

PACNEWS

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VAN - PARDON REVOKED: VANUATU DAILY POST/RNZI

PACNEWS 2: Fri 16 Oct 2015

Vanuatu President revokes pardon

PORT VILA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (VANUATU DAILY POST/RNZI) --- Vanuatu President Baldwin Lonsdale has announced that on Thursday, he signed an order revoking the pardons granted by Marcellino Pipite last weekend.

The Supreme Court had convicted 14 MPs, including the deputy prime minister Moana Carcasses and speaker of parliament, of giving and receiving corrupt payments.

Pipite, who is the speaker, pardoned himself and 13 other MPs while he was acting President when Lonsdale was out of the country.

One MP, Willie Jimmy, had pleaded guilty and was not pardoned.

President Lonsdale cited Chapter 10, article 66 of the Constitution, which states in part:

66. Conduct of leaders

(1) Any person defined as a leader in Article 67 has a duty to conduct himself in such a way, both in his public and private life, so as not to –

- (a) place himself in a position in which he has or could have a conflict of interests or in which the fair exercise of his public or official duties might be compromised;
- (b) demean his office or position;
- (c) allow his integrity to be called into question; or
- (d) endanger or diminish respect for and confidence in the integrity of the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu.

The President stated that Pipite infringed all of these items, and for that reason, the revocation was necessary.

The Supreme Court is due to sentence the MPs next Thursday..... PACNEWS

Fijian PM slammed Australia and NZ tactics, not happy with PACER plus

SYDNEY, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (PACNEWS) ---- Fijian Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama says it's a shame for the two metropolitan powers Australia and New Zealand for turning back on his country in its pursuit to create the first genuine democracy in Fiji.

While addressing the 22nd Australia Fiji Business Forum in Sydney, Bainimarama took the opportunity to lecture Australia on its unfavourable behaviour towards Fiji before the election last year.

Bainimarama cast as a pariah by the Australian Government after the events of 2006, couldn't attend an Australia-Fiji Business Forum in Australia after nine years because he was banned from the country.

"But I do want to say this: It is a great shame that Australia and New Zealand - our traditional friends - turned their backs on us when we set out to substitute a flawed democracy in Fiji with a proper one like theirs.

"To sabotage our efforts to create the first genuine democracy in Fiji of equal votes of equal value - a democracy based on the legal and moral basis of a common and equal citizenry.

"I personally will never understand why they couldn't understand that Fiji simply couldn't go on being a nation in which some of its citizens enjoyed more rights and privileges than others.

"Couldn't go on with a situation in which the votes of some citizens were worth more than others. A nation made to be divided along ethnic lines in which people were categorised by their race and ethnicity.

"With certain elites entrenched at the expense of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens. Where merit was shunned and cronyism thrived.

It was certainly something no Australian or New Zealander would ever have accepted in their own country yet their governments tried to enforce it on ours," he told delegates at the Forum.

"I also can't help wondering how things might have been different if Australia and New Zealand hadn't tried to destroy us with their sanctions, travel bans and their diplomatic offensive to damage Fiji's interests the world over.

How much sooner we might have been able to return Fiji to parliamentary rule if we hadn't expended so much effort on simply surviving. If you had been more understanding. More engaged. Been able to recognise that defending the status quo in Fiji was indefensible, intellectually and morally. Contrary to the fundamental principle of any democracy - the right of every citizen to enjoy equal opportunity and equal access to substantive justice," he said.

All this simply didn't exist in Fiji before the revolution we embarked on in 2006. But it does now, he said.

Bainimarama said Fiji went to the election based on the 2013 Constitution, as he had always promised in September 2014.

"An election declared free and credible by an international monitoring force of some 20 nations co-led by Australia, India and Indonesia.

"I know there was widespread surprise in official circles in Australia and New Zealand when the Fijian people endorsed our revolution and our new Constitution by giving my FijiFirst political movement 60 per cent of the vote under the proportional representation system.

But it came as no surprise to me or to most Fijian voters. Because not only had my Government created a fairer, more equal and more just society, he said.

Bainimarama told delegates attending the Forum that Fiji used the period of 'our estrangement to develop other relationships'.

"We've reached out to the world and the world has responded. But it is now time for Fiji and Australia to also reach out fully to each other again at an official level.

"For our governments to rekindle the warmth of our old relationship and match the unshakeable relationship between our peoples.

He said Fiji seeks a new relationship with Australia - a reinvigorated partnership based on mutual respect and friendship.

"Letting bygones be bygones. Building an atmosphere of confidence, cooperation and trust.

"And working more closely together than ever before on both our bilateral relationship and our cooperation across a broad front in the region and the world," he emphasised.

In terms of the existing regional architecture, Bainimarama said both countries have their differences.

"Fiji will continue to press for Australia and New Zealand to step back from the main table at the Pacific Islands Forum and allow the island nations to determine their own agendas.

"We also have a fundamentally opposing view of what needs to be done to reduce the carbon emissions that are causing global warming and the rise in sea levels and extreme weather events that pose such a serious threat to Pacific island nations," he said.

He said Fiji still aren't satisfied with the Pacer Plus Agreement.

"One cannot negotiate such an agreement let alone sign it when the fundamental premise of the proposed agreement fails to take into account the realities of the economies of small island developing states.

"Such an agreement must recognize the power differentials and the economic capacities between countries such as Australia and New Zealand on the one hand, and on the other, Pacific Island states that lack comparative economic sophistication and strength," Bainimarama explained.

He said there must be understanding if any such agreement is to be successful.

"We are still irritated by certain impediments to trade such as the Australian ban on imports of Fijian kava.

Yet none of this should be an impediment to a higher and more friendly level of engagement between us and better relations generally," he said....PACNEWS

PAC - WEST PAPUA: PCC

PACNEWS 2: Fri 16 Oct 2015

Do not insult the Pacific, churches tell Indonesia

SUVA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (PCC) ---- Indonesia must seriously address human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings in Papua, Pacific churches said today.

The call came after the killing of a student in Timika and Indonesia's denials at the United Nations General Assembly of human rights abuses in the territory it annexed in 1961.

Pacific Conference of Churches General Secretary, Reverend Francois Pihataae, said the situation in Papua was made worse by Indonesian denials when the evidence of abuse was clear.

"Social media makes it impossible for Indonesia to hide the atrocities committed by its security forces on a people who want to determine their political future for themselves," Rev Pihataae said.

"Papuan are killed and tortured – 500,000 have died since 1961 – merely because they want self-determination, a right guaranteed by the United Nations of which Indonesia is a member."

Rev Pihatae said that despite the obvious, overwhelming evidence, the Indonesian government insulted the intelligence of Pacific people by its denials.

"Now they send a minister who tells the women of Fiji that Papuans are being treated well by the Indonesian government when we can see that they are being systematically killed," he said.

"And Indonesia continues to relocate non-Papuans to Papua in an act of genocide which the world refuses to see."

Rev Pihatae said visiting Indonesian Minister for Women, Dr Yohana Susana Yembise, should be ashamed for misleading the people of Fiji during her attendance of the National Women's Expo.

"As a Papuan woman in a position of power, she should stand up for the people of Papua and use her influence to end these atrocities," Rev Pihatae said.

"The latest shooting in which one student was killed and another seriously injured took place in Timika where Dr Yembise's youngest child studies.

"There is no way she cannot be aware of the incident."

Rev Pihatae said it was imperative that Pacific leaders – especially those who had welcomed Indonesia into the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Islands Development Forum – spoke out against human rights violations.

He said the MSG and PIDF provided perfect platforms for leaders to address the plight of Papuans.

"Our leaders' silence will not make the issue go away," Rev Pihatae said.

"In the name of humanity we, the Pacific churches, call on our leaders to end this bloodshed and bring injustice in Papua to an end."

At the last UN General Assembly, Indonesian representatives rejected claims of human rights abuses in Papua, claiming they were misleading.... PACNEWS

PAC - NUCLEAR WASTE: PCC

PACNEWS 2: Fri 16 Oct 2015

Churches call for nuclear waste clean-up ahead of COP21

SUVA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (PCC) --- Pacific churches have called on France to clean up nuclear waste in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) less than two months ahead of the United Nations Conference on Climate change in Paris.

While welcoming French promises of assistance to climate change-affected islands in the region, Pacific churches also want compensation for former workers in test sites on Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls.

Pacific Conference of Churches General Secretary, Reverend Francois Pihatae, said the promises of help for communities affected by climate change were a promising start to new relationships between France and the region.

But he warned that more must be done to ensure justice for Pacific people.

"Nobody can deny that climate change is a pressing global issue which must be addressed by all," Rev Pihatae said.

"At the same time we must not overlook the tremendous cost to the environment and human life caused by nuclear testing in the Pacific by France and the United States.

"This damage will be irreversible for several generations.

"Since the late 1960s the PCC, its partners and member churches have called for a nuclear-free Pacific and for compensation and justice for the victims of testing."

Rev Pihaatae said generations of innocent people in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) and atolls in the Northern Marianas and the Federated States of Micronesia had been left maimed for life by the nuclear tests.

He said radiation from the tests was passed from parents to children through conception and some villagers had been forced to leave their ancestral homes forever.

"As we approach COP21, Pacific churches call on the French government to do what is morally correct and compensate the victims of testing on Moruroa and Fangataufa," Rev Pihaatae said.

"Those who have become ill, lost sight, limbs, homes and livelihood must be treated with justice.

"We also call on the United States to treat the people of the Northern Pacific territories with justice and compensate them for their losses.

"It is not enough to address the issue of climate change without also dealing with the nuclear problem which plagues the islands even after testing has stopped."

Last week, French Ambassador to Fiji, Michael Djokovic, said he had seen and experienced why the Pacific was vulnerable to climate change.

Djokovic said, he saw the effects of climate change on Tuvalu and noted the anxiety in locals and how they were confronted with the rise in sea level.

"Even if the EU cannot agree on all the posts, we will try our best in our European and French account as chair of COP21 to reach an ambitious legally binding agreement, and universal all together from the tiniest country to the biggest one," he said....PACNEWS

PACNEWS BIZ

FIJI - TRADE UNION: FIJI TIMES

PACNEWS BIZ: Fri 16 Oct 2015

Fiji Union stays away

SUVA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (FIJI TIMES) --- The Fiji Islands Council of Trade Unions will not sign the joint implementation report required by the International Labour Organization because their proposals and agreement were not met at the recent Employment Relations Advisory Board meeting in Suva on Wednesday.

FICTU general secretary Attar Singh said though they went into the ERAB meeting with a genuine desire to contribute, their requirements were not met, therefore, they would now await the ILO's decision.

Fiji Trades Union Congress general secretary Daniel Urai, when contacted last night, said there was no point in attending the meeting because Government would not change its position and it was pointless to attend the ERAB meeting.

However, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation CEO Nesbitt Hazelman said they signed the joint implementation report and while goodwill existed at the ERAB meeting, they would all want the commission of inquiry issue put to rest.

"The issues sighted by the ILO was to do with freedom of association and also Political Parties Decree and also the potential restrictions on right to freedom of association," FICTU general secretary Attar Singh said.

"We made proposals not to bring about changes to all that. Our proposals were discussed but unfortunately we could not get an agreement on the proposals and as a result we have informed the chairman and the members that the agreement does not go far enough and we would be unable to sign.

"We were the only ones - FICTU and representatives from the bank unions - that were represented at the three-day meeting and all other unions either did not attend at all or some in a day and not on the other days so it should be obvious that though we tried very hard, unfortunately, we did not get what we wanted.

"We are the first to complain to ILO so our complaints are before the ILO and we now expect the ILO to decide as to what should be the next step. Once the decision is taken then we will go from there."

Meanwhile, President-elect Jioji Konrote said he hoped more work was done on tripartite co-operation for the sake of workers, employers and the Government.

The ILO had deferred a commission of inquiry earlier this year after an eleventh hour agreement was signed in March between the Government, the federation and FTUC on steps to be taken to address those infringements. Next month's meeting will decide whether there should be a commission of inquiry. A commission of inquiry is the ILO's highest-level investigative procedure, generally set up when a member state is accused of committing persistent and serious violations and has repeatedly refused to address them.

According to the ILO, 11 commissions of inquiry have been established so far....PACNEWS

PNG - ECONOMY: POST COURIER

PACNEWS BIZ: Fri 16 Oct 2015

World Bank warns PNG of downside risks

PORT MORESBY, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (POST COURIER) --- The World Bank has warned that there are increasing downside risks in the economy, exacerbated by the decline in commodity prices and a slowdown in China's economy.

In its East Asia and Pacific Economic Update 2015 report, the bank had said the Treasury Department would need to curb expenditure this year by more than the proposed cut of K1.3 billion (US\$449 million), to effect a reduction in debt ratio after 2020.

It warned that failure to consolidate the fiscal position would worsen debt dynamics.

"However, fiscal consolidation, necessitated by weaker than anticipated revenue performance, will dampen growth in the non-extractive sectors over the short run, while a weak global economy could further dampen external demand and commodity prices. This will adversely affect foreign exchange reserves," the bank said.

The bank had noted that the economic activity is expected to expand by 8.7 per cent in 2015, down from the April 2015 forecast of 15 per cent. The downward revision was largely due to the drop in LNG prices and the suspension of production at the OTML, which was expected to lead to a contraction of 20 per cent year-on-year in the extractive sector.

The non-extractive sectors were expected to contribute, on average, 0.5 percentage points to overall growth in 2015, compared to 0.6 per cent points in 2014.

The falling commodity prices and temporary suspension of production at OTML, which accounts for 10 per cent of revenue, had substantially lowered government revenue.

Revenue from tax was also lower than initial projections and had contributed to the downward adjustment of overall government revenue from K13.9 billion to K11.4 billion (US\$4.8 billion – US\$3.9 billion) Notwithstanding the expected revenue shortfall in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal outlook.....PACNEWS

PACNEWS *In Focus*

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Water May Erase These Pacific Islands but Not the Culture

Kiribati islanders are introducing new agriculture and rebuilding seawalls to battle the rising tides.

By Kennedy Warne

TARAWA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC) --- It was the time called itingaaro, the dawn twilight, when the island was just waking up and the roosters were vying to out-crow each other and the angel terns were twittering their love talk in the breadfruit trees. People drifted sleepily into the lagoon to wash, splashing water on their faces, then tightening their sarongs and diving under.

The tide was full and taut like the skin of a pregnant woman. Beyond the lagoon the ocean stretched to the horizon. Marawa, karawa, tarawa—sea, sky, land. These are the ancient trinity of the people of Kiribati (kee-ree-bahss), the I-Kiribati. But the trinity is tilting out of balance. Mother Ocean isn't the heart of providence the people have always known. She is beginning to show a different face, a menacing one of encroaching tides and battering waves.

I-Kiribati now live with the reality of marawa rising. This is the time of bibitakin kanoan boong—"change in weather over many days"—the Kiribati phrase for climate change. The people live with the fear and uncertainty of those words.

How can they not feel afraid when the world keeps telling them that low-lying island countries like theirs will soon be underwater? Their own leaders have said that Kiribati—33 coral islands in an expanse of the central Pacific larger than India—is "among the most vulnerable of the vulnerable." They have predicted that Tarawa atoll, the nation's capital, will become uninhabitable within a generation.

But many I-Kiribati refuse to think of their homeland as a "disappearing island nation," its fate already out of their hands. They do not think of themselves as "sinking islanders," rather as descendants of voyagers, inheritors of a proud tradition of endurance and survival.

They believe their paradise is far from lost.

But it is surely suffering. The sea is becoming an unwelcome intruder, eroding the shoreline and infiltrating soils, turning wells brackish and killing crops and trees. Atolls like Tarawa rely for their fertility on a lens of freshwater, replenished by rain, which floats on a saltwater aquifer. As the sea level rises—a few millimeters a year at the moment but likely to accelerate—so does the level of salt water underground, shrinking the freshwater sweet spot.

"Now we hate the sea," Henry Kaake told me as we sat in his kiakia, an open-sided hut on stilts used for both sleeping and chatting with friends. "Yes, the sea is good for us to get our food, but it is going to steal our land one day."

An early casualty of creeping salinity has been bwabwai, the prestige food of Kiribati culture, the food of feasts, a giant swamp taro that can take more than five years to mature. Some varieties reach from a person's shoulder to the ground. Sensitive to saltwater intrusion in the pits in which it's cultivated, bwabwai now cannot be grown in many areas and could eventually disappear from island cuisine.

Government and aid agencies are helping gardeners switch to other starchy crops. In a communal garden on one of Tarawa's neighboring atolls, Abaiang, I watched Makurita Teakin chop leaves into mulch and spread it around seedlings of a shallow-rooting variety of taro that doesn't need swamp conditions. Nearby, another woman watered her seedlings with fish fertilizer from a can punched with nail holes.

The tide drained from the vast sand flats of Tarawa lagoon, exposing myriad miniature sand volcanoes built by ghost crabs. Adults and children, toting plastic bags and buckets, probed the sand with their fingers and scratched in the crevices of rocks with teaspoons for cockles—called koikoi—and sea snails. The harvesters walked far out to the water's receding edge, bending over double, sifting and scraping for a few ounces of seafood.

If they found enough cockles, they might prepare them in coconut cream, cooking them inside a coconut shell over a smoky coconut-husk fire. Coconut palm—nii—is there anything this tree doesn't provide? Baskets, brooms, timber, thatch, oil, fermented toddy, soap, a dark sweet syrup called kamwaimwai. Tree of heaven, some people call it. I-Kiribati have more than a dozen words for the stages of the fruit alone—from a young nut before the water forms to an old one with rancid flesh.

Holding fast to tradition matters for many I-Kiribati. Mwairin Timon was making coconut sennit when I met her, sitting on an old pandanus mat outside her shanty at the edge of the lagoon, rolling tufts of coconut fiber on a piece of driftwood with the palm of her hand. More than a year ago she had buried coconut husks in the lagoon, marking the place with a rock. A thousand tides had done their work, curing and softening the fibers. Now she twisted them into string the same way her grandmother would have, and her grandmother before her, all the way back to the first settlers of these atolls, who splashed ashore some 3,000 years ago.

Rain clouds darkened and moved across the lagoon, blotting out the islets of North Tarawa, the other side of wishbone-shaped Tarawa atoll. Soon they would bring relief to this side, South Tarawa, where half the nation's people live on barely six square miles of land.

It is a mercy that rainfall is predicted to increase over the coming decades, although downpours are likely to be more extreme, causing flooding. As underground freshwater reserves are compromised by rising seas—and in Tarawa's case, heavy population pressure—harvesting rainwater from roofs may offer an alternative. On Abaiang foreign aid has provided some communities with simple systems that catch, filter, treat, and store rainfall. As long as you have freshwater, you can cope with other changes—at least for a while. How long, no one knows.

The tide turned and slid shoreward like a sheet of green glass, pushing the harvesters ahead of it. Tides are an axis of Kiribati life. So are the movements of sun, moon, and stars and the directions of wind and swell. In times past, if you understood these axes, you could calculate when to plant crops, when to fish, when to set sail in hundred-foot outrigger canoes called baurua. Such was the algebra of the Pacific.

Fishermen knew the bait each fish preferred, whether to catch it in the day or night, and the best tactic for taking it: hook, noose, or net. But the certainties of that world are breaking down. Once reliable fishing places now yield empty lines and nets. The warming ocean is thought to be driving some fish to cooler waters.

Coral reefs are suffering as well—and worse is yet to come. As the sea grows warmer and more acidic throughout this century, reef growth is predicted to slow and even stop. Coral bleaching—when stressed corals expel the symbiotic algae that give them color and nutrients—used to happen every ten years or so. But it's becoming more frequent and eventually could happen yearly, threatening coral survival and dimming the reefs' living rainbow to a shadow.

Where reefs go, islands will follow. Atoll islands rely on deposits of sediment from corals and other marine organisms—often dumped onshore by storms—to keep their heads above water. They are like construction sites: If the materials run out, building will cease. A dead reef cannot sustain the islands it has built.

What kind of world is this, where the sea consumes its own creation?

To many I-Kiribati it seems deeply unfair that their country's climate troubles are not of its own making. Since the 1980s Pacific leaders have scolded, cajoled, pleaded with, and tried to shame the major carbon-polluting countries over climate change. The islands are ants and the industrialized nations are elephants, declared Teburoro Tito, a former Kiribati president, speaking of the infinitesimal contribution his country has made to the planet's carbon burden.

There is an aspect to the rich world's disregard that is especially hard for I-Kiribati to stomach. They are particular about respecting boundaries. Traditionally, you never took coconuts from a tree that wasn't yours. You wouldn't even take dead breadfruit leaves to light a fire without asking. Reefs had boundaries too. People knew where they were entitled to harvest.

Those protocols are still observed today. When I joined fishermen traveling from Tarawa to Abaiang, on a day so calm the clouds had blue-green bellies from the reflection of the sea, the skipper stopped the outboard motor at a certain reef and one of the crew threw hand-rolled pandanus cigarettes into the sea as offerings and a mark of respect for the owners of the territory we were crossing.

When you travel to another island for the first time, before you do anything else, you announce yourself to the place by visiting a sacred site. You make a gift of cigarettes or a few coins, and the caretaker picks up damp sand and pats it on your cheeks and ties a tendril of green vine around your head. After performing this ritual on Abaiang, the caretaker of the shrine told me, "You now belong to this island."

What do the wealthy countries know of respecting boundaries? I picture a cloud of greenhouse gases drifting toward Tarawa from over the horizon, like radioactivity from the nuclear weapons exploded in Kiribati's Line Islands after the Second World War. It doesn't seem so very different: nuclear fallout in the 20th century, climate fallout in the 21st.

The feeling of injustice is widespread on the atolls most at risk from rising seas: Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Tokelau, and Tuvalu. A former Tuvaluan prime minister, Saufatu Sopoaga, went so far as to compare the impacts of climate change to "a slow and insidious form of terrorism against us."

Even so, some I-Kiribati reject the rhetoric of victimhood and the implication that Pacific nations are powerless. "We are not victims," Toka Rakobu, who works for a Tarawa tourism agency, told me. "We can do something. We are not going to be a defeated people."

But can you blame politicians, including Kiribati's president, Anote Tong, for playing the global underdog? Talk of drowning islands and climate refugees has made Kiribati known around the world. Photographers and journalists have made their way to Tarawa to report from "the front line of the climate-change crisis."

Their visits tend to peak at the time of the king tides, the highest tides of the year, when the drama of waves overtopping seawalls is greatest. Early this year a king tide lifted a shipwreck off the reef at Betio, Tarawa's westernmost islet, and flung it ashore, piercing a seawall. There it has stayed. The ship has an ironic name: Tekeraoi, "good luck."

There is a darker irony too. The shipwreck came ashore on Red Beach, where a lower-than-expected tide stranded American landing craft during the Battle of Tarawa in 1943, leading to a bloodbath. Picture of children playing on a Tarawa beach alongside sandbags meant to prevent beach erosion. Sandbags do little to hold back the ocean at Temwaiku, a vulnerable village on South Tarawa. In February, waves washed away this bulwark and rolled inland, leaving behind flooded homes, salty soil, and tainted wells.

Stories of the Pacific's climate woes have brought a flow of sympathy and aid money to Kiribati and her island neighbors, but if you hear that message of environmental doom often enough, you might think you

had no option but to leave. There is much talk now about migration. Should we stay? Shall we go? Will we be forced to relocate? If so, where? No country is flinging open its doors to climate refugees.

The questions are agonizing, not least because they bear on a sense of identity. In the Kiribati language the word for "land" and "people" is the same. If your land disappears, who are you?

Yet, conversely, Pacific people are renowned for their migrations—after all, their ancestors made the entire ocean their home. In Kiribati's origin story Nareau, the Creator, was a spider, and I-Kiribati have been spinning webs ever since. Every family has relatives in New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, and farther overseas, each migration a silk strand in a net of kinship bonds.

There is sometimes an expectation that the young will leave Kiribati and the old will stay. But some of the young choose to live a simple life on ancestral land rather than pursue prosperity abroad. Mannie Rikiau, a young mother who works in Kiribati's environment ministry, told me she would rather work for her own people than serve another country, despite her father's urging that she migrate to a "higher place."

"Part of me wants to go," she admitted. But then she added, as if she had made her mind up once again, "Kiribati is the best place for my sons, regardless of the threats."

She was responding to tangiran abam, she said, the love and longing I-Kiribati feel for their homeland. Tangiran abam has kept Kiribati's more distant atolls culturally vibrant, even as their populations shrink and Tarawa's swells. It remains a strong impulse. I heard that love of place in the sound of people singing in the lagoon at night. I saw it in the vivacious dances of schoolchildren that mimic the movements of seabirds. I heard it in the words of Teburoro Tito, when he met me between parliamentary sessions and said that, at heart, he was an island boy: "I grew out of the soil and the sand and the coral of this place. I love these islands, and I don't see any other home in the world."

To protect that home from the hungry ocean, some islanders have taken to planting mangroves, whose matrix of roots and trunks traps sediment and quells scouring waves. I joined some women who were picking ripe seedlings that dangled in bunches like string beans among the glossy green leaves of a mature mangrove stand. A few days later we planted them in a part of the lagoon that needs extra protection from king tides. It wasn't much, but there's little else islanders can do to hold on to their land except rebuild their seawalls when the waves smash them.

Mangroves might make a good national symbol, I thought: resilient trees resisting storms, binding the land. The current symbol, emblazoned on the Kiribati flag, is evocative too: eitei, the frigatebird, a bird of chiefs, a bird of the dance, a high flier that floats on the wind rather than fights against it. But frigatebirds must follow the schools of fish on which they feed. If the fish depart for good, will the frigatebird's forked tail still be seen scissoring Kiribati skies?

One of the mangrove planters, Claire Anterea, who works in the Kiribati government's climate adaptation program, said her people must acknowledge their role in climate change, small as it may be, and try to offset it. "We contribute less, but we still contribute," she said. "We have been eating a lot of Western food. We like noodles, we like Ox & Palm [canned corned beef]. And that food is made in factories that produce gas. We are all contributing because we want to live the Western way."

Anterea had just finished building a traditional house, powered by a solar panel. "I can't talk about climate justice overseas if I don't act right myself," she said. Even small actions have a multiplying effect, she believes. "If we work together—all the countries in the Pacific—we can maintain our islands and stay here."

On my last night in Tarawa I wanted to do something to show solidarity with my Kiribati neighbors. I am a Pacific islander too—although New Zealand's mountainous islands face nothing like the existential threat that looms for atolls where much of the land is only a few feet above sea level. Yet the "blue blood of Oceania," as Kiribati poet Teweiariki Teaero calls the Pacific, binds us as one family.

The electricity was off, not an uncommon problem, so two of my mangrove-planting friends—Vasiti Tebamare and Tinaai Teaua, who run a health spa in the village of Temwaiku—suggested we take our meal to the airport runway. It is something of a tradition, on sultry nights too stifling even for a fan to relieve, for

families to spread their mats on the little-used runway and eat a picnic supper. It's always cool there, with a breeze off the ocean.

We took grilled fish, rice, and fried breadfruit chips to eat and moimoto—green coconuts—to drink. The airfield was twinkling with flashlights and bathed in the soft murmur of conversation. We found a quiet spot, ate, talked, then lay on our backs and stared at the blazing night sky—the “belly of the eel,” as I-Kiribati call the Milky Way.

I wished I could name the constellations as the early navigators did, knowing them as intimately as if they were family. They learned them by seeing the sky as the roof of a meetinghouse, divided into a grid by rafters and lines of thatch. The stars rose in one quadrant, sailed across the roof, and set in another.

Master navigators knew upwards of 150 stars. You could put them anywhere in the ocean, and they would know exactly where they were. I-Kiribati might live on small islands, but there is nothing small about their sense of their place in the world....PACNEWS

New Zealand writer and editor Kennedy Warne has visited three of the atoll nations in his Pacific backyard that are most at risk from rising sea levels: Tokelau, Tuvalu, and now Kiribati.

PACNEWS DIGEST

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Adolescents in climate change adaptation

SUVA, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (UNFPA) ---- Adolescents are living the most critical phase of their lives, wrought with uncertainties brought on by rapid physical (biological) and emotional changes as they struggle to contextualize the spectrum of economic and socio-cultural realities they find themselves in.

It is also at this stage when individual agency is developed and strengthened for a healthy and satisfying life but to make a successful transition into adulthood, adolescents must be accessible to health education including that which surround their reproductive health and rights, quality health services including sexual and reproductive, and a supportive environment both at home and in their communities at large.

According to the Towards a New Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents Health report published by the British Medical Journal (September, 2015) investment in adolescents' health and development is key to improving their survival and wellbeing and critical for the success of the recently-endorsed global development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The United Nations defines adolescents as people between 10 and 19 years old.

This cohort has specific needs and health system needs considerate of their formative processes whether biological, emotional or in relation to their socialization.

In 2012, an estimated 1.3 million adolescents died globally-speaking, mostly of preventable causes, the specific health-related causes being injuries and violence, mental health and self-harm, communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal mortality and morbidity and HIV and AIDS.

Globally-speaking, an estimated 180 adolescents die daily from interpersonal violence, 330 die daily from road traffic injuries, at least one in four boys between the ages of 15 and 19 say they have experienced personal violence since the age of 15.

Similar to findings from recent studies supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 10 Pacific Island nations, globally-speaking, some 50 per cent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16 and some 30 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 experience violence by a partner.

Like the global reality, the majority of women interviewed across the Pacific region spoke of first sexual experiences as being forced and coerced. Although half of all mental disorders in adulthood start by the age of 14, most remain undetected and therefore untreated - depression is behind the majority of illness and disability among adolescents.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19, and the third cause of death among adolescents between 10 and 19, globally.

Adolescence is also a time when most sexual debuts occur, the absence of correct and timely information and access to sexual and reproductive health services is life-threatening; 50 to 80 per cent of adolescents contract infections including HIV and AIDS within three years of initiating sexual intercourse.

It is also around this time that behaviour which enables non-communicable diseases begin, tobacco and alcohol use for example.

We must never forget that being neither children nor adults, adolescents' realities can get lost in intersections of (related) legislation and policies, a disservice to adolescent girls as it could prevent situations of early marriages for example, ending or at least reversing horrific facts like maternal mortality is the second leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years.

"The statistics related to adolescents' health are staggering but we also know that these can be reversed within a generation but it will require greater investment in the health and wellbeing of adolescents while addressing fundamental issues like gender equality," Dr Laurent Zessler, director and representative of the UNFPA Pacific sub-regional office says.

"It is critical for this region when you consider that we are actually talking about a cohort that will live through some of the most trying of times. We must begin to discuss reproductive, maternal, newborn, children's and adolescents' health in our climate change adaptation discussions."

The Fiji Government through its Ministry of Health and Medical Services will convene a three-day regional experts' consultation and a ministerial meeting from October 26 (2015) to begin the conversation on the interplay between reproductive, maternal, newborn, children's and adolescents' health (RMNCAH) and climate change.

Considerations of issues surrounding RMNCAH is critical in the context of climate change, particularly in terms of adaptation - Pacific peoples need to be resilient in the face of climate change and there is no better way to begin than ensuring all have a good beginning from the womb, a safe childbirth and crucial follow-up through to adolescence.

The experts' consultation and the ministerial meeting to be held in a week's time is an opportunity for Pacific leaders to develop contextualized and realistic objectives for the dignity, health and wellbeing of every woman, every child, every adolescents, everywhere - inclusive of humanitarian and fragile settings.

The Pacific can expect increasing humanitarian situations caused by the impact of climate change.

A health response must have humanity in its centre, there is no better way of effectively doing that than by weaving reproductive, maternal, newborn, children's and adolescents' health aspects into national health and disaster response and recovery plans.

Our world is home to 1.8 billion young people, between the ages of 10 and 24 among them 600 million girls and this cohort is growing the fastest in developing countries.

In the Pacific, in proportion to the total population now, youth comprise a third of our population and this will continue to increase because of current fertility rates - it is a group that cannot be ignored anymore if climate change adaptation are to be effective and the SDGs, attainable.

Our value system for adolescents has to change, their potential and capacity as agents of change must be fulfilled to its full potential.

Young people are essential partners for inclusive and sustainable development action.

They are also typically, with women, the first responders in any humanitarian situation.

It is critical therefore that their voices are heard, for therein exist knowledge and vision that will contribute to solutions.

An investment in young people's agency as equal partners, particularly in the context of reproductive, maternal, newborn, children's and adolescents' health and climate change adaptation, is an investment in a resilient Pacific....PACNEWS

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FAO hails pledge by more than 100 cities to fight hunger and improve nutrition

Urban Food Policy Pact aims to build more resilient food systems and curb food waste

MILAN, 16 OCTOBER 2015 (FAO) ---- Cities have a key role to play in ending hunger and improving nutrition, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said today, welcoming a commitment by more than 100 cities from around the world to make food systems in urban areas more equitable and sustainable.

Addressing a mayors' summit in Milan, Graziano da Silva said he applauded the city's Mayor Giuliano Pisapia and his counterparts from other cities for signing the Urban Food Policy Pact.

Through the agreement, cities adhere to four principles: guaranteeing healthy food for all; promoting sustainability in the food system; educating the public about healthy eating, and; reducing waste.

Urban centres will be key actors in achieving the globally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals, including the eradication of hunger by 2030, Graziano da Silva said, noting that achieving these goals or sustaining them in the long run will also require tackling climate change and reducing emissions.

"A majority of the population of the world already lives in cities and the urban population is going to increase, particularly in developing countries/Unfortunately, many cities cannot ensure regular and stable access to adequate food and water for all, nevertheless food security and nutrition remains overlooked in urban planning and development," Graziano da Silva said.

He also referred to the need to address unhealthy or wasteful practices. "Obesity grows at alarming rates, particularly in urban areas of middle and upper income countries, where diet changes are driven by people's lifestyles," the FAO Director General said, and noted also how food waste in cities is increasingly higher.

"Among other reasons, urban customers often discard fruits and vegetables that don't look good, even when they are perfectly fresh,"Graziano da Silva said.

The framework for the Urban Food Policy Pact, which was developed with FAO's technical assistance, recognizes the importance of an inclusive approach that brings together governments, private sector and civil society.

It also underscores the importance of enhancing the links between urban centres and their surrounding rural areas. In this context, the FAO Director-General cited innovative solutions such as the increase in small-scale urban and peri-urban agriculture that can produce food which helps to diversify and foster healthier diets of families and households living in cities.

The Urban Food Policy Pact forms part of the initiatives linked to the Expo Milano 2015 universal trade exhibition which is being held in Milan and has as its theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life".

Fao is coordinating the United Nation's system's participation at Expo where a UN itinerary is offering millions of visitors an opportunity to learn more about the issues of food security and nutrition, sustainability, poverty reduction, development cooperation and the UN's work to build a world free from hunger....PACNEWS