

YOUTHFUL VOICES AGAINST GLOBALIZATION

Participants from thirty countries are meeting in Nadi, Fiji, this week to discuss alternatives to economic globalization. The meeting is being organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and is the third in a series of regional and global consultations on this topic. Below, Bob Scott of the WCC Public Information team reports on a meeting of young people that preceded the consultation.

“Never before has it been so important for young people to search for alternatives to the current dynamics of globalization. It is our future that is being threatened.” That was the view of a large group of young people meeting in Nadi, Fiji this week. Brought together by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), they came from fifteen Pacific island states and were joined by other young people from Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

In their four-day meeting, the young people identified four major areas of concern: global warming, information technology, culture, and the economy.

Participants from the Pacific said that the emission of greenhouse gases, mainly from countries in Europe and the USA, has drastic consequences in their region. A rise in temperature from 1.5 to 6 degrees centigrade will have a devastating effect on the already-fragile ecosystems of the Pacific. If the sea level rises by 80 centimeters, islands that now are only 3 meters above sea level will be threatened with extinction. Already some island people have had to be relocated - refugees not from war but from ecological greed. “Is this a form of racism? The people in Northern countries don’t care what hap-

pens to us as long as they get what they want. Do they believe their lifestyle is more important than ours?” asks 21-year-old Betero Bebia from Kiribati.

As young people, the group acknowledged the exciting possibilities of expanding technologies and recognized the significance of instant access to research results, online

training and studies. But the positive aspects of communications development are balanced by a darker side: the volume of financial transactions

and speculation now possible due to the new technologies leaves their fragile economies even more vulnerable. “As our world expands through technology, so does our vulnerability,” judges Fonofonosefulu Margaret-Marie Maene from American Samoa.

The young people were also clear about the pernicious influence of pornographic sites on the Internet, reaching into young minds and corrupting carefully nurtured values.

Every visitor to any Pacific island is immediately struck by the strength of Pacific culture in song, dance and hospitality. That is the side of the culture tourists see and enjoy. Proud of their culture, the Pacific participants are feeling the increasing influence of western lifestyles and consumerism. Says

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The group recognized the benefits that tourism has brought to their region, especially employment opportunities. “But on the other hand, tourism is robbing the people of the Pacific of income generated in our own islands, because so much of the tourist industry is owned by foreign companies,” says 18-year-old Davina Hosking from the Cook Islands (Raratonga).

“The economic wealth of our islands is being enjoyed by people who have no home here, no stake in what happens to us as people, and who may one day abandon us. How can we trust them?” asks 25-year-old Richard Tatwin from Vanuatu.

A strong and positive vision emerged from the exchange. “Let Christ be the Island of Hope!” the young people said. They called for more intentional education about the effects of globalization, for living out the values of equality, justice, peace and respect for diversity, for the vision of life set out by Jesus Christ, in which each person treats his/her neighbor as he/she would wish to be treated.

What alternatives did the group propose? A return to cooperation and not competition, linking young Pacific people with other

young people worldwide to work for the adoption of international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, a transformation of education systems to preserve and promote Pacific values and cultures despite the impact of globalization.

The meeting ended with a call for an economic boycott. The young people were disturbed to hear that international oil companies like Exxon have cast doubt on the findings of the scientific body of the Climate Change Convention that CO2 emissions do

indeed aggravate global warming. The young participants see this as a life and death issue. They called on churches to initiate a boycott of Exxon and will ask the WCC to follow through on this.

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