



Strong foundations built on the sands of Cancún

In December 2010 representatives from 194 nations gathered for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in Cancún, Mexico.

Cancún is usually a party town, where American students and holiday-makers celebrate on the golden sands. But the Cancún climate conference was a rather quiet affair.

After the international community failed to come to an agreement on how to proceed with climate change action at the 2009 UNFCCC conference in Copenhagen, people lost interest, and perhaps faith, in the UN process. But the Cancún conference proved that, with time and persistence, these international gatherings can produce significant outcomes.

While there is still a long way to go, the Cancún conference ensured that there is a foundation on which future UNFCCC conferences can build. As UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres put it "It is not what is ultimately required but it is the essential foundation on which to build greater, collective ambition".

Notable Outcomes from Cancún

- Agreement that "deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions" are needed
- Agreement to hold global average temperature increase to below 2 degrees Celsius since pre-Industrial times
- Agreement by each nation to adhere to a system of measuring, reporting and verifying emissions cuts against their own targets
- Agreement by developed nations to direct \$30 billion in adaptation and mitigation funding to developing countries by 2012, and \$100 billion by 2020
- Agreement to a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program that creates a financial incentive for forest preservation

Chance for hope to grow again

The Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP) is a community organisation that advocates for low-lying Pacific islands, whose peoples are being threatened by climate change and rising sea levels. The PCP has attended three United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conferences - the most recent being the conference in Cancún in December 2010. Jill Finnane is a member of the PCP and is determined to help the voices of the Pacific be heard. She shared her experiences from Cancún with us.



What role does the PCP play in at events such as the Cancún UNFCCC conference?

Attending the Cancún conference was a part of our ongoing support for low-lying Pacific nations. Pacific island states are doing a tremendous job at making their voices heard, given how hard it is. Our role in Cancún was to help build a space on the international stage where their message could be heard by people who would not otherwise pay attention.

How did the PCP prepare for Cancún?

We were invited to send representatives to the Tarawa Climate Change Conference in November 2010, which was a conference organised by the small islands states and held in Kiribati. Often what happens at big conferences is that everyone argues about what they *don't* agree on. What the president of Kiribati, Anote Tong, and the people who organised the Tarawa conference wanted to do was to get small island states together with industrialised nations like Australia, New Zealand, China and the USA to find out what are the things we *can* agree on. This agreement became the Ambo Declaration.

Can you explain a bit more about the Ambo Declaration?

The Ambo Declaration is named after the village in Kiribati where the conference was held. It states that we need to have a real focus on the small island nations because they're at the very frontline of climate change. There was also agreement that they are going to need help with adaptation. The Ambo declaration was a way of bringing the message of the small island states to Cancún.

Being a part of that conference must have been significant for the PCP?

The fact that the PCP was invited to that event, and attended, was probably the most significant thing we did in 2010. We really valued the opportunity to continue our relationship with these island states and to support them in the role of observers to their history-making initiative.

Given that the Copenhagen conference yielded disappointing results, what was the atmosphere leading up to Cancún?

I think everyone had reduced their hopes quite a lot. There were no big hopes or expectations for anything from anyone. This was probably a good thing though. The media contingent was much smaller than in Copenhagen and so without the glare of publicity there was more room for negotiations to take place.

How did you and the PCP feel at the end of the Cancún conference?

On the final night we had dinner with representatives from Kiribati, and President Tong made a speech saying that he felt happy with the progress. Something I noticed at the conference was a lot more businesses were there promoting renewable initiatives. Clearly the business industry is waking up and seeing that the future is low carbon. There also seemed to be a much greater awareness of Pacific issues and the Pacific message. There is a long way to go, but there is definitely progress being made.

Do you think Australia has done their bit to respond to the plight of low-lying nations over the past year?

The Pacific are very grateful for what Australia does for them, but in reality it's nowhere near enough because their needs are so great. The Australian Minister for Climate Change, Greg Combet, put out a media release during the Cancún conference about Australia delivering \$599 million in "Fast Start" financing for adaptation programs in developing nations. At least 25% of that has been allocated to helping Pacific islands, which he acknowledged "are the most exposed to, but least responsible for, climate change". This was a good leadership move and I think it models the way that international Fast Start finance should be achieved. Allocating money to helping the Pacific islands is wonderful, but Australia still must meet its obligations in terms of climate change mitigation - addressing the cause of the problem, not just the symptoms.

Do you think Australians are prepared to make sacrifices to cut back on our emissions?

A recent survey showed that Australians are some of the most worried about climate change, but least likely to actually do anything about it. That's the context in which we are operating. It's surprising given the devastating floods that have recently occurred in Queensland and Victoria. The damaging effects of climate change are coming closer and closer to home, but we are still slow to act.

Will the PCP attend the next UNFCCC conference in Durban, South Africa in 2011?

We will be sending a small delegation, but this year we'd like to focus most of our time, energy and money to building a broad movement. We're going to try to raise more awareness and play more of a role in creating a popular movement that can sweep the government along with it.

What do you hope the Australian government will do in the coming year?

The carbon tax is huge and we'd really like to see that happen. It would be wonderful if the churches and congregations got out and supported it because a price on carbon pollution will reduce Australia's emissions and therefore reduce the ecological cost the Pacific Islands pay for our carbon-intensive lifestyles. It would be the beginning of us taking responsibility for our emissions. Professor Ross Garnaut has said that Australia underestimates its leadership power in the international community. We can be a huge leader, we just need to have the guts to do it.

What actions can Watermark readers take to support your work?

Readers can join the PCP letter-writing network. They can also invite Maria Tiimon - another member of the PCP from Kiribati - to speak to schools or community groups. We'd also like all readers to support the carbon tax and let others know - whether it be neighbours, friends, politicians or radio hosts - that you support it.



Left: PCP members Claire, Toani and Maria in Cancún



Above: Claire teaching people in Cancún about the Pacific islands

- If you would like more information about the PCP, visit their website by going to www.erc.org.au and clicking the "Pacific Calling Partnership" link on the left sidebar.
- You can have Maria Tiimon visit your school or community group - contact her on (02) 8762 4200 or by emailing mariat@erc.org.au
- If you would like to join the PCP letter-writing network, please contact Jill Finnane on (02) 8762 4200 or email jillf@erc.org.au

Building on the foundations

After reaching an international agreement to “deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions” at the Cancún conference, some may wonder, where do we go from here? While this achievement is an encouraging step it doesn't mean anything unless individual nations take action to make these emissions cuts a reality.

In Australia, this means the proposed carbon tax and emissions trading scheme. While there is still much debate about the price on pollution, the reality is that Australia needs to act quickly to meet its emissions-reductions obligations.

What the international agreement achieved at Cancún indicates, is that nations all across the world are beginning to realise the seriousness of the climate problem, and their responsibility to address it. Australia cannot fall behind.

People living on low-lying islands are already paying the physical price of climate change. If you are touched by their plight, know that you can personally make a difference by supporting a price on pollution in Australia.

Pacific Connections Forum

Does your congregation have a history of work in the Pacific islands, or a continuing connection to this region?

The Pacific Calling Partnership and CLRI(NSW) would like to draw together all of the congregations with Pacific connections in order to increase our solidarity with the peoples of this region who are suffering the impacts of climate change.

If you are one of these congregations, you are warmly invited to attend:

Congregational Pacific Connections Forum

When: Tuesday May 10 2010
Time: 3.30pm - 5.30pm
Where: Good Samaritan Centre,
Glebe

This forum will share information on our involvement in the Pacific to date and look at how we can forge a path ahead for passionate and targeted action.

If you would like to attend, please email clrinsw@ozemail.com.au for catering purposes.

Please join us for this important event!

Web Links



Summary of Cancún Achievements

http://unfccc.int/files/press/news_room/press_releases_and_advisories/application/pdf/pr_20101211_cop16_closing.pdf

Stay up-to-date with climate action in Australia

www.cana.net.au

Pacific Calling Partnership

Visit www.erc.org.au and click on the “Pacific Calling Partnership” link

Pacific Climate Change Blog

<http://climatepasifika.blogspot.com/2010/12/leaders-of-samoa-nauru-and-kiribati.html>

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