

# PACIFIC ISLANDS REPORT

*Pacific Islands Development Program/East-West Center  
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## **PACIFIC LEADERS PLEAD FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION**

*Grave concern amid lukewarm efforts to cut emissions*

SUVA, Fiji (Fiji Sun, September 24, 2009) – The Pacific created a wave at the United Nations Summit on Climate Change this week, as leaders begin making a strong commitment for the region on the issue.

In a Declaration adopted in New York at the ‘Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Summit on Climate Change’, leaders and ministers of the 42-member negotiating group expressed ‘grave concern that climate change poses the most serious threat to our survival and viability’, and disappointment at the current slow pace and lack of resolve in international climate talks.

Speaking at a press conference following adoption of the Declaration, Prime Minister Marcus Stephens of Nauru took a swipe at recent suggestions that talks on a new post-2012 climate deal should be allowed to leak into next year.

"Seventeen years after signing the Framework Convention on Climate Change, we are still waiting for emissions to peak. We cannot allow domestic politics and self-interest to delay what we already know to be essential. Further delayed action will escalate the cost of adaptation well beyond our economic capacity," said Prime Minister Stephens.

Leaders of the world's island states have demanded that the new post-2012 international climate agreement guarantee their countries' livelihood and survival by ensuring that global warming be kept well below 1.5 degrees Celsius (°C).

AOSIS Leaders heard that current targets from industrialized countries add up to emissions cuts of only 11 to 18 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, which would put the world on a path to 3°C or more in temperature rise. Current targets are about one third of the 45 percent cuts by 2020 required to keep global warming and associated losses and damage - already estimated at FJ\$125 billion [US\$65 billion] annually - under control.

Recent science indicates that 3°C of warming will result in substantial loss of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, resulting in one or even two metres of sea-level rise by the end of the century. The UN's High Commissioner for Refugees has already warned that some particularly low-lying island states are ‘very likely to become entirely uninhabitable’.

Prime Minister Tillman Thomas of Grenada, the Caribbean island state which currently holds the AOSIS Chairmanship, called the current targets "unacceptable", adding that no state or group of states has the right to condemn another to the tragedy of statelessness.

"Our people are already suffering devastating impacts and losses at the current 0.8 degrees Celsius (°C) of warming - coastal erosion, coral bleaching, salty drinking water, flooding, and more intense cyclones and hurricanes" said President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives.

"Should we, leaders of the most vulnerable and exposed countries, be asking our people to sign onto significantly greater degrees of misery and livelihood insecurity, essentially becoming climate change guinea pigs? The limit must be 1.5°C to stay alive!" Today's 'AOSIS Declaration on Climate Change' calls on the international community to ensure that the Copenhagen climate agreement peak global emissions by 2015, with a subsequent fall to 85 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

The AOSIS 1.5°C target and associated goal of stabilising atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations at 350 parts per million is supported by the Group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), a total of about 80 countries that represent more than 40 percent of the U.N. membership. The targets are below the 2°C and 450ppm promoted by many industrialised countries and some developing countries, which are based on now-outdated science.

Recent economic studies show the tighter targets are feasible, requiring investments of less than 2 percent of GDP by 2100.

Tighter targets would also send a positive carbon price signal to the markets to drive the development of clean energy technologies needed for the transition to low-carbon economies.

AOSIS Leaders also stressed that the provision of finance for adaptation by small island states and other vulnerable countries 'must be an urgent and immediate global priority', and that the new global deal must include a comprehensive insurance facility to address the now-inevitable loss and damage to fall on vulnerable countries as a result of climate change.

"Climate change is already delivering damage not of our making. Our countries need adaptation funding urgently - not in 2020, not in 2030, but now", said President Nasheed.

"The Secretary-General's Climate Change Summit tomorrow is a unique opportunity to up the tempo and head towards Copenhagen with a true sense of urgency and purpose," said Prime Minister Thomas of Grenada.

"World leaders must mandate their negotiators to deliver a deal in December, full of the ambition and scale of commitment necessary to address the challenge of our generation".

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