

## **Act Now- It is a matter of life and death**

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By: Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific at COP 15

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To many the Pacific is known as “The Liquid Continent!”

Most of the Pacific island states are Small Island Developing States (SIDS) characterized by their smallness, narrow coral- and reef-islands which have very low average elevation above mean sea level. Most of our island countries are especially vulnerable because of their geological formation, and the destructive forces of human induced climate change are already causing havoc in our lives and lands.

The Pacific Indigenous Peoples have considered the developmental impact of not only climate change, but also the flawed solutions being employed to address it. The rush to bio-fuel production will barely dent the developed world's appetite for fossil fuels, but has already made the basic food more expensive in many developing states with contentious implications to food security for our peoples.

“We call for real and genuine solutions to climate change, not false solutions like ocean fertilization, REDD, biofuels and monocultures for plantations that erode and violate the rights of Indigenous peoples and forest-dependant communities, and destroy biodiversity,” said Fiu Elisara, Samoa.

Any definition of forests must strongly differentiate between plantations and natural forests to incorporate fundamental Indigenous understandings of forests and account for the vast differences in carbon storage capacity.

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“We demand that forests not be included in carbon trading schemes, and call on all governments to halt deforestation and keep fossil fuels in the ground; not trade one for the other. Forests need to be protected, but they must be protected by strengthening and enforcing forest legislation, not using market mechanisms.” Excerpt from the Nuku’alofa Declaration: Indigenous Peoples Of The Pacific

“Developed countries, including those in the Pacific, namely New Zealand and Australia must do more than play the stock exchange with carbon credits, change begins at home to do otherwise is climate colonialism. In the context of New Zealand industries such as

dairy farming and forestry should be not be given a free pass to continuing polluting, this is irresponsible Government.” stated Teanau Tuiono, Ngapuhi, Aotearoa.

“For us Pacific peoples, the discussion on climate change is not just a theoretical issue that we talk about when we come to these global meetings! It is there and we see the effects in our daily lives. For us it is a matter of life and death!” said Malia Nobrega, Kanaka Maoli, and Hawai’i. In many cases we have to decide whether to stay on our islands or leave our homes. As sovereign countries, our rights as countries are protected under the Charter of the United Nations. We plead accountability against those causing these violations of our rights to exist as peoples, as countries, and as sovereign nations. Someone must bear responsibility for our demise when we lose our cultures, when our traditional ways of lives are trashed, and we are denied our freedom to exist as peoples. This is an issue of climate justice that we are calling for here and will continue to do so beyond Copenhagen.

We stand in solidarity with our indigenous brothers and sisters from all regions of the world in continuing to demand that any and all climate change decisions or frameworks must recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and must be in accordance with international human rights law and standards including the UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169, among other human rights instruments. This includes our rights to resources, lands and territories, our right of free, prior and informed consent, and the recognition of our vision, indigenous knowledge and our contributions in solving the climate change crisis.

We make this call for action not only as Pacific Islanders but in response to our collective responsibilities as stewards of creation. Our ‘aina (land) and moana (ocean) have always sustained us and will continue to refresh our souls and spirit as Indigenous Peoples of the Liquid Continent.

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