other – Pasifika, Maori and Pakeha.

- The way forward must involve the development of closer connections and relationships. Peoples of the Pacific must lead the way in all action within the Pacific region, and must embrace the indigenous standard accepted internationally that nothing shall occur for them without them.
- Addressing climate change will require fundamental changes in the way we relate to our world and how we view our place in it, involving an attitude of responsibility for and greater humility towards our shared environment, and a recognition that human populations and all human systems form part of the natural world.
- We urge the New Zealand government to abandon their policy of being ‘fast followers’ of climate change action, and urge them to show moral leadership and accept the challenge to support and enable Pacific leadership in this area, including a moratorium on fossil fuel extraction within the New Zealand Exclusive Economic Zone, a cessation of the use of fossil fuels for electricity generation, and facilitation of the move to renewable energy systems.
- We urge the government of New Zealand and the governments of all nations to establish an effective universal price on carbon, reflective of its finite supply and of the pressing need to reduce emissions world-wide to avoid catastrophic climate change.
- We strongly encourage the development and adoption of genuine and effective processes for transparency of information and for public participation in decision-making around climate change, such as through citizens’ assemblies and referenda.
- We call on local governments, communities and citizens to mitigate emissions, increase resilience and support their communities to adapt economically, socially, culturally and environmentally.
- We must recognise the dangers of adopting technologies that are detrimental to natural processes in the environment.

Further, we encourage:

- All Pacific countries, and all countries of the globe, to sign and then ratify the Paris Agreement promptly after it is open for signature on 22 April 2016,
- Pacific countries to continue the engagement at the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies meetings,
- Implementation of the Paris Agreement, as a minimum, through the development of a support programme proposal with the assistance and support of Partners for - development of Pacific nations’ Nationally Determined Contributions,
- Pacific countries to develop and submit their Adaptation Communications and their Nationally Determined Contributions (for greenhouse gas emissions reductions),
- Engagement across the Pacific in furthering the science of climate change, and engagement with the writing process of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Special Report on 1.5°C warming, and the upcoming 6th Assessment Report.