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Young First Peoples from Australia and Asia-Pacific unite in Canberra for climate action

Four young grassroots climate leaders from the Asia-Pacific region and the Kimberley will today meet with Australian political leaders in Canberra calling on them to urgently ban fracking, phase out fossil fuels and address the climate crisis affecting their communities.

Hosted by Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network and Oxfam Australia, the young climate advocates spent time in Melbourne before arriving in Canberra today, with Sydney as their final destination. Along the way, they will meet with key political decision makers to discuss climate issues such as climate finance and loss and damage.

The timing of the tour aligns with critical climate policy movements and events, including the lead-up to COP29 in November, the next federal election, and COP31, which Australia has bid to host in 2026 in partnership with the Pacific. Headlining the tour is a Parliamentary Forum event at Parliament House for the speakers to address these discussions.

The young advocates have also spend time with climate, Pacific, and First Nations grassroots organisations to strengthen international networks and explore strategies for climate advocacy from the grassroots level.

Tanya Afu from the Solomon Islands and Grace Ann Enriquez from the Philippines have been personally impacted by climate change fueled disasters, such as super typhoons and storm surges. Peter Griffiths-Sebastian and Eduardo Maher, both hailing from the Kimberley, are passionate about protecting Country from impacts of the fossil fuel industry and fracking.

Tanya's community, from Foueda Island, an artificial island in the Lau Lagoon, Malaita province of Solomon Islands, has been deeply affected by the crisis.

"Our community, known as the 'Himola I asi' or people of the sea, is deeply connected to our surroundings. However, climate change is altering everything – the sea, the land, even our food. I've witnessed the sea slowly devouring our home, destroying houses, and submerging our village during high tides," she said.

"Despite this, my people resiliently rebuild and adapt to the changing environment. As a young woman working in the climate change space, I'm driven to be a voice for my community and future generations."

Eduardo Maher, of Yawuru, Jabirr-Jabirr, Bardi-Jawi, and Nyul-Nyul heritage, says climate change has become an ongoing issue in the Kimberley community.

"The country we live on, and are connected to, has begun to be unrecognisable to our Elders. Wet seasons are shorter and during the wrong times of the year, fire seasons are becoming more dangerous due to the lateness of the vegetation drying, post the wet season. Elders are no longer sure how their cultural knowledge will be passed on to the next generation, this affects communities on a social level. It has been shown and predicted by scientists that a rise in extreme heat conditions will affect the Kimberley, and that the region will soon become unlivable for extended times of the year."

Ebony Pierik, a proud Jabirr- Jabirr and Bardi woman from Seed Indigenous Youth Climate Network highlights the importance of connecting communities to government decision makers.

"It's important for mob to share their stories and experiences when it comes to witnessing climate change. We contribute the least to the issue, but more often than not we're the first and worst

impacted. This speakers tour isn't only an opportunity for us to share our story. It is an opportunity for politicians and city dwellers to hear first-hand what it's like to live regionally and under threat of becoming a climate refugee on our own Country, and to connect with us on a deeper level for meaningful change."

Oxfam Australia's Chief Executive Officer, Lyn Morgain, highlights the significance of this tour in fostering allyship and meaningful change.

"This tour represents a crucial opportunity for Asia-Pacific and First Nations climate leaders to unite and share their first-hand experiences. By fostering these connections, we can build a stronger, more diverse and inclusive climate movement that can drive meaningful change for all our communities. It couldn't come at a better time with Australia likely to co-host the UN climate negotiations with the Pacific in two years time."

For interviews with the speakers, please contact Lucy Brown at lucyb@oxfam.org.au or 0478 190 099.