

BLOG FROM PARIS COP 21 - Number 12: 13 December 2015

AND THE WORK BEGINS ...

I am writing this on the train from Paris back to London. Nigel has yet again suffered another interrogation to cross the border back to the United Kingdom. I can only admire his patience and cheerfulness. So now we leave the Gare du Nord for St Pancras. The passports are now stamped, and we are now homeward bound.



The last two weeks have been spent on the periphery of great events which will shape our world for generations. It has been an incredible privilege to be here, talking to those who make the decisions, and to many gathered around – the reporters, the activists, and those like Nigel who already suffer from climate change.

It has also been a great privilege to see Nigel telling the story of his people – and seeing people hear him and respond to him. A large part of our time here has been learning how to better tell this story, and meeting people who can help the people of his atoll of Ontong Java. The agreement from COP 21 was good – as good as it could possibly be. There were moments during the negotiations when it seemed like it would all collapse, and that greed and self-interest would win out. But good as the agreement might be, it is too late for Nigel's people. The sea rise has already taken them beyond the point of no return. They will have to start leaving their home. The funeral rites for Ontong Java have begun and COP 21 is too late.

So now where do we go from here? COP21 has agreed that temperature rise above pre-industrial temperatures must be limited to 2 degrees, aiming at 1.5 degrees. At 1.5 many of the smaller islands such as Ontong Java will go, but most island nations will survive in one form or another, and we will be spared the horrors of permanent flooding in other nations. But the commitments given by all the nations at the start of COP21 will, if followed, give rise to a 3 to 4 degree rise in temperatures which would be disastrous. So clearly these commitments and plans will have to be redone, and there will need to be massive pressure to ensure that nations do not squib on 1.5 degree commitment. For the activists there is still much to be done.

Transparency is also part of the COP21 agreement. Unfortunately, many Governments have not been transparent. But there can be no more hidden deals, no more “commercial-in-confidence” agreements support coal mines and polluters. Government is now required to show how its calculations are made. Once again, this will need activists armed with calculators to check and to ensure that transparency is maintained.

And then there is support of the developing nations. There is a commitment to a fund to help developing nations, and this must include support of those people who have to move. This is a challenge to us, in Australia and in other developed countries, to show compassion. Nigel's people will need to start moving soon, and while it is hoped to keep a remnant on Ontong Java to maintain some sort of connection with their home, at least half will need to move in the next five to ten years. Where will they go? Who will pay for the shipping to move them and their few possessions? These costs are beyond them. And perhaps even more importantly, how will they remain together as a culture and as a community? We must not only save their lives, but also their culture as a living culture enriching the entire world. To break them up and scatter them all over the globe would be a cultural genocide that impoverishes us all.

So COP21 is over. And now the work begins. And it begins not with governments, but with you, the people. We have to lead this process, from the local communities upwards. It is clear that many of the governments at COP21 had to be dragged into the process, and that they are ill-equipped to lead. So if governments will not lead, we must lead, and bring our governments and corporations with us. And this starts today.

*The Very Reverend Dr Keith Joseph  
Dean of Darwin*