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Pacific Islands and Climate change: Commission takes the lead to help with adaptation and fight poverty

Pacific islands are an alarming case of the adverse effects of climate change where rising sea levels have an impact upon every aspect of citizens' lives and hamper the economic development. Between 2 and 4 March 2011, European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, and Pacific Islands partners will welcome a joint Action Plan on Climate Change during a High-Level Regional Conference on Climate Change in the Pacific in Vanuatu. The Commissioner will call for an increase of international support for the Small Islands, notably to Pacific Islands. He will also launch projects worth € 50.4 million and will announce new ones for €39 million for adaptation to climate change effects and poverty.

Ahead of his visit, Commissioner A. Piebalgs stated: *"Climate change and natural disasters are putting a brake on sustainable development, economic growth and progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals in the Pacific. It is time for us to take the lead in rallying substantial international community support for the Pacific's climate change adaptation efforts. The Commission is the second biggest donor to the region in this respect. I go there with a clear message of solidarity and I call on the Member States to actively participate in the EU-Pacific joint actions to fight both climate change and poverty.*

The European Commission is amongst the Pacific's leading partners in the struggle against climate change and fighting poverty. Building on the Cancun Climate Change Conference, the event in Vanuatu addresses the specific development and climate change challenges in the Pacific. In particular, it will study the way to increase the effort for a more effective cooperation of all donors to address the large scope of problems in this part of the world.

Following the launch of the Joint Pacific-EU Initiative on Climate Change in Strasbourg 2010, the leaders will set the course for the implementation and plan for future actions. The guiding objectives of ongoing EU-Pacific cooperation are to build a stronger political dialogue on climate change, to make cooperation on climate change more effective, and to mobilise international efforts on climate change around the Pacific.

Examples of Programmes launched during the visit:

During his visit, Commissioner Piebalgs will launch and announce new programmes aiming at fighting poverty and the consequences of climate change amounting to € 89.4 million.

- Strengthening Pacific economic integration through Trade (€30 million)
- The programme to support climate change capacity development for the population of the Pacific islands.

It will implement adaptation projects such as mangrove replanting, reforestation of watershed areas, rainwater harvesting and water conservation, introduction of drought/salt resistant cultivars, soil retention measures, reduced-impact harvesting, raising infrastructures, etc (total of €8 million)

- €20 million for the Pacific Regional Programme on the reduction of risks from natural disasters, which aims at improved resilience of countries to the impact of natural disasters and better preparedness of the population in disaster-prone areas.
- €12M programme for the Overseas Countries and Territories, aiming at the reinforcement of integrated management of coastal, terrestrial and marine environments;
- €4.3M – humanitarian assistance for the region's Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction.

Commissioner's visits

During his visit to Vanuatu, Commissioner Piebalgs will undertake field visits to the only wind farm in Vanuatu funded with €4.3 million from the European Investment Bank, as well as the Vanuatu National Disaster Centre and Meteorological Services.

Background

The Pacific Island Countries and Territories have a total population of 10 million people, scattered across thousands of islands in the Pacific, which covers 1/5 of the globe. The islands are very isolated developing countries which have already suffered from regular natural disasters, limited access to infrastructures and high dependence on natural resources. In the worse case scenario, some islands could disappear due to rising sea levels (in Kiribati and Tuvalu, a rise of sea level of merely 60cm will render the majority of these islands inhabitable) and increasing erosion occurring from intense storms. Moreover 80% of the Small Island States' population live in coastal areas which make them particularly prone to changes in the sea level or weather conditions.

For instance, the only hospital on the Niuatoputapu Island, which was at sea level, was destroyed by the October 2009 tsunami. It will be reconstructed at the highest part of the island with Commission funding to account for ocean level rise.

The Commission's support for the Pacific

The European Commission development aid to the Pacific amounts to € 665 million for 2008-2013. It has increased by 60% between the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) (2002-2007) and the 10th EDF (2007-2013). Out of this total, the Commission is also actively engaged with €90 million in ongoing and already planned development cooperation projects on Climate change at country and regional level for the period 2008-2013.

Additional information:

[MEMO/11/127](#)

[IP/10/1722](#)

[MEMO/10/ 685](#)

http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_10498_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/intervention-areas/environment/climatechangealliance_en.htm

GCCA website devoted to the high level conference:

http://www.gcca.eu/pages/36_2-The-Pacific-Regional-Conference.html

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