Submission into the Inquiry of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee into New Zealand's relationship with South Pacific countries

Introduction

1. Christian World Service wishes to appear before the Select Committee in support of this submission. Contact can be made through Jonathan Fletcher or Gillian Southey phone 03 366 9274, P O Box 22 652, Christchurch or gillian.southey@cws.org.nz.

2. Christian World Service is the development, justice and aid agency of New Zealand churches. Member churches include a significant number of Pacific nations people living in this country. Together the churches have funded aid and development work since 1945. Currently Christian World Service funds development projects in over 20 countries, provides emergency relief aid, offers educational programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand on development and justice issues, and advocates alongside those who are impoverished and who suffer injustice.

3. Christian World Service is a partner of the Pacific Conference of Churches and more broadly through its participation in the World Council of Churches and through Action by Churches Together. It has long standing partnerships with the Human Rights and Democracy Movement in Tonga (HRDMT), the Tonga Community Development Trust (TCDT), the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA) in Fiji, the Missionary Sisters and Yasona in Timor Leste, the Bougainville Adult Education Resource Development Agency (BAERDA) Literacy programme, the Indigenous Land and Human Rights group of New Caledonia, the Laru Land Conference Women’s programme in the Solomon Islands and the Solomon Islands Christian Association. We have also links with Pacific Concerns Resource Centre and Mororua et Tatou (in French Polynesia). While not all of these are in Forum member countries it is our position that the Forum must hold a regional brief including recognising the place of West Papua. We have discussed our submission with some of these partners. All of them are deeply involved in their respective communities, working to improve livelihoods, increase participation and rebuild after conflict and natural disaster. Together they provide a distinctive perspective from a community angle of the New Zealand government’s role in the South Pacific.

4. Christian World Service welcomes the opportunity provided by the Select Committee Inquiry to re-examine the role of New Zealand in the South Pacific and to explore common interests on a regional basis. The affirmation of New Zealand’s role as a Pacific nation implicit in the Inquiry’s terms of reference is a significant step towards improving the relationships and positions between Pacific nations. The possibility of developing sustainable economies for all countries independent of outside assistance seems remote given the many obstacles facing some of the world’s smallest nations. In making a submission CWS seeks
to highlight the perspectives of our partner groups drawing on their rich and varied experience and our long history within the region:

**Key Interests and Responsibilities**

5. New Zealand has a number of significant interests and responsibilities for example constitutionally to Niue, the Cook Islands and Tokelau, many of which are widely acknowledged. The strong links of many who live in Aotearoa New Zealand with their Pacific fono has an important bearing on relationships to many Pacific nations. The priority given by NZAID in its funding allocations supports these relationships and the support for essential services like education, infrastructure and rural development is crucial for many of the smaller states. Christian World Service appreciates this assistance and the practical support given in emergency situations in a volatile region and recognises that this is likely to increase as a consequence of climate change. Pacific countries also acknowledge the necessary support provided for in the areas of medicine and scientific research for example.

6. As a larger more resourced nation within the region, New Zealand has a responsibility to advocate on regional matters in consultation with Pacific nations. For example with its larger representation at the World Bank it ought to press for debt cancellation and an end to the harmful conditions that are undermining the livelihoods of people within those countries. Similarly there has been a lot of criticism for its forceful advocacy of trade liberalisation including at the World Trade Organisation and through Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER)\(^1\) and with individual governments. For a number of our partners the New Zealand support for trade liberalisation and its promotion of neo-liberal economics has undermined efforts to improve democracy and economic sustainability in the region. While the government may see itself as acting in the best economic interests of Pacific nations it has not been the experience of those who live in the countries who have been highly critical of the way trade negotiations have been undertaken with inadequate in-country consultation.

**Strategic threats**

7. The presence of conflict and instability within Pacific Forum member countries could be identified as a strategic threat but also offers New Zealand the opportunity to improve its understanding of and relationships within the region. In this regard CWS solicited views from partner groups in the Solomon Islands and Fiji. Ruth Liloqula from the Lauru Land Conference women's programme spoke of local experience of RAMSI. She reported that while initially most Solomon Islanders welcomed the arrival of the RAMSI force they have seen it evolve in ways that ultimately are undermining the Solomon Islands civil service and institutions. The arrival of international personnel has not only distorted the local economy but has also changed the social norms. Where once the community contributed services and goods there is now a greater expectation of payment for everything. The affect, for example of charging to park your canoe, has increased the demand for money without any new avenues of earning it. Consequently the cycle of increased commodification of many aspects of life has increased.

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\(^1\) See for example: Kelsey, Jane, Big Brothers Behaving Badly: 2004 http://www.arena.org.nz/bigbully.pdf
led to more people demand for money for what would have been freely exchanged. Ultimately the benefits have accrued to a few especially those with good English skills, rentable property or tradeable skills, increasing disparity and division within the community while not improving the real economy in which the people live. The distortion by an influx of aid workers, business people, consultants, government or UN officials and opportunists has had similar distortional effects in other post-conflict situations like Timor Leste.

8. ECREA offers specific comment on New Zealand’s role in Fiji:

We offer two main points of critique in the New Zealand Government attempt to assist in resolving seemingly irresolvable situations:

A lack of respect by the NZ government for the Pacific’s political processes:
The South Pacific countries including Fiji are real island states that have their own values, wisdoms and political processes. We request that the NZ Government develop more real and effective ways of using Pacific values, wisdoms and processes of dialogue as part of regional mechanisms for planning and decision-making and deal with the Pacific (and Fiji) as equal partners.

Through its comments and statements on the political situation in Fiji we have found that the NZ Government lacks a contextual analysis of the complexities of real life situations in the Pacific (and Fiji) and would appear to be governed by its own interests and cultural perceptions.

NZ Governments divisive role within Fiji Civil Society networks in particular NGO’s: ECRA also found that since the December 5 2006 military takeover, the representation from the NZ government is disturbingly divisive in its dealings with the local civil society organizations and particularly with the NGO’s. There is an apparent preference for the NZ Government to fraternize or be extremely friendly to those NGO’s who share certain constructs of democracy. This is clear of those NGO’s who were taken up to camp over the Christmas break as well as those NGO’s that prefer the media coverage to real sustained forms of dialogue to change the situation. While those NGO’s who challenge those constructs of democracy and critique overseas government statements on Fiji are sidelined.

An interesting case is ECREA’s pioneering founder Fr. Kevin Barr being ‘uninvited’ to the NZ High Commissioner’s residence for a cocktail party due to the fact that other NGO representatives and donors were not comfortable with certain views that were put forward. This caused some embarrassment to both parties as Fr. Barr and ECREA had been doing serious work around informal settlements which was due for finalizing.2

9. Another key strategic threat to the region is environmental. The exploitation of forestry and fisheries has had serious consequences for Pacific peoples. The way that logging companies have operated has also increased conflict, causing division within and between communities. The experience of BAERDA working

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2 Correspondence with CWS
primarily on literacy programmes has shown a way forward. After receiving some environmental training, BAERDA is now providing workshops and training on environmental protection in Bougainville. They are also highly critical of World Bank and UNDP funding of a programme to enable families to clear land and tropical forests to grow cocoa in up to 20 hectare plots when they could have rehabilitated old farms with less environmental damage. Global Warming and climate change are also major issues in the region both affecting local livelihoods and the long term viability of islands. If New Zealand is serious about addressing this strategic regional interest it must do much more about cutting its emissions and advocating for similar actions amongst rich countries.

10. New Zealand still has a role to play in advocating for the decolonisation of French Polynesia, New Caledonia and West Papua. The instability in government in French Polynesia and the unrest in Timor Leste may also have long term regional impacts. Of further concern is the continuing affects of nuclear testing on the health of former workers and the environment in French Polynesia.

Opportunities to advance New Zealand’s relationships

11. New Zealand can best pursue new opportunities by building sound relationships with member countries. This will enable robust debate over issues of common concern but also allow them the capacity to make their own way. Rather than imposing systems from outside it would be better to support local efforts to enhance their democratic participation, respect of human rights and to ensure that each person has a decent livelihood and is treated with justice. A shared strategy for example in dealing with the consequences of climate change will enable a better response that is more likely to benefit local economies. New Zealand can do better in providing appropriate training in areas like conservation and protection from rising sea levels as well as supporting Pacific Island people in dealing with international financial institutions.

Sustainable economic development and two way trade

12. New Zealand should identify new opportunities to enhance vibrant local economies in Pacific Island nations rather than developing markets for an increasing volume of imports. The Pacific should not be seen as a place to dispose of unhealthy mutton flaps for which there are no other markets. Christian World Service also believes that New Zealand must support development and trade that enhances the lives of all people rather than pressuring governments to enter into unbalanced trade agreements. Pacific nations will continue to need substantial development assistance to address their supply side constraints in trade and to undertake impact assessments of proposed trade agreements. New Zealand should also be prepared to lend support in the interests of Pacific nations for example in supporting their efforts in negotiating a fairer Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU.

Strategic Objectives in Aid Expenditure

13. The establishment of NZAID with a strong commitment to eradicating poverty plays a crucial role in the Pacific. Christian World Service believes that aid should not be tied either to donor or government priorities but rather be committed to sound development programmes with full participation of all people who have control over its processes and have agreed to priorities. The
consensus among our partners is that it should not be linked to the implementation of good governance or neo-liberal agendas and must respect local values and culture. Good governance is important but it cannot be used as a means to deny people access to essential development. Aid cannot be made dependent on votes in the United Nations or at other international meetings or on the basis of using particular consultants from donor countries or on the basis of adopting an outside development agenda. Aid is not neutral but every effort must be made to ensure that it enhances the participation of Pacific peoples and to ensure that their human rights and livelihoods are improved.

14. Christian World Service expresses its appreciation for the increased funding in overseas development assistance and the importance of the Koha scheme in funding good development initiatives that meet community needs. We have confidence in our partners' ability to deliver significant benefits for people, especially women and children who would otherwise miss out under existing economic arrangements.

15. ECREA has questioned the New Zealand role in Fiji, seeing it as increasing divisiveness and discouraging some from being involved in efforts to deal with the latest coup. Rather than helping local people deal with the situation it made the situation worse. They offered the following comment on NZAID for the purpose of this submission:

From discussions it was understood that NZAID would be set up as an apolitical arm of the NZ Government i.e. that politics would not interfere with aid. What Fiji experienced is a reverse of this; aid was cut and furthermore travel sanctions impose making it difficult for our country to move forward on its own terms. We ask for the reasons behind this thinking to cut aid from NZAID when its original intention was to avoid this.

Appropriate level and type of aid

16. Christian World Service supports increased overseas development assistance for use on good quality aid programmes that enhance local communities and improve the livelihoods of all people. If extra spending is done in conjunction with local people it has the ability to improve the critical statistics that show that Pacific nations will not meet the Millennium Development Goals and also enable greater protection and better management of existing resources. The impact of globalisation has had significant detrimental effects especially to the forests and fisheries. As a larger more resourced nation with regional interests New Zealand has a responsibility to stop some of the unscrupulous operations in the Pacific.

Recommendations:

1. That the New Zealand government foster put time and energy into developing sound and equitable relationships with Pacific peoples respecting their different values and priorities.

2. That the New Zealand government broaden its analysis and response to complex situations so as not to further divide nations and to encourage greater participation in the Pacific in political processes, especially by women and young people.
3. That the New Zealand government review its participation in the Pacific Island Forum to ensure that it works with Pacific peoples to enhance their local economies rather than promoting trade liberalisation as the only solution.

4. That the New Zealand government support untied aid based on agreed development needs and increase spending for good quality people-centred development.

Prepared by Gillian Southey
on behalf of Christian World Service
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