

SEPTEMBER 2021

# COP26 AND HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS ACROSS AUSTRALIA



PREPARED BY THE PACIFIC CALLING PARTNERSHIP TEAM,  
EDMUND RICE CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND  
COMMUNITY EDUCATION





The Pacific Island nation of Tuvalu is one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change.

# WHAT'S THE PACIFIC CALLING PARTNERSHIP?

The Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP) is an initiative of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, a centre that advocates for the rights of Indigenous peoples, refugees, people seeking asylum, as well as people from

Pacific Islands who are facing the threat of climate change.

The focus of PCP is to enhance Pacific Islander voices on climate change and create opportunities for leadership and advocacy on climate action.

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## TOSY'S STORY



Tosy is a young woman from Kiribati currently living in Australia who is very passionate about the issue of climate change.

Tosy is concerned for her future and the future of young people across the Pacific and throughout the world. Kiribati is one of the world's least developed countries and Kiribati's contribution to climate change and global warming is very small. Kiribati is very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and could well become uninhabitable by 2050. **Where will Tosy and her people go?**

In preparation for COP26, Tosy is writing to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and leader of the opposition Anthony Albanese asking them to take urgent, strong climate action. Tosy is also asking every one of us to write our own letters to support her. Read her letter to the PM on the following page.

# TOSY'S LETTER TO SCOTT MORRISON



Dear Prime Minister,

*I am very proud of my beautiful culture and my identity as an I-Kiribati woman. I want my people to live safely and freely without worrying about their future.*

*My Home Island, Kiribati, and my people are at the frontline of experiencing and battling the adverse impacts of the climate crisis, an issue that we have made little contribution to. Kiribati is a low-lying island nation that barely reaches two metres above sea level. Most of our islands have an ocean shoreline and coastal lagoon. There are no hills or streams. It is one of the most vulnerable nations in the world to the effects of climate change.*

*I am very concerned about our lives and our future as climate change has already threatened us in many ways.*

*One of the current effects of climate change is rising sea levels that we cannot run away from. This is already affecting us and our livelihoods in devastating ways and, according to the latest scientific projections, the current emissions path means that there will continue to be sea-level rise long into the future.*

*Ahead of COP26, I urge Australia, as a wealthy and developed country, to give us a helping hand by committing to a 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and announcing a plan for how you will achieve that.*

*Australia has been a generous and good neighbour in supporting Kiribati in various ways. I have no doubt that you can do much better than that. So I ask for further ambitious action from the Australian federal government to take urgent climate action to limit carbon emissions and keep temperatures to below 1.5 degree C, as agreed under the Paris Agreement.*

*We risk losing our home, which is everything to us, and along with that, our sense of belonging and our identity as I-Kiribati people.*

*Australia has shown responsible leadership on a range of important global issues in the past. Please help my people and show responsible leadership on this issue now.*

# CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT IN THE PACIFIC

Many communities across the Pacific live on low-lying islands and are experiencing rising sea levels and higher king tides that are eroding coastlines and reducing freshwater supplies and crop yields.

Over the last 15 years, the PCP has worked in close partnership with the small Pacific nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu. Kiribati (pronounced Ki-Ri-Bas) and Tuvalu are both made up of a number of flat, coral atolls that are extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels.

Kiribati has about 110,000 residents and Tuvalu about 11,000. I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan peoples have inhabited their

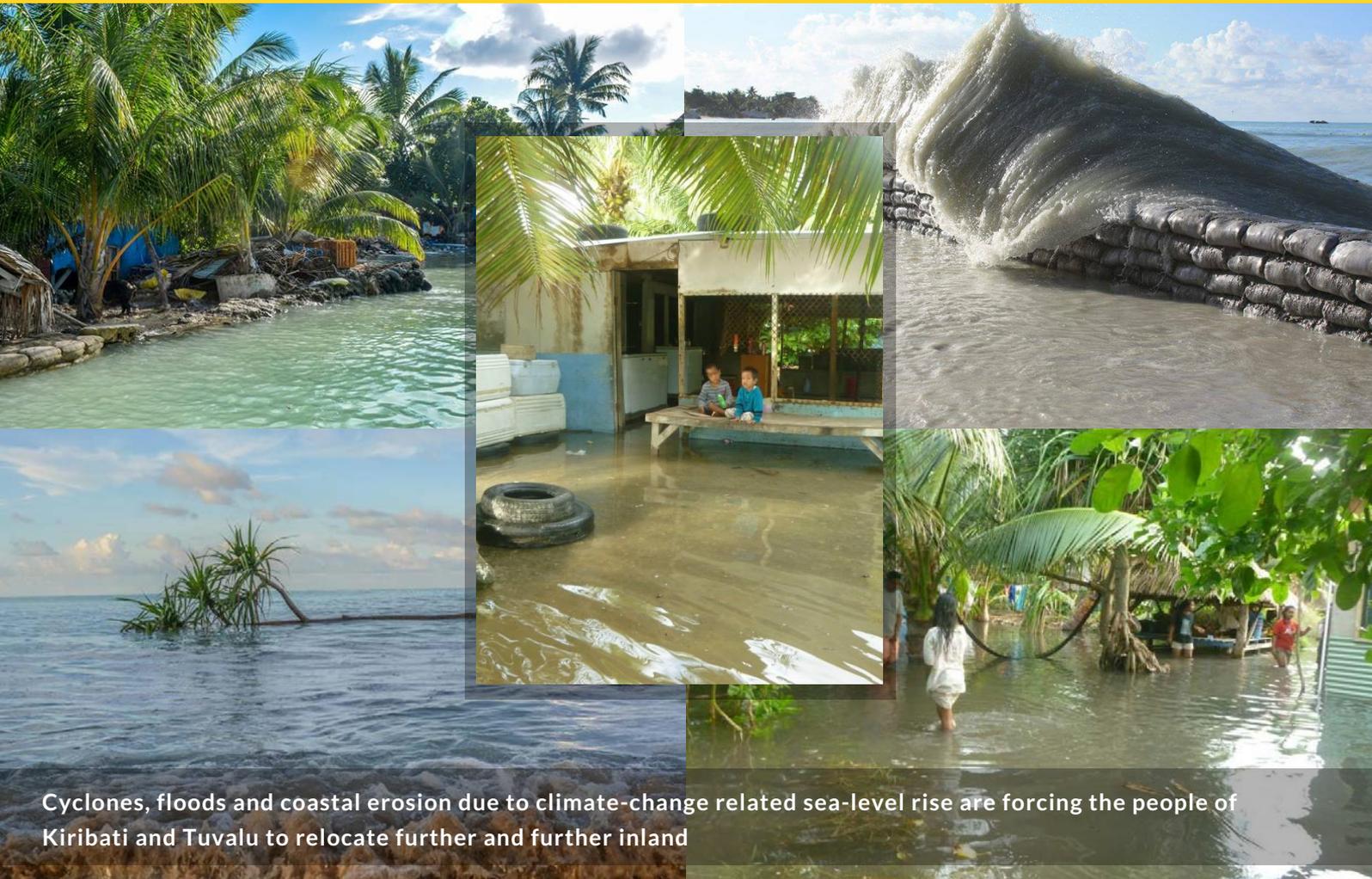
homelands for thousands of years. Tragically, science predicts that based on current projections, within a time-span of 30 years, neither Kiribati nor Tuvalu will be able to sustain permanent habitation ( see

this [report](#)).

Already, some Pacific Islander communities have been forced to relocate due to sea level rise, such as the Fijian village of Vunidogolo. A further 830 communities are listed for relocation in Fiji alone.

Cyclones across the Pacific are also increasing in frequency and intensity. In 2015 Cyclone Pam destroyed 95% of crops in Vanuatu's affected areas. A year later Cyclone Winston caused \$470 million worth of damage to Fiji – 10 per cent of that nation's GDP. Most recently, in 2020, Cyclone Harold devastated the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

*You can access further information about climate change in the Pacific [here](#)*



Cyclones, floods and coastal erosion due to climate-change related sea-level rise are forcing the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu to relocate further and further inland



## HOW DOES AUSTRALIA CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROBLEM?

Together, the world's top 15 greenhouse gas emitters, including Australia, produce 72.21% of all human-related greenhouse gases. In comparison, Pacific nations produce only 0.23% of all human-related greenhouse gases ([reference](#)).

One of the key explanations for this situation is that the world's top 15 greenhouse gas emitters, including Australia, are some of the world's wealthiest and most developed nations.

These nations need and use much more energy than small Pacific countries whose inhabitants often have very basic standards

*Being a wealthy nation, as well as one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters, Australia has a moral duty to act and help ensure that further climate impacts do not destroy Pacific Islander homelands, livelihoods and cultures*

of living. Yet, it is these small Pacific countries that bear the brunt of the impacts associated with climate change.

## WHAT IS COP26 AND WHY DOES IT MATTER SO MUCH?

The term “COP” stands for the “Conference Of the Parties”, an annual meeting on climate change organized by the United Nations and attended by delegations from most countries around the world. The COP is hosted by a different country each year and involves detailed negotiations between countries about how the world is going to address climate change and what action each country is going to take.

**COP26** is the 26th such meeting and it will take place in **Glasgow**, United Kingdom, from 31 Oct to 12 November 2021.

COP26 is a very important milestone for climate change negotiations as it comes five years after the signing of the “Paris Agreement”. The Paris Agreement committed every country to take action, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to ensure that the world's average temperature rise can be kept to below 1.5 degree C. You can read further about this year's COP26 [here](#).

Pacific Islands are some of the most beautiful nations on earth. We cannot let sea-level rise threaten these exquisite places and their unique flora-fauna and cultures.



## COP26 AND POPE FRANCIS

COP26 is so important that Pope Francis himself has committed to attending the climate summit in person.

In Pope Francis' words: "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, un-sustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world."

**BUT** also from Pope Francis: "Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home."

On 8 September 2021, the world's three main Christian leaders issued an unprecedented joint appeal to members of their Churches to "listen to the Cry of Earth" and back action to stem the effects of climate change (Read [report](#)). In "A Joint Message for the Protection of Creation", Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew asked Christians to pray that world leaders at the United Nations Climate Change

Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November make courageous choices.

In Australia, the recently released Bishops' Social Justice Statement 2021-22: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, affirms that "we human beings need a change of heart, mind, and behaviour" (read [here](#)).

The Social Justice Statement 2021-22 provides theological foundations to inspire efforts



to care for creation while responding to the needs of the disadvantaged and excluded.

In the Statement, the Bishops invite the Catholic community to join them in taking up Pope Francis' invitation to a 7-year journey towards total ecological sustainability, guided by seven Laudato Si' Goals. These Goals are: response to the cry of the earth; response to the cry of the poor; ecological economics; sustainable lifestyles; ecological spirituality; ecological education; and community engagement and participatory action.

## DOUBLE TROUBLE: TWO CRISES AT ONCE

Our world community is facing two great crises: Covid 19 and climate change. For Pacific Island nations, both threaten their survival and require principled world leadership on an unprecedented scale.

In the past years, small Pacific Island nations have shown magnificent leadership in calling the world to limit greenhouse gas emissions and face the challenges of climate change. In 2015 Tony de Brum (a former Senior Minister in the Marshall Islands) brought together leaders like Aote Tong (the former President of Kiribati), Enele Sapoaga (the former Prime Minister of Tuvalu) and Frank Bainimarama (the Prime Minister of Fiji), along with leaders from 31 industrialised and non-industrialised nations, to form the High Ambition Coalition. This coalition was responsible for ensuring that the 2015 Paris Agreement had as its main goal keeping global warming below 1.5°C.

The High Ambition Coalition introduced other significant climate targets to the 2015 Paris Agreement, including a pathway to net-zero global emissions by 2050 and a five-year cycle for countries to update their commitments to mitigate emission reductions.

# OUR RESPONSE TO THE PARIS AGREEMENT



Five years have already passed since Australia signed the Paris Agreement but we are lagging far behind the international community in terms of climate action.

For example, the Australian Government has not yet committed to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and has no plans for how to get there. Similarly, Australia has adopted only a very modest greenhouse gas emissions

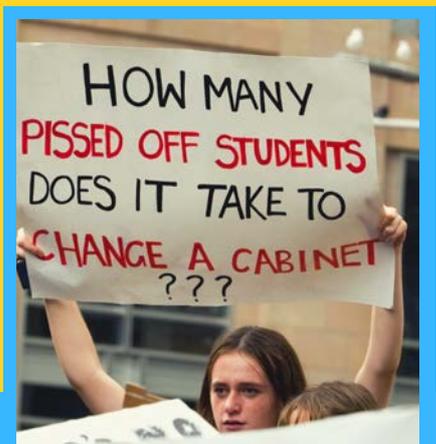
reduction target of 26-28% by 2030.

This target is not in line with what science tells us is needed to keep global warming to below 1.5 degrees. Neither is it in line with the position of our major allies. The US, for example, has committed to a 50-52% emissions reduction by 2030 and the UK to a 78% reduction by 2035.

A report that came out earlier

this year, ranked Australia last in 200 countries in terms of climate action (see [report](#)).

The Climate Council, a key non-government organization working in the area of climate change, has called for the Australian Government to listen to the science and develop a comprehensive plan to triple Australia's climate efforts. This would include getting Australia's greenhouse gas emissions down by 75% by the year 2030 (see [report](#)).



# SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP TOSY?



The good news is that it's not too late. There is still hope and each of us can take action to help Tosy and her people and everybody else living on this planet.

The latest science indicates there is still a narrow path to avoiding the most severe climate impacts, but only through immediate, deep and sustained emissions reductions.

## **Here's what you can do to take action prior to COP26:**

Write your own letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison [here](#). It's also important to express your views to the Leader of the Opposition Anthony Albanese at [A.Albanese.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:A.Albanese.MP@aph.gov.au).

Ask your school if they would consider putting up a banner on their building asking our leaders to take urgent climate action prior to COP26. If this is an option, you can order a banner [here](#).

Contact your local Federal Member of Parliament and ask for a meeting to discuss [this](#) with them or send them a letter. You can search for the name and contact details of your Federal member at this [link](#).





## MORE INFORMATION/HELP

*The PCP has a wide wide range of resources available on climate change in the Pacific. You can check out our [website](#) and you can also book a speaker or ask us to help you organise a climate action.*

*If you need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our Coordinator, Corinne Fagueret, at [cfagueret@edmundrice.org](mailto:cfagueret@edmundrice.org).*

