



Key Messages and Priorities for COP30

Guidance from Grassroots Leaders Confronting the Most Urgent Impacts of the Climate Crisis

Who is Pacific Rising?

Pacific Rising is a **collective of community-based and non-governmental organizations representing Indigenous and local communities across the Pacific Islands**. Established in 2022, the group addresses the negative impacts of climate change, particularly the loss and damage of local, traditional, and Indigenous resources and practices, mental health, water and food security, and historical and recent forced displacement due to the climate crises, also known in policy spaces as **Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD)**. Pacific Rising recognizes NELD as losses that are difficult to quantify or cannot be quantified.



The collective's current members are from **Bougainville, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Kioa, and Rabi**. These communities have been affected not only by the climate crisis but also by extractive industries, militarization, and ongoing colonial legacies, including cultural losses resulting from forced relocation and migration.

Despite these challenges, they have demonstrated resilience by drawing on generations of traditional and Indigenous knowledge and employing nature-based solutions to protect their environments and preserve important cultural sites. Supported by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), Pacific Rising advocates for **Indigenous leadership in climate action**, the legal and cultural protection of Traditional Knowledge, and embedding principles of fairness, transparency, and respect. Pacific Rising is committed to fostering collaborative, culturally appropriate approaches that uphold community rights and shared responsibility, and shifting toward decolonized models of partnerships, funding, and learning.

Pacific Rising Leaders Share the Following Messages and Priorities for COP30:

- Center human rights-based protections
- Prioritize effective financing for NELD (Non-Economic Loss & Damage)
- Embed Traditional Knowledge (TK) in climate frameworks
- Affirm the centrality of gender equality and intersectionality in climate justice work
- Address the need for grassroots accompaniment and capacity building

Human Rights-Based Protections Must be Centered at COP30

Human rights protections must be centered in all matters of COP30 negotiations.

- **Pacific Rising urges States to follow the ICJ’s Advisory Opinion on States’ Obligations in Respect of Climate Change (AO)**, which affirms that climate change is a significant threat to human rights and that countries have a duty to protect the climate system to ensure the enjoyment of human rights; and that States have legal obligations under existing international law to take action on climate change.
- Relating to loss and damage, the ICJ concludes that “responsibility for breaches of obligations under the climate change treaties, and in relation to the loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, is to be determined by applying the well-established rules on State responsibility under customary international law.”
- On page 131 of the AO, the Court is of the opinion that **customary international law sets forth obligations for States to ensure the protection of the climate system** and other parts of the environment from anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. These obligations include the following:
 - (a) **States have a duty to prevent significant harm to the environment** by acting with due diligence and to use all means at their disposal to prevent activities carried out within their jurisdiction or control from causing significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities;
 - (b) **States have a duty to co-operate with each other in good faith** to prevent significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment, which requires sustained and continuous forms of co-operation by States when taking measures to prevent such harm;
- **Pacific Rising also urges States to seriously address the issue of climate-forced displacement and relocation**, an issues that we as Pacific Island communities are already experiencing.
 - The ICJ recognizes that **displacement is among the most “severe and far-reaching” effects of climate change** (ICJ AO, 2025, paragraph 73) and affirms that States are obligated under international law to protect human rights, and respect the principle of non-refoulement. Strengthened international cooperation and predictable support are vital to help people adapt in place or move safely and with dignity.



Loss & Damage Finance (Non-Economic Loss & Damage) Must be Prioritized

Accessing finance is still the biggest challenge for the Pacific Rising community.

- **Financial mechanisms for Loss & Damage must explicitly allocate resources to address Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD)**, acknowledging that climate change undermines cultural heritage, identities, health, social cohesion, and intergenerational knowledge; impacts that cannot be fully compensated through economic means alone.
- **COP30 must operationalize the Loss & Damage Fund in a manner that is reparative, not charitable**, grounded in climate debt and historical responsibility of high-emitting states.
- **COP30 must establish transparent, accessible, and community-driven funding processes** that prioritize frontline communities disproportionately affected by NELD, ensuring that support reaches those most in need. An example of this approach is KATO, a Pacific grassroots community finance mechanism established in Kioa by Pacific civil society-based groups to mobilize flexible funding to communities in need, demonstrating that community-driven finance mechanisms are effective, accountable, and responsive to local realities.
- Any form of finance and capacity bridging must be prioritized for **community-based organizations** and not just states.
- **Urgent resourcing and operationalisation of the Loss & Damage funding mechanism.** We acknowledge the precedent-setting leadership and commitment of the Scottish government for providing ~1 million USD towards supporting NELD for the Pacific Rising since 2024 and we urge other developed States to follow suit.
- At the same time, **climate financing for adaptation and mitigation should not be withheld** from communities who wish to relocate or whose situations make it less feasible for them to adapt in place.



Traditional Knowledge (TK) Must be Embedded in Climate Frameworks

Parties must commit to embedding Traditional Knowledge (TK) within climate frameworks in ways that uphold Indigenous rights, cultural integrity, and sovereignty.

Recognition is only the beginning; protection, empowerment, and resourcing are essential for TK to contribute meaningfully and ethically to global climate solutions.

COP30 must also reject extractive models that commodify Traditional Knowledge and instead center Indigenous sovereignty, custodianship, and collective rights.

- **Equal Recognition of Traditional Knowledge in Climate Governance:** Traditional Knowledge (TK) must be recognized, respected, and valued equally alongside Western scientific knowledge across all UNFCCC, regional, and national climate processes. This includes its **full integration into decision-making**, reporting, and climate action strategies, accompanied by strong protections to prevent exploitation, misappropriation, and loss of TK.
- **Holistic and Culturally Grounded Learning Frameworks:** TK is deeply rooted in Indigenous cultural protocols, languages, and worldviews. Climate adaptation and mitigation efforts should adopt holistic, relational frameworks that honor Indigenous systems, values, and ways of knowing, rather than extracting or reducing them to fit Western models.
- **Upholding Indigenous Data Sovereignty:** Indigenous Peoples must retain full ownership and control over their data and knowledge. COP30 must reinforce commitments to Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring communities govern how their knowledge is collected, stored, interpreted, and shared. All engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems must be based on free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).



Affirm the Centrality of Gender Equality and Intersectionality in Climate Justice

COP30 must affirm the centrality of gender equality and intersectionality across all thematic areas from adaptation and mitigation to NELD and finance.

We must move **beyond inclusion to co-creation, co-leadership, and co-ownership of climate solutions with women, girls, and all marginalized voices**. Climate policy must prioritize the active participation and empowerment of frontline communities, especially women, youth, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, persons with non-confirming gender identities, and LGBTQIA+ persons in decisions and policies that directly impact their lives and environments.

- **Intersecting Vulnerabilities:** Climate crises compound inequalities across gender, sexuality, age, ability, caste/class, and migration status, deepening both economic and non-economic losses.
- **Unequal Burden of NELD:** Women and marginalized groups often absorb “hidden” and intangible losses, such as unpaid care, cultural continuity, and community healing, while acting as first responders.
- **Gendered Impacts of Displacement:** Climate-forced migration and relocation disproportionately affect women, girls, LGBTQIA+ persons, and persons with disabilities, increasing risks of violence, disrupting reproductive and sexual health rights, and eroding caregiving and cultural roles. Climate governance must anticipate and respond to these intersectional risks.
- **Increase in Gender Based Violence:** Pacific women and girls experience twice the global average rates of gender-based violence and violence against women and girls (GBV/VAWG). GBV/VAWG will only increase further as climate change impacts worsen. Women and girls with disabilities also experience much higher rates of GBV/VAWG. Their susceptibility to climate change further violates their rights. GBV/VAWG has no place in our societies, cultures, faiths or traditional spaces. It has damaging effects on survivors, families, communities and societies. Gender inequality is the key driver of GBV, so any policy responses and funding must address gender inequality and political and religious leaders must play an active role in challenging attitudes that lead to violence, or that use culture to foster violence.
- **Agency Beyond Victimhood:** Frontline women, girls, and gender-diverse persons must be recognized as leaders, strategists, and knowledge holders shaping climate governance, not only as vulnerable populations.

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- **Transformative Justice:** A feminist, intersectional climate justice framework is required to shift systems of power, center self-determination, and advance structural change.
- **Collaborating with Women's Groups for Locally Grounded Solutions:** Climate strategies should be co-developed with women's organizations and community groups, ensuring that local knowledge and gender-specific realities shape appropriate, inclusive, and effective practices.
- **Elevating the Role of Women and Girls in Climate Projects:** Women and girls must be key actors in the design, implementation, and evaluation of climate projects, not only as beneficiaries but as leaders, experts, and change-makers.
- **Recognizing Women as Traditional Knowledge Holders and Healers:** Acknowledge and value the critical roles women play as traditional healers and custodians of biodiversity and natural medicine, whose knowledge is essential for resilient ecosystems and health systems.
- **Supporting Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission:** Promote and protect the intergenerational exchange of knowledge, especially the skills, stories, and practices passed from elder women to younger generations as a vital part of climate adaptation and cultural preservation.
- **Safeguarding Cultural Heritage Through Gendered Lenses:** Women and girls are central to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, particularly in Indigenous and local communities. Their involvement must be safeguarded and strengthened as part of broader climate resilience efforts.
- **Shifting the Narrative: Women, Loss, and Damage:** Integrate a gendered lens in discussions on loss and damage, recognizing that women often bear disproportionate impacts while simultaneously acting as first responders and caretakers during climate crises.
- **Ending Exclusion from Decision-Making Spaces:** Deliberate efforts must be made to include women—especially from marginalized groups—in consultations and decision-making processes where they have historically been excluded.
- **Promoting Intergenerational and Inclusive Dialogue:** Encourage platforms that foster intergenerational dialogue, particularly ensuring girls and young women have opportunities to learn from elders and contribute their own perspectives on climate justice and resilience.

Affirm the Centrality of Gender Equality and Intersectionality in Climate Justice

- **Gender-Responsive Approaches to NELD (Non-Economic Loss and Damage):** All knowledge products, assessments, and policy responses to NELD must reflect gendered dimensions and impacts, particularly how shifts in gender roles affect resilience, identity, and well-being.
- **Mainstreaming Gender Across NELD Frameworks:** Gender must be fully mainstreamed in NELD approaches, including planning, policy design, and community consultations, to ensure holistic and equitable climate responses.
- **Gender-Inclusive Water Governance and Climate Adaptation:** Women must be actively included in training programs and decision-making processes related to water management systems and other key adaptation measures, recognizing their role in sustaining local water security.



Address the Need for Grassroots Accompaniment and Capacity Building

Communities on the frontlines require long-term accompaniment that strengthens their political, technical, and cultural capacities.

While funding is critical, it is not sufficient to address the complex and intersecting impacts of climate change and NELD. Long-term accompaniment is required to support frontline communities as they act on their own terms and resist extractive, transactional models of funding. COP30 must commit not only to mobilizing finance for NELD but also to embedding accompaniment and capacity bridging as integral components of climate justice. Without these, funding risks remaining extractive, transactional, and insufficient for building long-term resilience and self-determination in frontline communities.

- **Beyond Finance: Access to resources must be paired with tools, skills, and expertise** that enable communities to navigate legal frameworks, advocate for their rights, generate gender-responsive data, and influence decision-making spaces.
- **Intangible Support for NELD:** Communities also require accompaniment in areas that are harder to quantify, such as healing practices, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and collective cultural resilience, which are essential to address the intangible dimensions of NELD.
- **Equal Footing in Global Arenas:** Accompaniment ensures that frontline organizations can participate in regional and international processes without dependency on external intermediaries, strengthening their self-determination, sovereignty, and leadership.
- **Investing in Women's and Youth Leadership:** Capacity bridging must prioritize women, youth, gender-diverse persons, and persons with disabilities, with an intersectional approach that recognizes the overlapping inequalities they face and the leadership they bring in sustaining community resilience and advancing intergenerational climate justice.
- **Accompaniment must be understood as solidarity, not charity,** centering long-term relationships of trust and building political consciousness alongside technical skills.
- **Investing in care work and economic justice:** Policy reforms and legislative responses to protect and compensate care work should be prioritized in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target to 'recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through providing public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and promoting shared responsibility within the household and the family.'

BACKGROUND:

Pacific Partners on Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD)

The partnership between Pacific community-based organizations and UUSC was created and developed in 2016 to advance the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples in addressing the risks of climate-forced displacement in the Pacific. UUSC provides multi-year, general operating support to organize communities, build awareness, relocate communities forcibly displaced by the climate crisis, build adaptation based on local and traditional ecological knowledge systems and support advocacy of Pacific island communities in national, regional and global spaces for human rights protection and more direct and flexible resources to support communities in their decisions to adapt, relocate and migrate.

In 2018, UUSC along with the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) convened the first of its kind First Peoples Convening on Climate-Forced Displacement in Girdwood, Alaska where Pacific partners along with leaders from Alaska Native communities and Louisiana Tribal Nations shared stories, experiences and strategies to advance their self-determination as they experience first hand the impacts of climate-forced displacement. This resulted in the First Peoples Declaration on CFD.

In 2021, the Scottish government as host of COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland was the first country to commit to funding loss and damage. The Scottish government acted on their commitment and provided funding to CJRF, who partnered with UUSC in 2023 to address Loss and Damage in the Pacific. In 2024, the Scottish government provided additional funding to CJRF to specifically address NELD and advance gender/intersectionality. Through the pre-existing relationship and partnership with CJRF, UUSC as a recipient of this funding is supporting existing partners in the Pacific to address NELD and gender/intersectionality.

The Pacific NELD project is a 3-year initiative that started in 2024 and ends in 2026. As a group, the Pacific partnership, now called Pacific Rising, is leveraging the Scottish-CJRF funds to advance the intersectionality of NELD and gender/intersectionality in the Pacific and to model the impact of bilateral and multilateral funds on advancing rights and community-based strategies when directly impacted communities are able to access funds directly. Our shared goal to decolonize funding, advance climate justice and human rights drives our collective work.

Pacific Rising's work is part of a broader global frontline solidarity movement, connecting Pacific communities with Indigenous Nations in Alaska, Louisiana, and beyond, who are also advancing self-determined solutions to climate-forced displacement and NELD.

