



# The “Bula Bulletin”



More than the instant, warm Fijian welcome, “BULA” is a word that literally means “LIFE”

“Bula” and welcome to the Fiji Islands, and more particularly to Suva, its capital and to my work as a climate change researcher/advisor with the ecumenical organisation, the Pacific Conference of Churches.

5“Come and see what God has done, he is awesome in his deeds among mortals...

7[and he] rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations – let the rebellious not exalt themselves.”

Psalm 66: 5 & 7 (NRSV);

Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma  
lectionary reading  
Psalm 66:1-12,  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

This is the first of many *Bula Bulletins*, work-permit permitting, in which I intend to outline some of the events, activities and everyday life that I experience as I serve as a Mission Partner on this, the largest of the South Pacific Islands. Future formats to these updates may be similar to this one. Alternatively, they may be shorter and possibly more frequent, *The Bite-size Bula Bulletin* or *The Bula Bulletin Bulleted*, and perhaps even a *Bi-monthly Bula Bulletin* may appear, err... intermittently (or technically every two months!)

Life in Fiji will be the main subject of these accounts, but please don't think that the focus will be exclusively on this, a relatively small island nation in a distant part of God's world. From its Fiji base, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) represents churches at all levels from 17 island states and territories across the Pacific. PCC seeks to be a unifying Christian voice for its 2.5 million members on issues of justice, peace and solidarity, not only within Oceania but also on the global stage. And as I discovered soon after arriving, on occasion PCC can claim to lead the world...

## 10-10-10?

Did you note the significance of the 10<sup>th</sup> of October this year? Aside from being 'decimal'-double-duplication day (it really is easier to say 'ten-ten-ten'), the 10<sup>th</sup> October is National Day in Fiji, and this year marked 40 years



since Fiji gained its independence from Britain in 1970. Major celebrations were planned for the weekend, including an outdoor military parade at Albert Park in Suva.

But also this year worldwide the 10<sup>th</sup> October was declared a global day of activism to raise awareness of the need to reduce global carbon emissions to combat

climate change. The environmental campaign group 350 ([www.350.org](http://www.350.org)), so named to highlight the need for atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to be kept to 350 parts per million (ppm) to sustain our planet\*, promoted the idea and co-ordinated the day. 188 countries around the world took part in a chain of climate change awareness activities and events. Maybe you took part in an activity or saw media coverage of the day?

\* According to 350, there is general agreement among scientists on this figure. Current concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) are 387 ppm, and have risen from 280 ppm in pre-industrial times. Future projections without intervention from us are for increases to 650-1200 CO<sub>2</sub>e levels by 2100.





The Pacific Conference of Churches (along with the other environmental groups Suva Environment Group, IndyACT and WWF) kick started the 'day with a candle-lit, midnight vigil 'Celebrating Fiji, Celebrating God's Good Creation'. Geographically-favoured (being close to the International Date Line) and time-mindful (starting before midnight), this PCC vigil was the very first event of over 7,000 events held, according to **350**, on the largest day of climate activism ever. The General Secretary of PCC, Mr. Fei' Tevi, therefore, declared this Fiji contribution 'unique among all the events'.

While mostly conducted in silence, part of the two-hour long vigil consisted of a time of reflection on the impacts of climate change, when 10 traditional Pacific symbols were brought forward accompanied by the narration of appropriate prayers. The 10 symbols were in order:

a Bible; a bundle of coconuts; a rolled floor mat made of palm leaves; a miniature double-hulled canoe; a sports ball; a bundle of dalo (the staple, starchy root crop, also called taro); a lali (a hollowed-out wooden gong used to summon people to church); a basket of fruit and vegetables; a bundle of yagona root (that is used to make the ceremonial / social drink, kava) and finally, representative Pacific flags.



This act of reflection led me to my own reflections, and therefore, in turn I ask you: what 10 traditional symbols would you select to represent your nation or the region where you live? Would they too have God and his creation so intertwined? Would another person have a similar list to represent your nation or would they have chosen different symbols? Why do some regions of the world have such strong traditions and identity, while others are less-well defined?

Close to 1am the vigil concluded with the renowned Kadavu choir singing us out to the hymn 'Pacifika', the chorus of which goes:

*'Pacifika, Pacifika.  
With throbbing reef and coral shore.  
For fish and shell and mighty waves.  
For all God's gifts, our thanks we pour.'*

Over the coming months I look forward to learning a great deal more about the Pacific region, its traditions and its ever-apparent relationship with God.

Incidentally the planned military parade had to be cancelled because of water-logged grounds from a torrential (and much talked about) downpour the day before. According to the Fiji Meteorological Office, the prolonged, country-wide drought came to an abrupt end, in the Suva area at least, when the heavens opened and 264mm of rain fell on the capital in 24 hours.

God bless  
Julia