

# **Resolution on Challenges and Solutions for Ecosystems and Communities of the Asia-Pacific Region**

**ASIA-PACIFIC YOUTH SCIENCE EXCHANGE FORUM**

**OKINAWA, 23-25 SEPTEMBER 2011**

## Introduction

We, the youth of the Asia-Pacific region, recognize that many urgent issues face our communities and that there are pressing concerns for the future of our region. Our cultures and communities are tied to the ocean and our ancestors have depended on these ecosystems and resources for millennia. We are ocean cultures, and the traditions, knowledge and customs that make us who we are have been passed down from generation to generation. Our islands, coasts and seas form the fabric of our very identities, and if we lose these we lose ourselves.

We recognize that the degradation of marine ecosystems and resources places at risk the livelihoods, lifestyles, and cultural traditions of our coastal communities. Healthy and intact ecosystems are essential for the perpetuation of coastal communities, now and into the future.

Our region possesses a wealth of ecological and cultural diversity. Yet capacity and resources are not distributed equally, and some island and coastal communities are more vulnerable than others. Communities of the Asia-Pacific region are found in both developed and developing economies, yet many of the challenges that our communities, nations/territories and the region face are common to us all.

We have identified major threats that challenge the future of our coastal communities. While some of these threats can be solved locally, others are global in scope. Though these threats are pervasive, solutions do exist that can help our communities be resilient in the face of change.

We, the youth of the Asia-Pacific region, acknowledge both the challenges and solutions that exist to successfully address climate change, overexploitation, ocean pollution, and community engagement in our region.

## Climate Change

Climate change is a real issue affecting Asia-Pacific nations, because changes in the global climate due to global warming and ocean acidification are affecting all aspects of life right now. Rising sea level is eroding our land and inundating our food and water supply. Increased storm frequency and severity are damaging natural resources and threatening our economic livelihood, and warming and acidifying oceans are degrading our marine life. Climate change is

a cause of multiple biological, economic, and social problems and requires urgent, direct action on the part of our communities, nations, and global society.

Governments, citizens and groups should promote adoption and investment in green energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Local and national policies should be implemented to protect coastal reefs from non-climatic impacts. This will reduce levels of biological stress on coral reefs and increase the capacity for reefs to withstand future climate change. We need to raise public awareness about climate change impacts both on local and global scales through responsible eco-tourism, youth involvement and early childhood education. Of major concern is the lack of accountability and responsiveness of the developed nations to the climate change crisis. Asia-Pacific nations are suffering the impacts of rising sea level and increased sea surface temperature right now and we need to promote the urgency of climate change impacts to industrialized nations via social media and Pacific Islander perspectives to international bodies of governance (e.g. the United Nations). On a local scale, we can act to encourage trade and utilization of local goods to reduce our dependence on international imports and decrease our carbon footprint. Our communities need access to funding from industrialized nations for climate change mitigation and adaptation in Pacific Islands (e.g. water catchment and storage tanks, sea wall construction, agricultural development of salt tolerant crops). Forest protection and reforestation efforts of mangroves can help contain carbon emissions and mitigate coastal erosion impacts. The effects of climate change are real for our communities and we must initiate changes in policies to mitigate and adapt now.

#### Overexploitation & Food Security

Sustainable harvesting of marine resources is an essential part of our coastal communities to ensure a viable economic future. We recognize that sustainable fisheries are critical to food security, cultural perpetuation and sustainable livelihoods in our region. Overexploitation and ecosystem degradation places at risk critical food supplies and traditional practices both presently and in the future. Economic pressure may cause harm to particular species, overall ecosystems, biodiversity, and even cultural identity. Overexploitation is not only a scientific issue, but also a moral one, as individuals should understand that there is a personal responsibility in sustainable fishing. In the short term we want to encourage adaptive regulations, strong enforcement of those regulations, global communication, and community based consultation and decision-making. There are also many important long-term solutions, which include formulating better economic infrastructure that is not completely reliant on fishing, aquaculture, diversification, and education. We also have a strong desire to encourage transmission of cultural practices, traditional and local ecological knowledge through youth education and involvement.

#### Land-Based & Ocean Pollution

Land-based and ocean pollution is pervasive and threatens our resources, ecosystems and cultural sustainability. Pollution comes in many forms, including sedimentation, agricultural-based pollutants, marine debris, mining (both on the land and in the sea) and sewage run-off.

The sources of pollutants occur at many levels, from communities to the globe, and the complexities of these issues require both technical and social solutions. Solutions can seem overwhelming, but many approaches to these issues are found in traditional management practices. Such traditional practices include recognition and proper management of land-sea connections employed within our coastal communities. Other pollution problems will require political will and involvement by our leaders at all levels of government. These leaders include community members, families, political leaders and community elders. Educational outreach and increased awareness are also critical to addressing problems associated with land-based pollution in the Asia-Pacific region. With increased education and awareness comes increased environmental responsibility and stewardship. Educating coastal communities and stakeholders must be a priority to effectively deal with land-based and ocean pollution. Better land management and planning are also needed to effectively address pollution. Ideally, solutions will be tailored specifically to each location throughout the Asia-Pacific region to be effective.

### Community Engagement, Management & Planning

We acknowledge that in order for there to be strong and productive community engagement, management, and planning there must be true recognition of cultural diversity in our region. Not every community or culture functions in the same way, so it is important to create community engagement plans and processes in a place-based manner.

Education is primary to life and can strengthen the adaptive capacity of communities in our region. Increased capacity building and social networking represents a productive avenue for youth education, and programs should also be developed for adults to support financial livelihoods and other social benefits. Cultural empowerment and community engagement is critical for the future of our region. It is vital to provide people with opportunities to develop environmentally friendly businesses. This can give opportunities to communities to establish new incomes, diversify livelihood strategies, and for local groups to develop relationships with financial sponsors. We collectively agree that possible initiatives that communities and governments can engage in include, but are not limited to, aquaculture, coral gardening, eco-tourism, community marine protected areas, mangrove reforestation, and setting of fishing quotas.

### Conclusions

We call for these challenges to be priority goals of the Asia-Pacific nations and territories for the next three years, with support from governments of developed and developing nations, organizations and environment-supporting foundations. These actions may not be sufficient to see our lives continue completely unchanged but will better protect our traditions, livelihoods and communities as we adapt to changes in the Asia-Pacific region.

The youth of our region represent a significant resource that needs to be part of the solutions for our future. The valuable storehouse of place-based, traditional ecological knowledge must be applied together with modern scientific approaches and management tools to maintain our

most valuable asset, our reefs and our marine resources – the lifeline of our communities and cultures. Education, leadership and increased cooperation at all levels of governance are also critical for addressing these challenges.

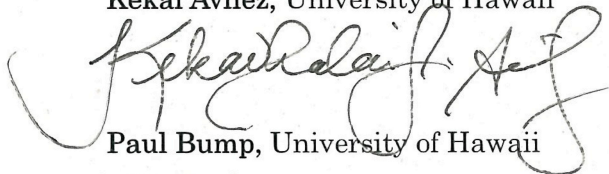
We call on the developed nations and economies of the world to respond to these urgent issues in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly to assist the most vulnerable communities that are at greatest risk. Developed countries have a clear moral obligation towards developing countries and territories in the Pacific, for their past and continuing contribution to many of these problems and because they have the economic and technical resources that smaller nations do not possess.

These challenges are not in the future – they threaten our communities now. We recognize that real solutions and workable answers exist. The time for meaningful and direct action is now. Failure to address these issues in the immediate future will seriously challenge the future perpetuation and existence of our coastal cultures and communities. Like the coral reefs and ecosystems on which we all depend, our coastal communities can only respond to the effects of climate change and other threats in one of three ways: move, adapt, or drown. We hope that through the immediate adoption of these actions in this resolution, our communities, our traditions, and our living cultures can thrive in the Asia-Pacific region for generations to come.

Asia Pacific Youth Science Exchange Forum  
Okinawa, 25 September 2011

#### SIGNATORIES

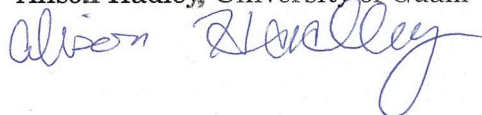
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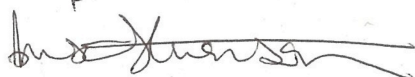
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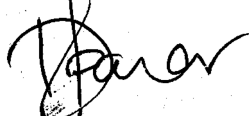
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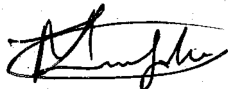
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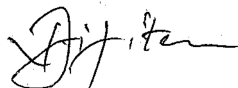
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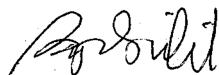
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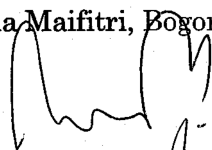
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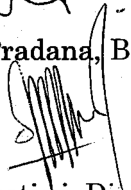
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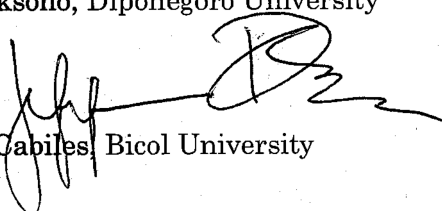
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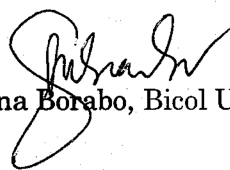
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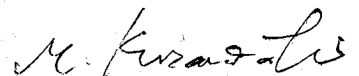
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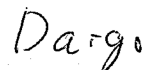
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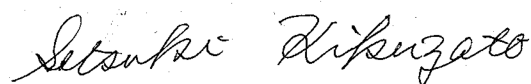
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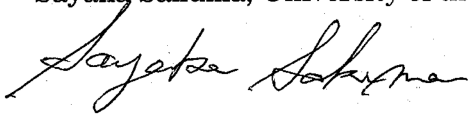
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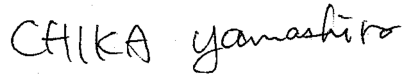
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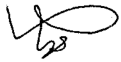
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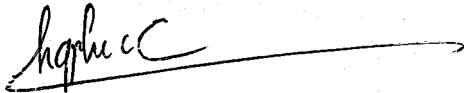
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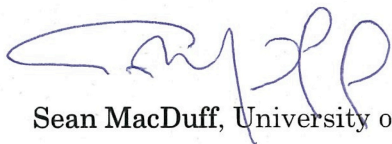
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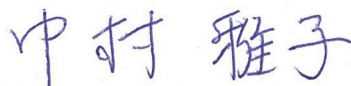
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