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AUSTRALIA MUST MAKE CLIMATE CHANGE A PRIORITY

Caritas Australia, the international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church, has today urged the Federal Government to make climate change a priority through domestic emissions policies and international leadership.

World leaders have gathered in the Polish city of Katowice for the annual UN Climate Conference where they are expected to finalise the framework of the 2015 Paris climate accord. Delegates from the Caritas Internationalis network are at the UN climate talks in Poland and are urging States to deliver a concrete plan to tackle the devastating impacts of climate change on human life, ecosystems, food and water security.

Caritas warned of the urgent need to curb climate change for the coming decade and stated the cost of increased disasters and hazards was now unbearable for communities already facing poverty.

Countries across Oceania like Tonga are among those most affected, even though they have contributed the least to historical emissions.

Director of Caritas Tonga, Amelia Ma'afu spoke firsthand of the impact of climate change on communities in Tonga and said that we are already seeing the impacts of climate change with unpredictable weather patterns and rising sea levels impacting the lives of millions of men, women and children.

"In the Pacific, climate change is here. It is a question of us losing our home, our values and our lands," Ms Ma'afu said.

"Today's Pacific nations are facing very, very serious milestones at the moment, a number of our countries are already facing mass migration due to the islands going underwater".

Ms Ma'afu said it was crucial that governments should dedicate resources to assist developing nations who are being impacted by climate change.

"As our islands go underwater, so too do our connections to the land and our practices. All of our identity is in the land and the sea and it's the sea that actually provides a common home for Oceania, so we really need the assistance of bigger, more industrialised countries."

Caritas Australia's call comes a month after it released its fifth state of the environment for Oceania report titled "Waters of Life, Oceans for Mercy". The report, produced in collaboration with Caritas Australia's sister agencies in Oceania, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, Caritas Tonga, Caritas Samoa, and Caritas Papua New Guinea, tracks five key environmental issues affecting the lives of Oceania's peoples. These issues include coastal erosion/sea level rise, food and water, extreme weather events, offshore mining and drilling and climate finance.

The report also puts a human face on the consequences of climate change by sharing the stories of people across the region whose lives have been impacted by rising global temperatures.

Caritas Australia is encouraging all Australians to speak up in solidarity with our Pacific neighbours. Send a message to your local Member of Parliament by uploading a video on the Caritas Australia website. For full details visit:

<http://www.caritas.org.au/welcome/speak-up>

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