



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **New EU support to renewable energy and fighting climate change in the Pacific**

European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, and New Zealand Foreign Minister, Murray McCully, will undertake a joint mission to the Pacific on 23-27 April to further strengthen development cooperation in that region. The visit will focus above all on renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, several of them co-financed by New Zealand and the EU in Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati (including Christmas Island) and the Cook Islands. Commissioner Piebalgs will also travel to Papua New Guinea from 28 – 30 April to discuss development challenges with members of the government and will launch two projects worth almost €60 million.

The Pacific islands are victims of the adverse effects of climate change where rising sea levels have an impact upon every aspect of citizens' lives and hamper economic development. The difficulties they face are exacerbated by extremely high fossil fuel costs due to their isolated location and by the lack of access to electricity in outer islands.

Ahead of the trip, European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, said: *"Renewable energy is something that I am strongly committed to. Energy is crucial for education and healthcare, for growth, tourism and even for the supply of water. In short, renewable energy is a country's main route towards growth and development."*

New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully said: *"New Zealand places great value on our partnership with the EU in the Pacific. Converting the region to renewable energy is critical and it is only happening at such a rapid pace because of our close cooperation with the EU."*

### **Examples of Programmes launched or visited:**

- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> solar panels to provide renewable electricity in three of Tuvalu's outer islands, which will make reliable clean electricity available for the first time. (€2.5 million)
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> The construction of six photovoltaic power plants in the region, including the energy-dependant Cook Islands, co-financed with the Asian Development Bank,
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> In Kiribati, a project will provide people with access to an environmentally-safe source of construction material, therefore protecting the vulnerable shores from perturbation caused by aggregate mining (€5.2 million).
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> A Health Laboratory in Kiribati will be dedicated to monitoring and responding to environmental diseases, such as vector-borne diseases (vectors are small organisms such as mosquitoes, bugs and freshwater snails that can transmit disease from one person to another). (€500,000)

## **Development cooperation with Papua New Guinea**

The high level visit will also include Papua New Guinea. Despite its fast-growing economy and richness in natural resources and biodiversity, the country is still facing great challenges. Around 80-85% of its population still depends on subsistence agriculture and lives in rural areas, and it is unlikely that any of the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved by 2015.

However, the change of government in 2012 came up with a number of laudable initiatives in health, education, infrastructure development and anti-corruption. During this visit, Commissioner Piebalgs will meet the country authorities and highlight that the EU stands ready to keep up the momentum initiated then.

Two new projects on human resources development (€26 million) and on rural economic development (over €32 million) will also be signed. The first one will focus on providing technical and vocational education to help the country's labour markets absorb a growing young population and provide them with a skilled workforce adapted to the national needs. The second project will aim to accelerate income generation through infrastructure-related activities such as rural road rehabilitation and maintenance, or by increasing access to financial services for agricultural value chain financing.

## **Energy Partnership**

These projects are the first fruits of the EU-NZ Energy Partnership for the Pacific, an outcome of the Pacific Energy Summit, held in Auckland in March 2013. Its aim was to move Pacific nations closer to achieving 50% of their electricity from renewable means. Around €400 million were secured for Pacific energy projects.

Providing clean and efficient modern energy, is an important step on the Pacific's way to sustainable development. Currently, the Pacific region meets around 80% of its energy needs from imported fossil fuels. This considerably affects health, education and trade opportunities in the region. The Partnership helps to reduce the Pacific's dependence on fossil fuels, thus generating savings.

For the European Union, the Energy Partnership for the Pacific is a concrete proof of its commitment to the UN's Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL). Through this initiative, the EU has committed to help developing countries provide 500 million people with access to sustainable energy services by 2030. Commissioner Piebalgs is a member of the SE4ALL Advisory Board.

## **Background**

The Pacific Island Countries and Territories have a total population of 10 million people, scattered across thousands of islands in the Pacific. These 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 worst 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 more information**

Website of the European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/piebalgs/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/piebalgs/index_en.htm)

Website of EuropeAid Development and Cooperation DG:

[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm)

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