

## Press Release

### URGENCY OF DROWNING ISLANDS DOES NOT NEGATE NEED FOR GENDER EQUALITY

**Copenhagen, 14 December 2009 – Leah Wickham is a 24 year-old woman from the Fiji Islands fighting for urgent and immediate action on climate change to prevent her small island from sinking. She says with tearful eyes that she wants to hope that 50 years from now her children will be growing up in Fiji without the fear of their island sinking. Ms. Wickham is pleading to world leaders to take action on climate change mitigation for the future generation of her islands. “To lose culture is the most degrading thing. [Climate change, causing] the slightest rise in sea level, affects tradition, culture and roles of people,” says Leah.**

It is clear that Leah, like so many of her companions from Small Island Developing States (SIDS)— a part of the AOSIS group at COP-15—is desperate to have words translate into action to save their sovereignty. In Fiji, higher temperatures are the cause of coral bleaching and less fish. Women, as the primary shoreline fishers and farmers, have been the first to notice these impacts. Men, primarily responsible for housing and settlements use traditional knowledge to rebuild after disasters. Therefore, despite, or rather, because of the urgency of the Fiji’s disappearing island, gender roles must be addressed to effectively implement climate change actions.

Ambassador Dessima Williams and delegate to the UNFCCC from Grenada, also a member of AOSIS, has always stated that gender equality is a prerequisite to sustainable development and a necessity to a comprehensive global climate change agreement: “Incorporating gender equality strategies into disaster risk mitigation is an important way to maximize protection against climate-induced disasters.”

Other delegates notice that a gender perspective is not only important in the global climate change outcome but also in the negotiations that lead to them. One delegate expressed that it can be difficult to have equal perspectives from women and men when there are so few women compared to men at the meetings. Although significant efforts have been made by various countries particularly by the government of Finland to bring more women to the COPs 2/3rds of the country delegates to the UNFCCC are men.

However, there is much that is being done and that can be done to address gender equality in the new global climate change agreement. The Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA)—an alliance of 13 United Nations agencies and 25 civil society organizations—aims to increase awareness on these gender issues and helps to ensure that the final outcome agreement has a gender perspective. The GGCA has been providing technical language and training on the connections between gender and climate change to negotiators throughout the year. At COP-15 the GGCA is also creating awareness through various avenues that include street theater performances, *Want it Done, Ask a Women*, an art exhibit by ARTPORT, *(Re-) Cycles of Paradise*, a high level side event including the President of Finland and the U.S. Speaker of the House and a photo shoot of leaders standing up for gender equality.

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