

## **OXFAM: Pacific Islands are being ‘hung out to dry’**

By Online Editor

3:54 pm GMT+12, 23/10/2009, New Zealand



Today, Pacific Islanders waded out into the sea and hung 350 T-shirts, each printed with the name of a different island, on a series of giant washing lines to highlight the insufficient action being taken to combat climate change. ‘350 Islands for Change’ was organised by Oxfam as part of the ‘350 International Day of Climate Action’, involving over 4200 events in 170 countries.

Jane Filemu, a 9-year-old Samoan girl, walked through knee-deep water to hang the final T-shirt, then turned and recited a poem. She told the crowd: “I have a choice to be one of many, to make a better world for the future of Aotearoa, Pasifika, our planet. Everyone has the power to choose wrong or right. Family, we can work together, we can make a change. Alofa, Aroha, Peace!”

Pacific people, who have caused almost no historical climate change pollution, are already struggling with the effects – worsening droughts, salination of fresh water supplies, food shortages, eroding coastlines, and the very real threat of being displaced. They need support and leadership from developed countries who have caused the problem. Instead, New Zealand is behaving like a laggard in the international climate change negotiations and our Pacific neighbours are being hung out to dry.

“The outpouring of support after the recent tsunami has been inspiring,” says Oxfam spokesperson Jason Garman. “New Zealanders have shown such compassion and generosity towards our Pacific neighbours and our family members. What a disappointing contradiction that our Government is showing such blatant disregard toward them with its behaviour on climate change.”

One of the major roadblocks that must be overcome in order to reach a new global agreement in Copenhagen this December is the issue of funding to help developing countries protect themselves and adapt to climate change. The money must be considered payment to cover the costs of the damage done. It is not aid and should not be taken from existing aid commitments.

Even now, with 44 days until the Copenhagen conference starts, the Government has yet to announce that it will contribute new funding for climate change adaptation. New Zealand recently received two more 'Fossil of the Day' awards at the UN climate change meeting in Bangkok, given to those countries preventing progress in the negotiations.

“Do we really want to be a country that blocks this urgent global deal from happening because of short-sighted self-interest?” asks Garman. “It’s time for New Zealand to take responsibility for our fair share – both of the necessary emissions cuts and the costs to help people on the front lines of climate change. What we are doing now is simply not good enough for our Pacific neighbours or the Pasifika community here.

“With 4200 events taking place throughout almost every country on Earth, this is the largest environmental action the world has ever seen,” says Garman. “People should be inspired. It’s an historic movement driven by concerned citizens calling for justice, responsibility and collective sanity.”

SOURCE: OXFAM