



Tuvalu not comfortable with environmental change refugees status

By Online Editor

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Hilia Vavae, head of Tuvalu's Meteorological Services

By Pita Ligaiula in Cairns, in Australia

While the rest of the world continues to debate the implications of climate change, the people of the tiny island atoll of Tuvalu says it's too early to label them as 'environmental refugees.'

That's the view from Hilia Vavae, head of Tuvalu's Meteorological Services, who is attending the Science of climate change, Greenhouse 2011 conference in Cairns, Australia.

"I think it's a bit early to have the actual name of refugees into discussion, however what is actually happening back home is we don't look at ourselves as environmental refugees. This is actually within us, indigenous people of the country," Vavae told PACNEWS.

Communities on low lying atolls are faced with a looming homeless crisis due to rising sea levels caused by global warming.

“I think it’s fair to say that we need to work on the causes of the problem as well as adaptation to go along with it,” she said.

Countries throughout the region and the world, including Australia are being pressured to take a more proactive role in tackling some of the consequences of climate change.

Vavae said despite the fact that Pacific Island countries are low emitters of carbon pollution, Tuvaluans don’t want to be labeled as environmental refugees.

“We are still hopeful that big countries around the world will help us. On the other hand, if we become environmental refugees and we are forced to leave the country, then that is very sad.

Sea levels are predicted to rise between 14cm and 32cm by 2050 as a result of rising atmospheric temperatures melting ice sheets and glaciers.

Meanwhile, Tuvalu has been experiencing drought since September last year due to the LA NINA weather pattern.

“It’s not severe as the 1999 drought,” Vavae told PACNEWS.

She said the drought experienced from September to December was quite intense.

Tuvalu needs climate science to help adapt to climate change and climate variability, Vavae said.

SOURCE: PACNEWS