

Talanoa[1] and Tuvalu's Right to Dream

Tou tou lā. Mana koe mai i luga nā. Mana. Fakaake se mouku o uta mo fai ou totoga mana.

These words remind me that strength is not something we hold alone. It is inherited, nurtured and shared across generations. They remind us to care for what will be handed to those who come after us.

I grew up between the backyard ocean and the front yard lagoon. Wherever we stood, the ocean surrounded us. We are people of the ocean. It has never separated us from the world; it has connected us to it, shaping our identity, our relationships and our understanding of our place in God's creation.

The world often calls us small island states. But, as Epeli Hau'ofa reminded us, we are people of a vast ocean. We are not small because our islands are small. We are large because our ocean connects us.

In 2005, I left Tuvalu seeking greener pastures for my family. My children now live in New Zealand, with what many would call a more secure future. Yet I think often of the children still living in Tuvalu and across the Pacific. Our greatest concern is not simply finding a new home. It is about people, identity, belonging and our shared responsibility to one another.

Every child has a right to dream. Climate change should never take that right away.

For decades, Tuvalu has been sounding the conch shell, calling for help. Too often our story is reduced to that of a "sinking island". Those words fail to see our humanity, dignity, culture, faith and resilience. Tuvaluans have never been defined by despair.

When storms come, neighbours check on neighbours. Families share food. Community halls and churches become places of refuge. Much of this care is carried quietly by women, whose leadership, knowledge and commitment hold communities together. They remind us that our relationship with nature should be one of stewardship: protecting, nurturing and ensuring life can flourish for future generations.

Climate change is no longer knocking only on Tuvalu's door. It is knocking on everyone's. We breathe the same air, draw from the same Earth and are bound together by the same ocean.

Yet there is a sorrow I carry. The ocean that once gave life now threatens to take it - not through the tides known to our ancestors, but through a changing climate that is reshaping our world. The question is not simply where Tuvaluans will live, but how our language, culture, faith and identity will travel with us.

My name is Tuvalu. I am grounded in my land, my ocean and my atmosphere. Climate change threatens my whole being, yet it cannot diminish who we are.

I think about our tulaga, kalafaga and tusaga: those who came before us, those who walk beside us today and those who will inherit the choices we make tomorrow.

What will be our imprint

When future generations look back, will they say we turned away? Or will they say we recognised our interconnectedness and acted with courage, responsibility and faith?

For me, migration was once about greener pastures. Today, it is increasingly about finding a drier one. Climate action is not only about protecting coastlines. It is about protecting people's right to dream. Every wave leaves its mark upon the shore; every generation leaves its imprint upon the world. May ours be one of faith over fear, hope over despair and action over indifference. Fakafetai lasi.

Eliala Fihaki

identity, climate change and our responsibility to future generations

[1] Talanoa is a Pacific practice of inclusive, open and transparent dialogue, the same word is Sautalaga in Tuvaluan.



The Islands Gathering

An Irish civil society offering in support of Tuvalu's leadership of the Santa Marta Process.

Why this and why now

The Climate Gathering in Inishbofin in September 2026 brought together practitioners from communications, science, art, politics, faith and other fields to help mobilise collective climate action. Recognising Ireland's role in supporting Tuvalu's leadership of the Santa Marta Process on a just transition away from fossil fuels, participants expressed ideas on what timely and practical contribution civil society could make.

The gathering invites Irish civil society organisations - including academic, faith, youth, cultural and business groups - to strengthen Ireland's support for Tuvalu's leadership. We respect the work already under way in Ireland and elsewhere and seek greater cohesion and collaboration in service of Tuvalu's lead and Ireland's support of the same.

Ireland has an opportunity to demonstrate what credible solidarity with a small-island state looks like in practice: supporting well, bringing diverse voices together and building effective coalitions behind Tuvalu's agenda. The aim is to help Ireland do justice to that supporting role while encouraging participating governments to show collective ambition and leadership. The vision is to see the people of the oceans sharing dreams, traditions, beliefs and wisdom of the generations.

Our offer - the Islands Dialogue

In the spirit of Talanoa, we offer the governments of Tuvalu and Ireland a collaborative civil society platform for the next chapter of the Santa Marta Process. We also ask to be recognised and involved as a constructive ally, helping strengthen ambition and outcomes for a fair transition away from fossil fuels.

Our offer builds on the ethos of supporting and inspiring unity across Islands, facilitating a powerful and significant constituency within a wider ecosystem of dialogue and action as part of the process leading up and through the preparation for the Tuvalu and Ireland meetings. The dialogue will connect small and big island states virtually and sometimes in person[2]. The process will build on what is already in place.

The diversity of dialogues will include:

- **Drawing on Faith and indigenous wisdom**. Link existing faith activity, spirituality and indigenous culture, and support work towards a formal Faith Chapter within the process.
- **Modelling Citizen-led action**. Building on Ireland's experience of climate dialogue and citizens' assemblies to champion fossil-fuel phase-out. This includes advocating for a national Citizens' Assembly on the transition and sharing Irish experience with other countries.
- **Growing a Youth tag-team**. Create a formal link between Irish youth delegates and young people in Tuvalu so the next generation has representation and agency.
- **Inspiring Business and finance**. Bring business voices into the coalition and explore fair financing arrangements, including favourable loans for renewable infrastructure in vulnerable states.
- **Celebrating Arts and culture**. Use creative practice to deepen public understanding, widen participation and connect the process with people's lived experience.

Immediate next steps

1. Invite collaborators representing a variety of sectors across civil society to join in. Demonstrate the power of collaboration and support to the two governments.
2. Set up a small working group to get the plan off the ground with specific outcomes.
3. Continue to dialogue with the representatives and teams from the two governments to continue the discussion on partnership and support.

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[2] We don't have time will lead the facilitation of the virtual platform and communication.