

# The Future We Demand

**Pacific Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and allies appeal to member states of the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 for strong political leadership to avert the imminent disaster to our planet by urgently changing dominant development and political mindsets, and moving quickly to real and transformative solutions.**

## **Call to reaffirm Rio principles**

The 'business as usual' mindset has failed. We must accept that there is nothing 'sustainable' about current economic and social systems. We see this in the recurring global financial, energy, food, water and ecological crises leading to deeper inequality, displacement and dislocation of peoples, violent conflict, and marginalization of vulnerable communities and groups. We have surpassed critical tipping points in our ecological carrying capacity with already around 200 species becoming extinct around the world every day. We must do all it takes to ensure that the last remaining key biodiversity areas are safeguarded from encroachment by unsustainable production and consumption.

Agendas and decisions based on these failed economic, social and ecological conditions nevertheless persist, reinventing and perpetuating the problem under new guises. The Green Economy, seen as the RIO+ vehicle to usher in genuine sustainable development, must be founded on people's welfare and community empowerment as the key stewards of biodiversity. Government policies toward private sector involvement especially by transnational corporations in so-called Green Economy industries must be framed within the larger goal of national development, poverty eradication, participation by citizens, and transparency and accountability. We must move away from modalities where regulatory frameworks are written up at the regional level with the involvement of powerful countries whose economic interests are tied with overseas investments. The green economy must be embedded in a holistic concept of sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

In 1992 the unique environmental and economic vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) were also recognized and articulated in the Barbados and Mauritius documents in Agenda 21, and subsequently reiterated by the Association of Small islands states (AOSIS) and G77 Groups<sup>2</sup>. There were also over 121 references to gender in Rio's Agenda 21, and a core approach of social justice and human rights included equality for women and girls.

Twenty years on, these pledges made in Rio remain unfulfilled, unresourced, and under threat.

## **Revisiting the Pacific context**

Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) are acutely aware of our multifaceted risks to global economic crisis and environmental shocks. However, PSIDS also recognize our importance resilience that remains under-emphasized by civil society, development partners and Pacific governments themselves, perhaps because it directly counters the commonly pushed ideologies of free trade and financialised economies.

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<sup>1</sup> Civil Society Reflection Group on global development perspectives

<sup>2</sup> AOSIS Statement: 'New AOSIS Chair shares her view on Rio+20'. Hon. Ambassador Marlene Moses, Nauru

Our locally appropriate subsistence models of economic production that exist outside of the global market economy ensure some level of resilience to shocks. We know this from research, and in our daily lives. Our close spiritual connection with the lands and sea is also at the heart of this resilience. So as Pacific peoples we continue to defend our right to re-create and sustain our own systems of social, environmental and economic organization in the midst of regional and global pressure to conform to dysfunctional trade and financial systems that would further harm our people. In contrast the Rio Principles, if fully and meaningfully respected, would assist to safeguard Pacific peoples' food sovereignty, rights to trade in fairness with others, while also maintaining the good health of our environment.

However, this resilience is being challenged at Rio+20 by the dominant economic and political agendas.

Therefore, mindful of the sovereign right of each state to exercise its political and economic self-determination on issues of national interest, PSIDS Government are called upon to rethink 'popular' development paths to achieving sustainable development.

All mineral extractive industries, including experimental seabed mining, are examples of old school mal-development. What is needed is a strategic refusal by small island states and allies to participate in this false development course. In allowing essential ecosystems to be mined, we are part of a global industrialisation process that views the environment as a means to profit, with environment degradation, social exploitation, biodiversity loss, climate injustice and violence as its consequence. As Pacific peoples, we know better. The creation of platforms to enable effective national transition toward sustainable development alternatives is imperative.

The impacts of climate change are getting worse. Recent floods in Fiji, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and drought in Tuvalu and Niue attest to the worsening impacts. In the coming decades, climate change will motivate or force at least 200 million people to permanently leave their homelands in search of viable livelihoods and safety. Climate-induced resettlement and migration is already occurring in our region. PSIDS are thus redirecting limited resources towards acquisition of lands, conflict resolution, human rights and welfare needs of its peoples. Some PSIDS already face the ultimate threat of statelessness. Member states must give this existential threat due consideration. Clearly, the urgent and ambitious reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to levels established by the IPCC is the ONLY just solution to avert runaway climate change.

Our current ecological crisis will also require urgent state policy and resources for agricultural and fisheries practices based on universal human rights and social justice - not just because this is the right thing to do, but because it is the inattention to core human rights and needs that has brought us to this very point.

The future that the peoples of the Pacific demand in solidarity with others around the world, is one of social justice and human rights for all, and a recognition of the need to balance the three pillars of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic sustainability.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore in appealing to the UNCSD to regain full ownership of the Rio process, Pacific Civil society organizations urgently call upon member states to:

- reclaim and reaffirm their commitment to the principles of sustainable development laid out in Agenda 21. These include the principle of: 'common but differentiated responsibility', 'precautionary principle', the principle of 'historical responsibility' (historical debt) and more recently the principle of 'free prior and informed consent';
- re-establish state responsibility as an indispensable actor in this process of reversing the imbalances created by the dominant economic system, beginning with setting legal and enforceable frameworks and standards of gender equality and universal human rights as well as social, economic and ecological justice

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<sup>3</sup> Rio+20 Wm's Major Group Statement, UNCSD Bureau Informal Dialogue with Major Groups. 27 March, 2012

as the means to, as well as the goals of, the creation and maintenance of sustainable and holistic communities;

- accept that there are limits to the 'growth' paradigm and that the Green Economy, put forward as a strategy to realise genuine sustainable development, must be safeguarded from corporatised growth-based frames and initiatives that serve to perpetuate these failures;
- reaffirm that poverty and economic injustice cannot be alleviated by more 'growth' but rather through more economic-social inclusion and in reemphasizing human quality in equilibrium with the environment as the key focus of development. A just, sustainable society is possible and more desirable than a society in constant material expansion. This approach is the only alternative to catastrophe.
- In recognition of the special challenges of mining in the Pacific region, PSIDS are further called upon to:
  - reject mineral extractive industries, and in particular experimental sea bed mining in the Pacific and to support the transition toward sustainable alternatives;
  - reassert state responsibility to always uphold, through policy regulation and enforcement, the interests of the public and of the environment over that of corporate industry;
  - strengthen the accountability mechanisms, resources and capacity of UNCLOS, as the only international UN governance mechanism on oceans;
- dually recognize that SIDS are in need of urgent financing for adaptation and mitigation actions under the principle of historical responsibility; AND also encourage and nurture the development of local economic and social models of development that increase the resilience of PSIDS communities to face the adverse impacts of the ongoing global interlinked crises;
- take decisive action by engaging in collaboration between States and global civil society partners to develop new paradigms of 'oikos' and whole-earth justice. Such a framing would include integrated, synergistic work on the financial crisis, the food crisis, climate change, universal human rights including gender equality, indigenous rights, and social justice;
- Finally, we call for legally binding commitments to reduce global greenhouse gases by 45% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 from pre-industrial levels to guarantee that global mean temperatures stay below 1.5° Celsius, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and as the real minimum level to ensure continued survival of Pacific peoples.

16 April 2012

**This statement is endorsed by the following local, national, regional, economic south and global organizations:**

Pacific Network on Globalisation, PANG

Pacific Conference of Churches, PCC

Fiji Women's Rights Movement, FWRM, Fiji

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN

**If you would like to add your organizational or individual endorsement to this call, please email: [research@pang.org.fj](mailto:research@pang.org.fj) by COB (Fiji) latest Monday 23 April, 2012.**