

Fiji student moves Copenhagen climate summit with appeal

Submitted by TemoL on Tue, 12/08/2009 - 05:33



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"Fifty years from now, my children will be raising their own families. It is my hope that they will still be able to call our beautiful islands home," said Leah Wickham, a 24-year-old student at the University of the South Pacific.

Wickham issued her appeal to the conference's president, Connie Hedegaard, and Yvo de Boer, the executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

"I am relying on the decision makers to sign a deal that will mean that my children inherit a safe world," a visibly emotional Wickham said. "All the hopes and dreams of my generation rest on Copenhagen."

According to Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), sea levels have already risen by 17 centimetres in the 20th century, threatening low-lying island states in the Pacific Ocean.

A member of Greenpeace, a pressure group, Wickham presented delegates with a TckTckTck petition signed by 10 million people calling for a "fair, ambitious and binding deal" at the Copenhagen summit.

The TckTckTck campaign is calling on rich nations to provide at least 150 billion dollars a year in aid to help poorer countries adapt to the impacts of climate change.

It is also seeking a legally binding agreement aimed at limiting the concentration of carbon dioxide to 350 parts per million (ppm), which many scientists say is the safe upper limit. The current concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere was recently estimated at 387 ppm.

TckTckTck says bringing CO2 levels back to the 350 ppm limit would require emission cuts by the developing world of at least 40 per cent by 2020.

Hedegaard said pressure from non-governmental organizations and civil society meant it would be "very difficult" for politicians not to deliver during the 12-day conference.

De Boer said Wickham's emotional speech showed that the conference was about people's "livelihoods" rather than just pieces of paper.