Global Justice Overcoming Poverty

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~ Hon Dr. Maina Vakafua Talia, Minister of Home Affairs, Environment and Climate Change, Tuvalu

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UNCOMMON WEALTH: FOSSIL FUEL EXPANSION

In October at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Samoa and attended by leaders of 56 nations including King Charles and Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, Tuvulu's Prime Minister, Feleti Teo, said that the planned increase in fossil fuel exports by nations such as Australia represented a "death sentence" for Tuvalu.

It was the launch of a new report titled *Uncommon Wealth: Fossil Fuel Expansion in the Commonwealth Dominated by Three Wealthy Countries* which reveals the stark imbalance in fossil fuel extraction across the Commonwealth, highlighting the dominance of three wealthy nations—Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom—in driving fossil fuel expansion and emissions.

The report, prepared by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative with data from the Global Registry of Fossil Fuels, shows that despite representing only 6% of the Commonwealth's population, Australia, Canada, and the UK are responsible for over 60% of emissions generated from extraction across Commonwealth countries since 1990.

Key Findings:

- The "Big Three" Commonwealth nations—the UK, Australia, and Canada—account for over half of the emissions from ongoing fossil fuel extraction and are the primary drivers of new oil and gas projects within the Commonwealth.
- Commonwealth countries' Business as Usual (BAU) extraction plans would lead to 84 billion tons of CO2 emissions by 2050, far exceeding the targets for Net Zero.
- Despite rhetoric on climate leadership and Pacific solidarity, Australia's fossil fuel exports are second only to Russia. Recently, three new coal mines were approved and the world's largest pipeline of coal export projects awaits approval.

Hon. Dr. Maina Vakafua Talia, Minister of Home Affairs, Environment and Climate Change, Tuvalu, said, "As Tuvalu and other small island states are drowning under the impact of rising seas, it is a death sentence for us if larger nations continue to open new fossil fuel projects. As a Commonwealth family, we must work together to keep our Paris commitments of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees alive and lead in financing a fair transition for countries like ours. We call on our wealthier partners to align themselves with this goal and not fan the flames of the climate crisis with fossil fuel expansion."

Hon. Ralph Regenvanu, Special Envoy for Climate Change and Environment of Vanuatu, said, "We call on these nations to stand with us and not sacrifice the future of vulnerable nations for short-term gains. As a Commonwealth family, we look to those that dominate fossil fuel production in the Commonwealth to stop the expansion of fossil fuels in order to protect what we love and hold dear here in the Pacific."

Vanuatu and Tuvalu have led the campaign for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, and 12 other nations have joined, including Fiji, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

CHOGM 2024, taking place in Samoa—the first Pacific Island state to host the meeting—is a pivotal opportunity for Commonwealth nations to champion resilience, sustainability, and climate justice. But the question for Australia remains as to how it will phase out coal and gas exports, and also maintain jobs and public funds.

Source: 'Uncommon Wealth: Fossil Fuel Expansion in the Commonwealth Dominated by Three Wealthy Countries' by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative, October 2024; 'We will not allow others to determine our fate': Pacific nations dial up pressure on Australia's fossil fuel exports, by Liam Moore, The Conversation, 24 October 2024.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S PROGRESS SINCE INDEPENDENCE: 3 OUT OF 10, SAYS PRIME MINISTER JAMES MARAPE

In 1975, we were fused into one nation and merged over 1,000 tribes, the most diverse nation on the face of planet Earth. There is no other nation like ours which speaks over 800 languages. Those languages each have their own matching cultural and ethnic structures. That diversity was fused into one sovereignty in 1975. Some parts of our country had been exposed to contact for less than 100 years. I want to acknowledge the Motu-Koita who've given the land for this university to be situated on; they were in contact with the outside world since the 1800s. Some cultures – where I, for instance, come from — the first contact with the outside world was in 1952, only 23 years before our nationhood was established in 1975.

Forty-nine years on, if you ask me to rate our progress on a scale from one to ten, I would not go past three. If I benchmark against human development indicators, we have yet to reach even the halfway mark in terms of where our country should be. Some of the impairments, retrospectively

speaking, have always been: number one, the lack of greater, relevant education opportunities for our people; number two, the lack of relevant employment and economic opportunities for our people; and number three, in my view, the lawlessness amongst us which has always held us back.

As it is the government's primary responsibility, I want to apologise for the government. For the past 49 years, it has not served you, the people, very well. I do sincerely apologise and admit the many shortcomings of government in the past. I stand here today on the eve of our nation's fiftieth anniversary. And I want to say on behalf of leaders of the past until today, if we have fallen short, and I know we have fallen short, I do sincerely apologise.

The economy is the mother of our country. If the economy is bigger, stronger and healthy, then the economy pays the bills. I do not want this country to be a borrower forever. I make no apologies to anyone when I fight to take back more from our resources. That's the country's entitlement. That's why Porgera has now reopened with 51% ownership to us and 49% to our investors. That's why we are restructuring to ensure that in all other resource projects we negotiate we will take above 50% of the economic gains, and our investors under 50%.

We are fighting very hard to grow the economy. And I want to give opportunities to every citizen of our country. Part of the focus on the growth of the economy is to achieve import replacement. I have spoken at many investment conferences about the food sector — rice, beef and other produce. This is the lowest-hanging fruit to replace our imports, supply local markets and ramp up exports to the markets around us. We must focus on production for exports, capitalising on the kina finding its own strength in the market.

The task before me is to ensure that, as we cross into the fiftieth anniversary of our nation next year, first and foremost we remain one people, one nation, one country, and second, that economic opportunities are open for all our citizens. That includes putting more students into school. In the last five years, we've been able to put more students into secondary school, and more students into universities and colleges. We've introduced the higher education loan program to subsidise costs for students who come from families who need assistance. We've also helped students to study overseas, expressly in areas we feel our economy and our country need for the future.

So, I want to say, we're doing our absolute best. The economy has been my number one focus. I need to grow the economy at the very earliest to a K200 billion plus economy, to sustain our population that now is possibly about 15 million. We need the help of everyone.

I want to close off with the same words that Chancellor Robert Igara mentioned earlier. The sons of this country must rise up. The greatest impediment facing us today is a lack of respect for our country's law. I will repeat it. The greatest challenge facing us today is the lack of respect for our customary laws and our combined constitutional laws. Respecting the law is the easiest contribution any one of our citizens can make for their country. It comes at no cost. It is a free gift.

And I want to conclude with this point. It really falls to our sons. I address the Papua New Guineans amongst you — you are my kinsmen and kinswomen, because you are the most educated. To all the males in this university, in your home, on your campus, in your learning places, give respect to the females amongst us. At the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of our nation, I ask you, respect your sister, respect your daughter, respect your mother in your country, and gradually it will fall into place in our country. Small things matter most, and these are the first steps to build our country bigger and better.

This is an edited excerpt from the 2024 PNG Update opening address by James Marape, delivered at the University of Papua New Guinea on 21 August 2024. A recording of the full address may be viewed here. The original edited excerpt was published by Devpolicy on 28 August 2024, published by the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University.

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THE OCEAN OF PEACE

At the Melanesian Spearhead Group Leader's meeting in Port Vila in August 2023, Fiji's Prime Minister Sitiveni Ribuka put forward the idea of the Pacific as an "ocean of peace". He presented the idea to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders at their meeting in Rarotonga in November 2023, and there was further consideration of the concept at the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga in August 2024 and leaders reaffirmed their vision for a region of peace.

The "ocean of peace" is deeply rooted in Pacific ideas of family and relationships. In his ministerial statement, Prime Minister Rabuka says:
"At a time of geo-strategic tension, economic uncertainty, and a changing climatic environment, those who are the 'custodians of the ocean' welcome the proposal that the Pacific be an Ocean of Peace, and agree to adopt some high-level principles, to guide efforts to realise this ambition and embed peace as a cornerstone of future policies and strategies."

This concept is in addition to existing plans – such as the 2018 Boe Declaration and the Blue Pacific – but Rabuka wants to make sure Pacific perspectives are heard, as Pacific Islanders face issues such as the militarisation of the region, nuclear legacy challenges, and the dumping of treated nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean.

"The concept of peace comes from deep within our faith in the God of peace, deference and justice, that finds its expressions in our approach to issues that are embedded in the Pacific Way."

The Ocean of Peace themes include:

- Protecting and recognising the Pacific's stewardship of the environment and ocean that underpins the very existence of Pacific people;
- The Pacific's longstanding support of and contribution to global peace-making;
- Reinforcing the Pacific's peaceful example to uphold international law and urge others to refrain from actions that undermine peace and security in the Blue Pacific and beyond;
- The opportunities and benefits for the Blue Pacific in enhancing regional economic connectivity and integration.

"We are convinced of the importance of promoting peace and cooperation in Oceania for the benefit of the Pacific people, in particular, and humankind in general."

"We are convinced of the need to preserve the region from acts of militarisation, arms race, and above all, nuclear weapons – their threats of use and [actual] use. "

In 1998, Rabuka was Commonwealth Special Envoy to broker a peace settlement in the Solomon Islands conflict, and in 2023 he and Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, James Marape, were appointed special envoys by the Melanesian Spearhead Group to talk to then Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, about the situation in West Papua.

Sources: 'PM Rabuka's Ministerial Statement – The Proposal of the Ocean Of Peace', 5 August 2024; 'A Pacific "zone of peace" – what will it entail?' by Patrick Kaiku and Faith Hope Boie, 21 November 2024, The Interpreter.

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Network Cordinators: Alison Healey (info@grailaustralia.org.au) and Mary Boyd (maryboyd@live.ca)
Editor: Rosamund Burton (admi@grailaustralia.org.au)
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