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Commissioner Piebalgs and Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Slade launch a Joint Initiative on Climate Change

Following the Cancún Climate Change Conference, Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development and Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, launched today a 'Joint Pacific-EU Initiative on Climate Change'. The objective is to mobilise EU Member States and international partners to join efforts to reinforce Pacific Countries' capacity to address the impacts climate change more efficiently. These countries are possibly the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. The initiative aims to ensure that a fair share of international climate change funding goes to Pacific countries. The Commission is leading the EU's efforts to support the Pacific Islands to tackle climate change effects, with a overall dedicated envelope of €90 million over 2008-2013.

Commissioner Piebalgs said: "The EU confirms its leading role in supporting partners to face climate change, and notably the most vulnerable. We have to prevent millions of people from falling into extreme poverty because of the disastrous effects of climate change. The Joint Initiative is a call for the international community to match EU ambitions and to put high impact aid on climate change into practice in the Pacific."

Secretary General Slade said: "As recognised by Forum Leaders who described climate change as the great challenge of our time, the Forum region remains very vulnerable in terms of threats to livelihoods, security and the overall well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. The Joint Pacific-EU Initiative on Climate Change is an important demonstration of the partnership between the Pacific region and the European Union and it provides practical support for our member states in addressing the key challenge facing us all. The Forum hopes this joint effort will provide inspiration to others in the international community to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable countries remain at the forefront of global efforts to address the impacts of climate change".

Considering the nature and the scale of the challenges faced by our partners, the Commission and the Pacific Islands Forum have agreed to a Joint Initiative to encourage – and, where appropriate, assist – EU Member States and other international climate change partners to increase the share of international climate change funding for Pacific countries, and to ensure more effective and coordinated delivery methods.

The Memorandum of Understanding is the first step towards a joint integrated strategy to address climate change in the Pacific. The European Commission and the Forum Secretariat will work together with their respective Member States, institutions, civil society and private sector, on a Joint Plan for Action which will also embrace the Overseas Countries and Territories. This Joint Plan will be submitted to a Regional High Level Climate Change Conference, during Commissioner Piebalgs visit to the Pacific in 2011.

A fragile situation in the Pacific Islands

As 50% of people in the Pacific Islands live close to the coastline, populations in the Pacific are the most exposed to threats such as sea rise or extreme weather, both in terms of economic opportunities (impact on fishery resources, on tourism) and subsistence. These states have limited opportunities for economic growth, face structural capacity constraints and are very vulnerable to recurrent natural disasters. Climate change can further exacerbate tensions over scarce resources such as land or water, affect influence agriculture and hamper progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Background on Commission financed climate change programmes

The Commission is leading the EU's efforts in development cooperation with the Pacific, with more than €600 million made available for 2008-2013. In addition, the EU dedicates €70,49 million for the Pacific Overseas Countries and Territories on the same period in the framework of the EU-OCT (Overseas Countries and Territories) association. Addressing climate change has been one of the priorities of the last few years, with €90 million for programmes at country and regional level. They notably focus on adaptation measures, sustainable management of natural resources, renewable energy and disaster preparedness.

For instance, programmes in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands seek to increase countries' capabilities to cope with the effects of climate change by improving its overall understanding of the effects of climate change. They also aim to strengthen **climate resilience and disaster risk reduction** in key sectors. At the regional level, the EU programmes support strategic actions on **adaptation** by strengthening capacity building, community engagement and encouraging applied research. Also, the European Development Fund finances climate change related programmes. For example, renewable energy is the main sector of activity for EU actions in Federate States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Nauru, Palau, and Tonga. The objective is to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency that will help reduce dependency on fossil fuels and improve the quality of life in the concerned countries.

Another example refers to the "INTEGRE" project developed by Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Pitcairn, the Pacific Overseas Countries and Territories associated with the EU. This project of € 12 million focuses on actions in the areas of protection of the environment and the management of natural resources and island ecosystems, with an overall objective relating to adaptation to climate change. The project will reinforce regional cooperation in these areas by the means of implementing in the Overseas Countries and Territories projects carried out in Pacific States. This will notably allow networking between them. This project will be co-managed with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

For more information

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