



**SPREP
OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES**

NO. 2

**ADDRESS BY THE
HON. RUSSELL MARSHALL,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
GOVERNMENT OF NEW ZEALAND TO
THE PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT
CONFERENCE HELD AT THE
COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE,
LONDON, 3 OCTOBER, 1988.**

**South Pacific Commission
Noumea, New Caledonia**

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

(SPREP)

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA

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NO.2

PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE

Address by the Hon. Russell Marshall, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Commonwealth Institute Pacific Environment Conference, 3 October 1988

Tukino ao Tukino Koe

Chairman of Governors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The theme and title of this address is drawn from a Maori proverb "Tukino ao Tukino koe" - destroy nature; destroy yourself.

May I begin by saying what a great pleasure it is for me to be invited to speak at the Commonwealth Institute. I have known for some time, of course, of the importance of the Institute in promoting awareness of the Commonwealth and its members, but it is gratifying to be able to come here and see for myself the excellent exhibitions and facilities. As the representative of a Commonwealth member country which has itself made contributions to the Institute, I would like to congratulate and thank the British Government for its generous support, and also the Director and his staff for the energetic and creative approach they have taken.

I have been particularly impressed by the imaginative and, I think, entirely successful way in which the Institute has developed the theme of the South Pacific Commonwealth during this year's "Pacific Way" programme. New Zealand is, of course, very much a part of the South Pacific region and we identify closely with the concerns of the region. The South Pacific is blessed with a number of natural advantages. But there are also several difficult issues which confront the region, the most evident being the small size and remoteness of many of the countries. The Pacific Way programme is, therefore, a valuable opportunity for the members of the region to articulate their concerns and put forward solutions which will, I hope, not only assist their own development, but contribute to the solution of similar problems elsewhere, thus reinforcing the mutual support provided under the Commonwealth umbrella.

It is an honour also to be invited to speak on the environment as it is a topic of considerable importance, not only to the South Pacific, but to the global community. Responsible management of the environment has become a key issue of the late 20th century - it is no longer simply a question of how environmental changes will impact on the quality of our lives but whether, under existing pressures, our world can continue to sustain life through the next century and beyond. It is, in my view, essential that we focus on the issues now so that more appropriate environmental management practices can be installed as a priority. There have been important moves in this direction already. Clearly forums of this kind, which provide an opportunity for contributions at many levels, are a significant part of the move to develop an effective and concerted attack on the problem areas. The Commonwealth Institute is to be congratulated for its foresight in focussing on this issue.

International Perspective

It is, I believe, a fair generalisation to say that until quite recently New Zealand took a geographically narrow approach to environmental issues. We focussed on ecosystem problems of particular relevance to New Zealand and our immediate region of the South Pacific and Antarctica. We left it to the rest of the world to sort out its own problems. Issues such as tropical rain forest destruction, Northern Hemisphere industrial pollution, African desertification, acid rain, were considered to be important but too distant from our more immediate concerns. Today we recognise the inadequacy of such an approach. The interlinkage of various kinds of environmental damage and the global impact on our biosphere mean that no one can afford to be detached about any aspect of environmental mismanagement. This is, for example, clearly evident in the manufacture of chlorofluorocarbon gases which manifest themselves in the depletion of the ozone layer above the Antarctic and elsewhere. An even more complex problem has arisen with such individually unique environmental issues as fossil fuel consumption, tropical rain forest depletion, and desertification, which have coalesced to create the greenhouse effect. These problems do not have their principal sources in our South Pacific region, but they

provide a very serious potential threat to us and, of course, to other parts of the globe.

The complexity and interlinkage of environmental problems and their capacity to have severe global consequences have been made very clear to us by that remarkable document, "Our Common Future", which was prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development. As you may be aware, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath Ramphal, was one of the members of this distinguished Commission. Its report, also known as the Brundtland Report after its Chairperson,

Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Prime Minister of Norway, has, I believe, removed any last lingering doubts about the severe and cumulative consequences to the world's biosphere of environmental abuse - regardless of where and how it occurs. The clear corollary of this is that we each have a responsibility to the international community to ensure that all our economic endeavours are undertaken in harmony with the environment. Moreover, the international community needs to act in concert in repairing the damage that has been done already. The report is also to be highly commended for its success in bringing these fundamental but often neglected issues to the forefront of the international community's attention. The report received careful consideration at last year's United Nations General Assembly and played a key part in giving environmental issues a much needed international perspective. Now that the seriousness and the nature of some of the problems are better understood, I believe that the scope for more effective action has been enhanced.

The Brundtland report also recognises that for effective global and environmental protection, work needs to be undertaken and coordinated at three levels - nationally, regionally and internationally. In endorsing this, I would add that I also see an important role for the Commonwealth. As an intra-regional body with a proven capacity in achieving consensus amongst a very representative cross section of the international community, the Commonwealth is uniquely placed to play an influential part in promoting a harmonious and concerted effort to achieve global solutions to environmental problems. This role is, I believe, particularly important in dealing with some of the problems identified in regions such as the South Pacific, where the member states may have only a limited capacity to ensure that their problems are addressed adequately in international forums.

New Zealand's Approach

Recent reorganisation of New Zealand's way of implementing environment policy has, I believe, given us a better focus and a more dynamic approach. In less than two years, considerable progress has been made towards more comprehensive, integrated and consistent environment planning and management. Our 1986 Environment Act provides the basis for implementing a comprehensive strategy for dealing with environmental issues in a way that recognises the linkages between various ecosystems and their impact on the global biosphere. The 1986 Environment Act, like the Brundtland Report, underlines

the importance of ensuring that natural and physical resources are managed to sustain environmental quality and human wellbeing. Within this overall goal there is wide scope for activity and New Zealand has had to identify very carefully those priorities which will ensure a high quality physical environment, provide for social equity, and deal with the major environmental risks on a national, regional and global basis. I do not have time to cover

every area of concern, but I would like to share my thoughts on some environment aspects which are important to New Zealand and which may be of interest to the South Pacific, and the Commonwealth.

Social Equity

I believe that it is fundamental that a high quality of environmental protection must be provided to all communities, both nationally and more widely, on a universal basis. In New Zealand this requires a commitment by the Government and the people to work in partnership with the Tangata Whenua (the indigenous Maori people of New Zealand) and in harmony with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. This is essential if we are to secure full recognition and use of the particular skills indigenous people can bring to the balanced management of land, forest and marine resources. The Maori peoples understanding of the environment is clearly and succinctly reflected in the proverb Tukino ao tukino koe - destroy nature and destroy yourself.

In the South Pacific, in particular, where very fragile and finely balanced ecosystems are coming under considerable pressure from urbanisation, tourism, fisheries exploitation, forest development, and industrialisation, it is essential that the local communities are brought into the planning processes at the outset. For example, the individuals and communities exercising rights to land have to be made aware of the environmental risks in making major changes in land use. This is important not only for sustaining traditional societies, but to ensure that traditional skills for managing the environment which are based on the firmly understood principles of sustainable economic activity, are retained for the national benefit. I believe that the South Pacific island countries have, by and large, retained a closer harmony with their environment than many other communities. In this regard the South Pacific may have a lesson to offer to the rest of the world and I am sure that practical ways of using South Pacific management practices will emerge in the course of this seminar.

Development Assistance and the Environment

More widely, our need to provide for environmental equity should be reflected in a careful concern to ensure that our commercial activities do not impair the environment of others. This is particularly so in the case of our development assistance programmes where, without careful thought, we run the risk of creating environmental hazards that reduce the quality of life and create added burdens for developing countries. It is now a requirement of

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New Zealand's development programme, which is largely directed to the South Pacific region, that all new major programmes receive an environmental assessment and clearance before they can proceed. I recognise that this

concern adds a significant new dimension to the cost and time in proceeding with important projects and this may diminish the capacity of existing programmes. This is a problem common to most bodies involved in development work and I hope that the Commonwealth and other development agencies may be able to construct procedures that will make such environmental assessment methods more effective and less expensive. From my examination of the agenda this seems to be another area where this Conference may be able to provide solutions relevant to our region and elsewhere.

Role of Education

Another major thrust of my country's environment strategy is to apply the old rule that prevention is better (and less expensive) than cure. A key element to this is education. We must always be fully alive to the many environmental consequences of our commercial endeavours. This approach is being encouraged by an innovative and far sighted educational programme throughout the Pacific Basin. Many of the delegates from the South Pacific will be aware of the Pacific Circle Consortium (the group of regional educational agencies initiated by the South Pacific OECD countries), which since 1975 has been instrumental in developing for schools of the South Pacific and Pacific Basin educational material on the environment with a focus on oceans, coastal zones, forests, tourism, and Antarctica. Because the oceans and forests provide a primary economic base for many South Pacific communities, they are of particular concern to us and this is also reflected in the structure of this Conference's agenda. The impact of education programmes is clear today in the numbers of young people coming forward who are very sensitive to, and active about, the consequences of inadequate management of the environment. Their views are no doubt a factor in the high profile that New Zealand projects on a number of environmental issues.

Nevertheless, much more needs to be done in respect of raising environmental awareness. In our region the work of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and conferences of this kind are playing an important part. Internationally the Brundtland Report has assisted greatly in this area, particularly in giving UN agency programmes a more sharply focussed environmental perspective. I hope that the Commonwealth agencies may also be able to take a greater part in reinforcing and complementing this by ensuring that their agenda also reserve a prominent place for environmental issues.

South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

It is now beginning to be better understood that environmental integrity at home can only be sustained by a national commitment to broader regional and global environment programmes. At the regional level the South

Pacific is blessed by a comparatively low level of environmental degradation and by the presence of an active and effective institution, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, known more conveniently as SPREP. Since its inception in 1974 as a coordinating body for several regional and international organisations involved with the South Pacific's environment, SPREP has taken a very constructive and progressive approach. As the South Pacific participants in this meeting will be aware, SPREP has played a key role in three areas. Firstly, it has prepared a regional based "Action Plan" which has been designed so that the South Pacific countries can maintain and improve their shared environment (and I should mention that among the plan's priorities is the development of a strategy for excluding nuclear waste from the region). This regional plan is supplemented by SPREP's role in implementing a range of practical programmes with a particular focus on the protection of tropical forests and coastal and lagoon environments, areas which are of fundamental importance for sustaining traditional economic activity. Thirdly, SPREP has prepared international environmental treaty arrangements designed to ensure that the region's environment is respected in a wider and more legally binding fashion. Indeed, the SPREP Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific, along with its protocols to combat pollution emergencies and dumping, could serve as a valuable model for other areas seeking regional arrangements to protect their environment.

South Pacific Nuclear Issues

Among the potential threats to our South Pacific environment, the threat of radioactive pollution carries some of the most serious and far-reaching consequences. Within our South Pacific region New Zealand has been a keen supporter of measures to protect the natural environment against possible radioactive pollution. Our strong feelings are shared by our South Pacific neighbours. The South Pacific's limited land-based natural resources, and the need to rely on the ocean to provide a very large part of the food base, has made us all very sensitive to the threats to the atmosphere and sea from radioactive pollution. These concerns are manifested in the Convention for the Protection of Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region in November 1986 which, among its provisions, prohibits the dumping at sea or into the seabed and subsoil of radioactive waste and obliges signatories to take "all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution" arising from nuclear testing. It was adopted by all South Pacific countries and those nuclear powers with a territorial involvement in the region - the United Kingdom, the United States and France. Accordingly the SPREP Convention plays a most important part in bringing together countries with differing security perceptions in a commitment to environmental protection.

While the SPREP Convention aims at minimising any pollutant effects from nuclear testing in our region, what New Zealand and other countries of the South Pacific would like to see is an end to testing altogether. Through

Protocols 2 and 3 to the 1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (or Treaty of Rarotonga) our region has invited the nuclear weapon states to extend important guarantees concerning the non-use and non-testing of nuclear weapons in our part of the world. So far two of these states (China and the USSR) have indicated their support for the relevant Protocols. New Zealand and the eleven other South Pacific signatories hope that other nuclear weapon states will also sign the Protocols in the near future.

Antarctica

In the context of the environmental wellbeing of the Pacific we must also focus on Antarctica which, although at the southern extremity, exercises a major influence on the environment of the Pacific - and of the globe. As changes to the Antarctic ecosystem can have an important bearing on regional concerns such as ocean currents, marine resources, climate and sea levels, there is a need for us to be particularly careful with the management of the Antarctic environment.

Antarctica is, of course, a part of the world in which New Zealand has a direct and significant involvement. For the past 30 years human activity in Antarctica has been carried out under the auspices of the Antarctic Treaty. It provides a vital framework for international cooperation in the continent and gives special recognition to the need to protect the fragile environment. This has been a major theme of Treaty discussions, as can be seen from the adoption of a range of measures to protect the Antarctic ecosystem. Most recently the Treaty Parties adopted in June this year the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities which contains the most stringent environmental protection regime that has ever been negotiated in an international agreement.

International Environment Hazards

Within the biosphere there are a number of serious changes taking place arising from population pressures or consumerism coupled with poor environment management practices. Among the list of major concerns I would include nuclear testing, the uncontrolled dumping of toxic and hazardous wastes, desertification, the acidification of the atmosphere, tropical rain forest destruction, deterioration of the soil base and deposit of wastes in the oceans. Each of these is very serious in itself and some processes such as desertification have already contributed to large scale human deprivation and suffering. I would like to touch on three issues; nuclear winter, the greenhouse effect, and the destruction of the ozone layer, whose potential for large scale global damage is quite staggering.

Nuclear Winter

I have mentioned possible radioactive pollution arising from causes within our South Pacific region. Localised threats are not the only ones which concern New Zealand though. We may be far away from the main theatres of any

global nuclear war but we are not immune. There is no barrier we or anyone else can build to keep radioactive fallout away from our seas, skies and shores. Last year the New Zealand Planning Council undertook a study of the possible consequences for New Zealand of nuclear war. Their completed study "New Zealand after Nuclear War" makes disturbing reading. New Zealand and the South Pacific would probably escape the immediate impact of nuclear bombs, but the consequent environmental change would be of an extreme extent and intensity. Vast quantities of carbon particles, darkened skies, freezing temperatures, and radioactive contamination, would leave our region with abject misery and little solace in any possible prospect of survival. These are some of the reasons why New Zealand continues to be concerned to promote a nuclear free South Pacific and be active in multilateral disarmament endeavours, convinced that balanced and verifiable arms control and disarmament measures offer the best prospect for durable world security and protection of the natural environment of the whole of this small globe.

Greenhouse Effect

As all of us are aware, scientists are predicting there will be significant increases to the earth's temperature over the next 50 years. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that this process is well under way. From the current build up in greenhouse gases, created by the combined effects of car combustion, coal consumption, energy releases, industrial pollutants, deforestation, and desertification it is predicted that the earth's temperature will increase by about 0.8°C each decade. While this may have advantages in certain cool and elevated areas, the warmer temperatures associated with rising sea levels, changes in weather patterns and ocean currents, can be expected to have potentially serious consequences in other parts of the world and in particular its coastal areas. The South Pacific could be very severely affected. The very existence of atoll communities in such places as Kiribati, Tuvalu and Tokelau would be threatened, while the economic activity and quality of life in other South Pacific countries are likely to be severely impaired. New Zealand, largely a country of coastal communities, would also be hard hit. These prospects, alarming in our region, take on a horrific dimension in other parts of the world. For instance the impoverishment of Sub Saharan Africa could be accelerated by further drought and desertification with, no doubt, a devastating impact on the inhabitants' survival prospects.

The cost in human suffering makes a compelling case for the international community to take urgent action now to anticipate the situation. But this is not an easy issue. Indeed the wide variety of contributing environmental factors, the high cost of changing existing economic activities, commercial resistance to change, coupled with the resource problems of the third world where desperate food situations leave few alternative options, give little assurance that remedies can be quickly put in place.

There are, nevertheless, some reassuring aspects. The problem has been recognised and attempts are being made to come to grips with it. In our region the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme is examining options and advising governments. The Commonwealth has taken the lead in setting up an expert group to ascertain ways of controlling the situation and they will report to the 1989 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The World Meteorological Organisation is establishing a panel of experts to look at the impact on and possible responses to climate change. We now need initiatives from these organisations which, with a committed support from the international community, may be able to establish some prospect of better environmental control. In recognition of this need, we have already undertaken to contribute personnel and resources for the work of each of these multilateral bodies and to establish at the national level a Government programme to plan for the consequences of the greenhouse effect has been put in place.

Ozone Layer Depletion

Scientific studies have also clearly established that the emission of Chlorofluorocarbons and other related gases, from a wide variety of industrial processes, plays a major part in reducing the earth's protective ozone layer. This part of the stratosphere protects us from the ultraviolet radiation that creates skin cancers and severely limits plant yields. Worst case scenarios of ozone depletion have indicated food and health problems equal to, or worse than, those of a nuclear winter. The issue has global consequences but is particularly alarming for the South Pacific region since depletion has most seriously manifested itself in a growing gap in the ozone layer above Antarctica.

In recognition of these concerns New Zealand played an active part in the negotiations organised by the United Nations Environmental Programme to develop a protocol to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. This work, as you know, culminated in the adoption in September 1987 of the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer. The Protocol, which provides for a 50% reduction by 2000 in the emission of the most dangerous CFCs, is in New Zealand's view a bitter-sweet success. UNEP's achievement in having the Protocol adopted represents a major and welcome step forward in international environment control and points the way ahead for dealing with a range of environmental hazards. However, present evidence shows that the Protocol's measures are insufficient to protect the ozone layer. Much more stringent provisions are required. More work is needed and this could, I suggest, be facilitated by the efforts both of the South Pacific countries and, more widely, by the Commonwealth.

Conclusion

My remarks have had a rather pessimistic tone. The impact of 20th century industrial society in the developed countries, coupled with population pressures and resource

restraints in the developing world, have combined to create environmental damage and hazards of huge dimensions. By polluting the atmosphere, destroying vegetation, poisoning the oceans, destroying soils, the human race is in the process of removing its own life support systems. It is most ironic and unfair that these processes, which are eliminating the inheritance of our children, will take a serious toll on those communities of the South Pacific which are amongst the few that operate in close harmony with the environment, and which have very limited influence to persuade others to apply more responsible management practices.

As a New Zealand and South Pacific minister, I am, therefore, most grateful for the Commonwealth Institute's foresight in organising this meeting. It will, I believe, contribute to a greater awareness of the problems and the movement to put in place national programmes that will facilitate regional and global solutions. Let us also work to ensure that this message will, through our Commonwealth links, be reinforced and promoted more widely in the international community. The solutions to the South Pacific's environmental problems lie both in our national commitments to apply appropriate environment control measures, and in our collective commitments to develop concerted plans of global and regional action. This Conference will, indeed must, make an important contribution in developing a platform for progress at all levels.

He konei ra e nga rangatira e hui hui nei. Kia ora tatou katoa.