

Pacific voices gathered in witness ahead of COP31

Pacific church leaders, young people and community representatives have gathered in Fiji to share stories, reflections and calls for climate justice ahead of COP31.

Led by Archbishop of Suva Peter Loy Chong, **Threads of Witness: A Pacific Climate Justice Talanoa** brought participants together around a woven Pacific mat to reflect on the realities facing communities across Oceania and the hopes they carry into the global climate process.

The gathering hosted by Caritas Oceania formed part of the Pre-COP31 Stakeholder Program in Nadi and sought to carry the lived experience of Pacific communities into the spaces where global climate decisions are made.

Participants were invited to place witness cards, testimonies, reports and reflections onto the mat, which will be entrusted to the Australian Government in its role as COP31 President of Negotiations.

The event coincided with the launch of **Turbulent Waters: Navigating Debt and Climate Vulnerabilities in the Pacific**, a new report from Caritas agencies and Jubilee Australia warning that Pacific countries face a climate finance challenge far greater than previously understood.

The report estimates Pacific countries could face an overall climate finance shortfall of up to \$5.7 billion Australian dollars annually, while warning that many communities are being forced to respond to a crisis they did little to create while carrying growing debt burdens.

Caritas Australia CEO Kirsten Sayers said the new research reinforced what Pacific communities have been saying for many years, that the cost of climate change is rising while international support remains far short of what is needed.

“What has not changed is the reality facing Pacific communities, but rather our understanding of what it will take to support them. The Pacific contributes least to climate change yet carries some of its heaviest burdens. Communities are doing everything they can to adapt, but too often they are being asked to shoulder costs created elsewhere.”

Kirsten Sayers also said the gathering also reflected the Catholic Church’s responsibility to accompany communities and ensure their voices are heard.

“Across the Pacific, the Church walks alongside communities already living with rising seas, increasingly severe disasters, water insecurity and changing livelihoods. As parishes, dioceses, schools and Caritas agencies, we can share in the struggles, hopes and resilience of communities facing these challenges every day simply by hearing their witness and holding them in our prayers.

“As Caritas we can also bring their witness to decision-makers, to help ensure the voices of Pacific peoples remain at the centre of global climate discussions. Climate finance may be discussed in dollars and policy frameworks, but ultimately it is about people, communities and the future they are being asked to build in the face of a crisis they did not create.”

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