

UK Pacific High Level Climate Dialogue

8th July 2021

Gladys Habu - Pacific Youth Representative

Honourable Prime Ministers & Presidents of the Pacific Islands,
Right Honourable COP26 President - Alok Sharma
Distinguished Pacific Leaders and UK representatives.

It is indeed my highest honour to be granted this opportunity to engage with you this morning.

Allow me to take you back to late March 1995. UNFCCC hosted the first ever conference of the parties, COP 1, in Berlin, Germany. Three short months later, on a little island country in the Blue continent, my parents welcomed me to what I now call home. Planet Earth.

In 2009 COP 15 took place in Copenhagen Denmark, by then I was 14 years old and noticed an island I held so close to my heart slowly being washed away. Kale Island was my Grandparents home. This personal loss prompted my journey as a climate advocate.

In 2014 COP 20 was hosted across our Pacific Ocean in Peru. You see, whilst the rest of the world were participating in COP 20, 5 of our islands had completely submerged underwater, including Kale. This is documented land loss in Solomon Islands alone.

I have been advocating for climate action for over half my life and I still do not believe we are doing enough.

Instead what I am seeing, particularly here in the Pacific, is political division.

Our islands are sinking.

Our people are being displaced.

Our children are going hungry.

Our communities are becoming unhealthy and dying.

Today we are at risk of losing access to some of the most basic human rights.

If we are unable to unite, we will lose our beautiful Pasifika way.

Pacific leaders, we are already losing lives to Covid 19 and other existing battles including the overarching climate crisis. We cannot solve one crisis in isolation. Similarly, we cannot lead the fight without unity.

My only request is:

1. That each respective pacific island country must prioritise the climate crisis by declaring a climate emergency. This declaration will be symbolic of your national commitment to my generation.

As we then look ahead to COP26 in Glasgow this November, this is what I hope to see:

1. Firstly an increased representation of pacific climate leaders, especially youth. We have not been given the space we deserve to raise our voices. Our deep and personal losses must be heard.
2. Secondly, close collaboration with the UK Government and other international allies to ensure international leaders comply to their commitments to the Paris Agreement accordingly. We have less than a decade to reduce to our target global emission.
3. And finally We need increased institutional support to prepare country proposals aimed at accessing international climate finance. We need better access to finance that will provide more support in livelihood adaptation.

Distinguished leaders, just like COP, I will also be turning 26 years old this year. COP has made some significant achievements over the past 25 years but just like myself, for COP there is still a lot of work to be done.

Therefore, I like to propose a challenge, especially to the country who is to host COP 27.

The closest COP has been to us was during COP 23 when Fiji, under Hon. Bainimarama's leadership held the presidency position.

It is now 26 years and counting, and our region has yet to bring the world's biggest climate event to our shores. We need to bring COP closer to us.

We contribute almost nothing yet are at risk of losing everything.

Please come and stand in our seas and feel for yourself the urgency and importance of your responsibility!

The loss of my beloved Kale island is my line in the sand and should be a red flag for our global community.

Our future is not the only one at stake.

I fear for that of our children.....and their children to come.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.