



**Post
Copenhagen 2009
The dawning of a
new era in Climate
Change action?**

Striking an accord

At the end of 2009 the world's attention was turned to Copenhagen. We watched and waited to see the outcome of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15).

No-one knew quite what to expect from this unprecedented gathering of nations. Some hoped the conference would usher in a new period of robust climate change action. Others were skeptical about the ability of so many nations to agree on a way forward. So what did happen at the COP15 conference in December 2009?

The consensus of most environmental groups is that the conference "failed". Our world leaders could not achieve the "fair, ambitious and binding" agreement for which many ecological organisations were calling.

Instead, a document called the **Copenhagen Accord** (see web link on page four) was created. The Accord simply sets out some key principles at which signatory countries should aim, outlines goals for aid to vulnerable countries, and acknowledges the need to keep global temperature rise under 2°C from pre-Industrial temperatures.

The Accord does not set out any actual targets or provide measures to assess progress towards such targets.

Without the legally binding treaty for which many were hoping, some fear that industrialised nations, such as Australia, will have an excuse to relax their efforts. Meanwhile those for whom climate change presents the biggest threat continue to agitate for stronger action.

On page two we speak to Maria Tiimon, who travelled to Copenhagen in December 2009 to plead for the rights, and the lives, of her people.

Contents

Introduction: 'Striking an accord'	1
From Kiribati to Copenhagen: An interview with Maria Tiimon	2-3
Conclusion: Where to now?	4
Web links	

From Kiribati to Copenhagen

Maria Tiimon is a woman from the nation of Kiribati, one of many low-lying Pacific island nations whose peoples are feeling the direct effects of climate change today. From drought, to salt-water contamination, to the threat of inundation, climate change presents a daily struggle to Maria's people. With a delegation from the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP), Maria attended last year's conference in Copenhagen. She shares her thoughts and experiences with us.



Maria Tiimon dancing in Copenhagen

What was your goal at the COP15 conference?

When I went to Copenhagen my aim was to get justice out of the conference for those low-lying islands like Kiribati. I was disappointed. [The outcome] is not justice at all.

What impact did the conference have on you? Are you discouraged?

I wouldn't be discouraged by what the world leaders' decision was. For me I get more determined to fight for justice. That's how I feel and I hope that other people in the grassroots will feel the same. I strongly believe that it's only through us - the people who fight and push our world leaders - that we can get them to listen. I won't give up until we get justice.

Were you inspired by other delegations that you met at Copenhagen?

Being with everyone from all over the globe gives me more courage because I know that I'm not the only one fighting for this issue. I was so happy to meet a lot of them, and we all knew that we were there for only one reason. It really touched my heart.

What was your experience of the politics of the conference?

We had a farewell dinner with our President from Kiribati [President Anote Tong] in Copenhagen and he expressed his disappointment in the process. He said that he had met with the President of the United States before Copenhagen and he'd sounded so positive. But in the end it's all talk, because the economy gets put first. President Tong felt that the world leaders were not listening to him.

Do you think that there is hope for a better outcome in future conferences?

This [conference] didn't work out - maybe we can approach it from a different angle? Rather than saying "They didn't listen to us, it's pointless to have another go", learn from that. I feel that we - people at the grassroots - need to do something before our world leaders come together and have that conference. Unless the people at the grassroots do something they might just meet again and talk, talk, talk. We need action right now, not meetings and talking. Enough is enough.

How do the people of Kiribati feel about climate change?

There's a lot of changes in Kiribati. There're well waters that are drying up now and becoming brackish. Life is very difficult from the past. The elders say "We might not be here when Kiribati is under water, but what about my great great grandchildren? I want them to be saved". In the islands, especially elderly people, they have been ecological people. They have a very high respect for the land. Although our parents and great grandparents are trying to keep the earth the way it is, it is being destroyed by climate change.

"I won't give up until we get justice"

The relocation of I-Kiribati people to Australia has been proposed in the event that Kiribati is inundated. How are I-Kiribati people responding to this idea?

I asked my dad "What if Kiribati is going under water, would you be happy to come and live in Australia?" He said "No way. This is where I was born, this is where I grew up and this is where I want to die".

Faces of the Pacific



When climate change talk gets lost in facts and figures, the people of low-lying Pacific Islands remind us that the issue has a human face.



Photos by Jonny Lewis, courtesy of the Edmund Rice Centre

It's not about moving or migrating my people, it's about losing our culture, it's about losing our identity. We have every right to stay in our country and we just need our world leaders to work with us. They just need to listen to us and give us a fair deal.

So, for you, this issue is not just about respecting the earth, but also about respecting human rights?

It is all about human rights. Because this is the life of humans beings that is threatened by climate change. It is not just about relocation and migration, no, it's about the life of people. It's my life, it's my peoples' lives. To me that's one reason that I'm so determined to do it because I know that I'm representing the human faces of the pacific.

"Every single little thing has an effect on the low-lying islands"

Are you angered by those nations that stood in the way of a binding deal at Copenhagen?

I'm not pointing fingers at other countries, what I'm trying to say is "Can't we work together as a team?" We are not blaming anyone, we just want world leaders to work with us and listen to us, it's something that the people really need. My voice that I want the world to hear is "Let's work together as a team and give justice to those people who are the first ones to pay the consequences of what other industrialised countries have done".

How should everyday Australians begin to show their support for you?

I'm asking every single person in Australia to be very conscious of what they do in their daily lives. It starts from an individual's life, the way we use our electricity, the way we deal with our rubbish, the way we use water. Every single little thing has an effect on the low-lying islands. I'm so conscious of all of these things because I know that every drop, every single little thing we do has an effect on other people.

Can you suggest some actions that Watermark readers could take on this issue?

I'm so desperate to get Pacific Islanders involved in this work. And not only Pacific Islanders but if I could have a church or community who are interested in this, just invite me to give a talk, or join the PCP. Some people in Australia know that there's an impact of climate change in the islands but they don't know exactly. We give workshops and tell stories for people who are interested in helping us out and helping us to make our voice strong to the world. So my pledge to the people out there is, if you have time and you are passionate about this, I would love to work with you on this issue.

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Where to now?

Maria Tiimon's story reminds us that, while climate change may take a back seat for our politicians, it presents a daily struggle for people living in low-lying Pacific islands. Indeed, climate change is an issue of great urgency for all of the world's people.

The 2009 climate conference in Copenhagen yielded disappointing results, but rather than feeling defeated we can, like Maria, find an even greater drive to achieve justice.

In the lead-up to the COP15 conference there was an unprecedented global movement by people at a grassroots level. Through

participation in demonstrations and local campaigns, millions of people around the world sent the message to their leaders that taking strong action on climate change was important to them.

Until our leaders show us that they have listened, either at a national or international level, we must join our voices with Maria's.

Copenhagen 2009 may have been a missed opportunity for the world to fight climate change on a united front, but our nation still has an obligation to act. We don't have to wait until the next conference to tell our leaders that we support strong action on climate change. We can tell them today.

Speaking of Copenhagen...

"Greed wrecked Copenhagen: Now it's up to us all"
Banner at coal blockade protest organised by Rising Tide

"While over 100 countries called for a target of 1.5 degrees and cuts to below 350 ppm CO₂-e, Australia continued to push for two degrees and a 450 ppm CO₂-e target, while offering cuts that would not even fulfill them."

Friends of the Earth

"The Copenhagen Accord has hit a major roadblock but it is no excuse for inaction at home,"

John Connor, CEO of The Climate Institute

"It's clear many world leaders here are moving forward to cut emissions and transition to low carbon economies – regardless of the outcome at Copenhagen. Australia is at risk of being left behind. We urgently need a comprehensive set of national climate laws."

ACF

"This is not good enough to fly and we urge the leaders to come back together again as soon as possible. Repeat the class!"

ACF

Web Links



Pacific Calling Partnership - Stay in touch with Pacific Islanders' fight for justice
www.erc.org.au

The Copenhagen Accord
http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_15/application/pdf/cop15_cph_auv.pdf

Climate Action Network Australia (CANa) - The "lowdown" on Copenhagen
<http://cana.net.au/international-negotiations/lowdown-copenhagen-cop-15>

Detailed analysis of the Copenhagen conference from **Greenpeace**
[http://www.cana.net.au/sites/default/files/Greenpeace COP15 analysis 2.pdf](http://www.cana.net.au/sites/default/files/Greenpeace_COP15_analysis_2.pdf)

Don't forget! If you wish to contact **Maria Tiimon** her details are on page three.

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