

# Otin Taai Declaration

*The Pacific Churches statement on climate change\*Otin Taai, pronounced "osin tai", means sunrise, a symbol of hope in the Kiribati language*

A statement and recommendations from the Pacific churches' consultation on climate change  
6-11 March, 2004  
Tarawa, Kiribati

*Let all the islands rise and sing and to our God their praises bring,  
On strings and drums God's might proclaim to shout the glory of God's name.*

*Pasifika, Pasifika, with throbbing reef and coral shore,  
For fish and shell and mighty whale, for all God's gifts our thanks we pour.*

## Overview

Here on the small island atoll of Kiribati, the impacts of human-induced climate change are already visible. **The sea level is rising. People's homes are vulnerable to the increasingly high tides and storm surges. Shores are eroding and the coral reefs are becoming bleached. The water supplies and soil fertility are being threatened by the intrusion of salt water.** Weather patterns are less predictable posing risks to fisher-folk and farmers.

Kiribati is not alone in its plight. Many other island nations in the Pacific are experiencing similar impacts of human-induced climate change. Our peoples, who number about 7 million, are already suffering and are vulnerable to more impacts in the future.

We, participants in the Pacific Churches' Consultation on Climate Change, feel called by God to:

- **Affirm our commitment to care for the earth as our response to God's love for creation;**
- **Declare** as forcefully as we can **the urgency of the threat of human-induced climate change to the lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and eco-systems of the Pacific Islands;**
- Dedicate ourselves to **engaging our churches in education and action on climate change;**
- Commit ourselves to ecumenical collaboration among our churches and with other religious and secular bodies in the Pacific and beyond that will increase the effectiveness of our national and regional efforts;
- **Call on our sisters and brothers in Christ** throughout the world **to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change.** We issue this call **particularly to churches in the highly-industrialized nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions.** We further **urge these countries to take responsibility for the ecological damage that they have caused by paying for the costs of adaptation to the impacts that can be anticipated;**
- Invite church-related specialized ministries for emergency-response, development and advocacy to integrate climate change and adaptation projects into their policy-development, education and advocacy;
- Express appreciation to the World Council of Churches for its support of the Pacific churches on the issue of climate change and **request that the voices of the Pacific become increasingly reflected in the WCC Climate Change Programme and in the next WCC Assembly in 2006;**
- **Pressure all countries to ratify and implement the Kyoto Protocol\*, especially highly-industrialized nations such as the United States of America, Australia and the Russian Federation which to date have not ratified the Protocol;**

- Encourage companies that are major producers or consumers of fossil fuels to support a transition toward less carbon-intensive economies, reduced energy usage and the development of cleaner, renewable energy sources.

Who we are

The Consultation involved 45-50 people most of whom were from Pacific Island countries (Kiribati, Nauru, French Polynesia, Niue, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and the Cook Islands). Ten of the participants came from outside the region (Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, Norway and the USA). A number of resource persons from Kiribati and other South Pacific countries attended. Included among the Pacific and international visitors were pastors, youth workers, church representatives, members of the Kiribati Protestant Church, and Pacific Conference of Churches and World Council of Churches staff persons.

Our context

We are aware that this Consultation builds on an important history of ecumenical concerns for social and ecological justice here in the Pacific. Nuclear testing with its long-term consequences is one significant example. More recently (August 2001), the Pacific played host to a WCC global conference on economic globalisation that brought together representatives of churches, ecumenical and civil society organization from 29 countries. Entitled **Island of Hope - A Pacific Alternative to Economic Globalisation**, the gathering affirmed that "spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect are components of the concept of the Island of Hope which prioritises relationships, celebrates quality of life and values human beings and creation over the production of things." This current Climate Change Consultation can be seen as a continuation of the Pacific churches' commitment to challenging those forces which threaten human community and creation and to modeling alternative approaches of justice and love.

Specifically in terms of climate change, our context for this consultation is a region that will be very severely affected. It is predicted that the Pacific Region will likely warm by between 0.6 and 3.5 degrees C in this century, a rate of warming which is much larger than the observed changes during the last century and very likely without precedent during at least the last 10,000 years. For the Pacific peoples, perhaps the most significant negative effect of these higher temperatures is the rise of sea levels resulting from thermal expansion of oceans, melting ice-caps and increased precipitation. It is projected that sea levels will rise by as much as 5mm per year over the next 100 years as a result of global warming.

Human-induced climate change will have an extensive range of negative impacts on peoples of the Pacific Islands including:

Loss of coastal land and infrastructure due to erosion, inundation and storm surges;

Increase in frequency and severity of cyclones with risks to human life, health, homes and communities;

Loss of coral reefs with implications for the sea eco-systems on which the livelihood of many Islanders depends;

Changes in rainfall patterns with increased droughts in some areas and more rainfall with flooding in other areas;

Threats to drinkable water due to changes in rainfall, sea-level rise and inundation;

Loss of sugarcane, yams, taro and cassava due to temperature extremes and rainfall changes;

Human health impacts with an increase in incidence of dengue fever and diarrhea .

## What we believe

Throughout the Bible from the Genesis creation story onward, we learn about God's love for the earth and all its creatures including humanity. The **Biblical understanding of the wholeness and inter-relatedness of all creation has some similarities to the traditional Pacific teachings about the land known as Vanua/Fonua/Whenua/Enua and the ocean referred to as Moana.** The implications of this **vision** include the **need for us humans to live with respect and humility**

within God's creation. Responding to God's love for creation, we are called to care for the earth and limit destructive activities such as those that contribute to climate change.

Being good stewards or custodians leads to a reciprocal relationship between people and the earth. We are dependent on the earth and must take care of it. If we do so, the land and oceans will yield bounty sufficient for all. Conversely, if human societies damage the earth, people suffer.

We would like to say a word about God's promise to Noah not to flood the earth again. Some Christians view this covenant as a guarantee that they are not at risk of flooding from climate change. But the sea level is rising and threatening Pacific Islands with flooding from high tides and storm surges. This is not an act of God. It is a result of human economic and consumer activities that pollute the atmosphere and lead to climate change. Most of these polluting emissions come from highly-industrialized countries. Our response to God's covenant with Noah should be to act in love toward God's creation and to reduce the pollution that is contributing to climate change. By placing us on the earth, God has given us both the right to use it and the responsibility to do so with care.

## What we have done together

The Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) played host to the Consultation. The leaders and members of the KPC were incredibly generous in their hospitality and organizational work. Most participants were hosted in community homes. The KPC sponsored numerous feast and cultural evenings as well as facilitating the logistics for this international gathering. We are very appreciative and indebted to them.

We benefited enormously from the Youth Consultation that took place in Kiribati immediately before the Pacific Churches' Consultation on Climate Change. Twenty-three young people gathered for four days of worship, singing, study on climate change and the drafting of recommended strategies for ecumenical action both for Pacific youth and for the churches. When the Pacific Churches' Consultation began on March 6th, the youth brought their passion and expertise on the issue of climate change into larger the event.

The delegates for the Consultation arrived in Kiribati on Friday March 5th and immediately became immersed in the worship and cultural life of our hosts the Kiribati Protestant Church by participating in the World Day of Prayer Service in the community of Bairiki. A community feast and cultural evening followed the service. Saturday was spent in exposure visits to areas on Kiribati where there is clear evidence of the erosion caused by the rising sea levels, high tides and storm surges. A welcome dinner sponsored by the Kiribati Protestant Church took place on Sunday evening with more indications of the generosity of the Kiribati people. Participants attended worship in various communities on Sunday. The Consultation programme sessions ran from Monday March 8th to Wednesday March 10th with such elements as morning devotions and Bible study, a dialogue with the Kiribati Minister of Environment (Hon. Martin Puta Tofinga), an introduction to the WCC Climate Change Programme (David Hallman and Nafisa D'Souza), a key-note address on the inter-relationship between oil-producing countries and climate change affected countries (Atle Sommerfeldt of Norwegian Church Aid), and presentations on climate change in the Pacific Region by the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (Andre Volentras) and the World Wildlife

Fund (Amelia Makutu). Plenary and small group discussions were interspersed through the programme.

The Consultation culminated with deliberations on a draft statement and recommendations which emerged from the plenary and small group discussion sessions.

## Recommendations

### *To the Pacific churches*

1. Encourage the local churches to include in their annual budgets money to be used for education of their congregations on the issues regarding climate change.
2. Youth members be used to spearhead activities relating to climate change awareness.
3. Churches work together with ecumenical partners in the sharing of information.
4. Encourage local churches to promote their own workshops and not wait for the national or regional ecumenical organizations to facilitate consultations on climate change.
5. Church leaders take the initiative on the work of churches on climate change through Bible studies and sermons focusing on the creation stories and other relevant Biblical scriptures pertaining to it.
6. Work in partnership with the government and ecumenical partners to implement policies that will ensure that climate change becomes part of the curriculum of schools and theological institutions.
7. Include the issue of climate change in Christian education curriculum by 2005.
8. Promote a day of prayer specifically related to climate change.
9. Form a committee within each church to deal with issues of climate change including educating the people on its effects and receiving feedback through story-telling and specific examples of changes happening in the local environment.
10. Emphasise the theology of creation in the seminaries and how it relates to climate change and the life of the Pacific people
11. Utilise existing church and educational structures to raise awareness of climate change e.g. church committees, women's and men's groups, youth groups, Sunday school, parents and teachers associations.
12. Climate change resources be made available in local languages and scripture teachings be in local languages.
13. Churches (pastors) equip themselves with an eco-theology to fully understand the relationship of God, nature and the people.
14. Include Biblical texts related to creation and relevant to climate change in lectionaries.
15. Nominate from within their own faith community, a coordinator to work with the local churches and communicate with other interested parties to observe and accompany the implementation of the recommendations.
16. Use mass communication to disseminate information on climate change issues.
17. Make active use of existing materials, resources and organizations (WCC, WWF, SPREP, etc.). approved

### *To the Pacific Conference of Churches*

1. To increase, improve, update and disseminate to the Pacific Churches information on climate change from the region and Global bodies.
2. Recognize coordination work from individual churches and promote climate change through mass media and promotional items ie T-shirts, caps etc...
3. To produce, provide, and share theological resources that focus on prayer and reflection

related to climate change through consultations and workshops.

4. To set aside a specific Sunday as Pacific Climate Change Sunday.
5. To engage groups from other religious traditions in dialogue and action on climate change (e.g. inter-faith activities in Fiji)
6. To prioritise the issue of climate change on the agenda of PCC Executive Committee and the PCC 2007 Assembly.

***To the World Council of Churches and to WCC member churches***

1. Continue supporting the Pacific Islands in their struggle on climate change.
2. Include at least one representative from the Pacific Region on the WCC Working Group on Climate Change.
3. Publish the Consultation's declaration, report, youth statement and plan of action, and background materials.
4. Translate the Consultation materials and send them to the churches.
5. Monitor and accompany the implementation of the Consultation recommendations in the individual churches of the Pacific.
6. Disseminate the Consultation Declaration to the global WCC Climate Change Network and WCC member churches.
7. Offer a space to the representatives of the Pacific churches to the WCC Assembly (Porto Alegre, Brazil 2006) to share their concerns on climate change in addition to the allocated time for the sharing from the regions.
8. Strengthen the WCC Climate Change Working Group to continue working with churches of the Pacific Region and at international levels.
9. Facilitate a follow-up consultation on climate change.
10. Assist Pacific churches in gaining financial assistance for activities on climate change.
11. Provide updated information on climate change including obstacles and solutions.
12. That the participants from this consultation continue to be involved in follow-up meetings and/or events on climate change in the Pacific to share the understanding that they have developed on the issue.
13. Continue to pursue dialogue with OPEC countries to support reduction of fossil fuel use causing climate change and involve assistance from the interfaith working group of WCC.
14. Facilitate the attendance of a delegation from Pacific countries affected by climate change to attend the Annual General Meeting of one oil company every year from 2005
15. Notes that the WCC Office in the Pacific will co- host the Pacific Islands Regional Roundtable on Nature Conservation in 2004 in partnership with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Building on this partnership, the WCC OP and SPREP will work closely to raise public awareness and develop educational tools related to climate change and the associated thematic issues identified under the SPREP Action Plan 2005-2009.
16. That WCC facilitate a special presentation by Pacific young people on the effects of climate change in the programme of the 2006 WCC Assembly.

To Denominational and Ecumenical Specialised Ministries for Emergency-response, Development and Advocacy, both in the North and the South<sup>1</sup>. Make climate change a priority and provide resources for activities on climate change (e.g. awareness-raising, adaptation, emergency relief, advocacy) by churches/church-based organizations.<sup>2</sup> Formulate comprehensive policies on support to adaptation programmes in countries severely affected by climate change. This should include:

- Strategic emergency-preparations on a local, national, regional and global level within the context of Action by Churches Together International (ACT)
  - formulate programmes aimed at increasing the capacity of churches and church based organisations to: - awareness-raising - networking with other relevant actors in the civil society, government and the private sector - project implementation in local communities
  - Prioritise programmes in long term development which are part of adaptation measures, including if necessary a change in priorities, e.g.
    - Emergency-preventing projects
    - Alternative energy in all development programmes
    - Water programmes
    - Rehabilitation projects
3. Advocate, specifically in the OECD-countries for increased funding for adaptation programmes.
  4. Encourage teaching institutions to include climate change in denominational theological institutions and seminaries.
  5. Encourage recognition that the devastating effects of climate change are a reality in the Pacific and that resources both personnel and funding are required to assist those affected.
  6. Support disaster-relief in the Pacific Island countries.

### ***To governments in the Pacific***

1. Continue their struggle and passion for the survival of Pacific Island countries
2. Be proactive and implement a feasible and sustainable action plan on climate change.
3. Invite NGOs and churches to participate with government to confront the issue of climate change.
4. Promote awareness on climate change and variability through informal education activities, through the mass media, annual international occasions such as World Environment Day and in all departments in the governments as a cross-cutting issue.
5. Enforce legislation to minimize the misuse of natural resources (sand, gravel & forests, etc.)
6. Work in cooperation with the churches using mass media to give updated information on climate change.
7. Extend government projects on education and awareness programmes to the churches in the Pacific.
8. Strengthen political leadership in enacting legislation related to climate change.
9. Provide precise information concerning governmental action plans and the situation on climate change in the respective countries (transparency).
10. Ensure the optimum preparation of the negotiators at the international levels.
11. Work towards the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.
12. Provide an increased budget for adaptation measures.
13. Support research and studies on limiting the effects of climate change and the technologies to be put in place to decrease the vulnerability of Pacific Island countries.
14. Address climate change as a top priority in national development plans, policies and strategies.
15. Invest in education and training to develop the capacity required to fully address national concerns related to climate change.

### ***To the governments of highly-industrialised countries (Annex 1 Countries in the Kyoto Protocol)***

1. Acknowledge their special responsibilities for the effects of climate change - take action immediately because the Pacific people are suffering, crying and dying right now
2. Reduce fossil fuel production/consumption and increase use of renewable energy.
3. Provide scholarship funds to students of the Pacific for higher educational level studies on

the issue of climate change.

4. Ratify and implement the Kyoto Protocol
5. Increase budgets for adaptation programmes in the Pacific.
6. To implement the reduction targets specified in the Kyoto Protocol within the first commitment period.
7. To relocate and compensate the victims of climate change as requested by Pacific countries.

***To major fossil fuel producing and energy consuming companies***

1. We demand that these companies change their attitude and policies and recognize that they share accountability for the effects of climate change and contribute to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Special Climate Change Fund for adaptation activities in the Pacific.
2. Company scientists and government bodies should see firsthand the effects of climate change by visiting the Pacific and meeting with the peoples affected.
3. Reorient their work to focus on renewable energy as priority programmes of action.
4. Support shareholder actions and petitions which address climate change.
5. Members of the governing bodies of these companies should consider the theological views of churches that address climate change and recognise what their companies are doing to God's creation.

*\* The Kyoto Protocol was negotiated by countries through the United Nations in 1997 in Kyoto Japan. The Protocol sets out actual targets with a set time frame for industrialized countries (referred to as Annex I countries in the Protocol) to reduce their polluting greenhouse gas emissions that are leading to climate change. The Protocol includes provisions (e.g. the Clean Development Mechanism) that allow highly-industrialized (Annex 1) nations to meet part of their targets by funding sustainable projects in developing nations. The Kyoto Protocol has yet to come into force. In order for it to become international law it requires at least 55 countries to ratify it by adopting it in their parliaments or legislatures. More than 100 nations have so far ratified. But the Protocol must also be ratified by highly-industrialized (Annex 1) countries making up at least 55% of total greenhouse gas emissions in industrialized nations. Australia and the United States, although major emitters, have announced that they will not ratify the Protocol. This leaves Russia as the only highly-industrialized (Annex 1) country with enough emissions to meet the 55% criteria in the Protocol and thus bring it into effect. Russia is still deliberating whether to ratify.*