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Rudd leans on Tuvalu over warming limit

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Behind the scenes: Australia has been accused of trying to bully smaller nations in Copenhagen (Australian Science Media Centre)

Tuvalu Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia says Australia is pressuring him to drop his demand for global warming to be limited to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Australia is supporting a deal at the United Nations climate change talks in Copenhagen that would aim to limit the global temperature rise to no more than 2C by the turn of the century.

But low-lying islands like Tuvalu and the Maldives say that is not enough to save them and want a 1.5C limit instead.

Mr Ielemia says he has been receiving calls from the delegation attached to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Copenhagen.

"Especially from the advisers in the Prime Minister's office and members of the Australian team who are here in Copenhagen," he said.

"I tell them I won't move anywhere else. I'm going to argue, I'm going to keep up the fight."

He says these negotiations have left a bitter taste and developed nations are trying to offer money to cut a deal.

Mr Rudd has batted away accusations that he has been bullying smaller nations at the summit, saying he refuses to be distracted by "the slings and arrows being thrown around during these discussions".

But it is a recurring theme from smaller nations that, ahead of his arrival at the summit, Mr Rudd was on the telephone to many small nations, particularly in the Pacific, trying to convince them to back down on their calls for a legally binding agreement.

Small island states earlier used the Copenhagen meeting to issue a final, desperate plea for help, with Tuvalu likening the state of the negotiations to the Titanic - a ship sinking fast.

The states say that without a framework for action by Friday, they will be the first victims of climate change.

They argue that a 2C temperature rise is too much for low-lying nations and they will sink as a result. They're supporting an agreement put forward by Tuvalu that calls for a cap on emissions.

Chief negotiator Ian Fry says the state of the talks so far gives them little hope.

"I have the feeling of dread that we are on the Titanic and sinking fast, but we can't launch any life boats because a member of the crew has decided that we are not sinking and that we have to have informal consultations to decide whether we are sinking or not," he said.

"It's time, matter and precedent to launch the lifeboats; it's time to save this process. Let us consider the legal texts that are on the table and move forward."