Submission

to the

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee

on the

Inquiry into New Zealand’s relationships with South Pacific countries

“Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 2006

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the Catholic agency for justice, peace and development. We are mandated by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference to work for the elimination of poverty and injustice both overseas and in New Zealand. We work through the delivery of aid and emergency relief, through development projects in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and Latin America, and through advocacy and education in New Zealand.

2. Caritas welcomes this inquiry by the Committee. New Zealand’s relationship with the countries of the South Pacific has a long history and New Zealand has, in the main, acted in a responsible and often compassionate manner. There have been instances when New Zealand has not acted in the best interests of the peoples of the Pacific and Caritas would like this inquiry to seek to address those concerns.

3. This submission shall follow three key elements in relation to the terms of reference set out by this inquiry. They key elements addressed here are: Environment, Governance and Aid. Caritas sees each of these elements as part of New Zealand’s responsibility in countries belonging to the Pacific Forum; as an opportunity to advance New Zealand’s relationships with governments and peoples in the Pacific Island Forum countries and identifying the strategic objectives for expenditure of New Zealand Aid and the appropriate level and type of aid in Pacific Forum countries.

4. The principles of Catholic social teaching (CST) lies at the heart of the work Caritas does in areas of relief, development and advocacy. The principle of Solidarity is one that has helped form the basis of this submission. We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other transcend national, racial, economic, and ideological differences. We are called to work globally
for justice. The principle of solidarity requires of us that we not concern ourselves solely with our own individual lives. We need to be aware of what is going on in the world around us.

Environment

5. In June last year, Caritas made a submission to the Department of Labour for the Immigration Act Review 2006. In our submission we highlighted the plight of environmental refugees. We would like to reiterate this point again here. The effects of climate change have already been noticed in the low-lying countries of Tuvalu and Kiribati and there is little doubt that other Pacific countries will also soon be affected. It is projected that as a result of rising sea levels there could be as many as one million environmental refugees who will need assistance.

6. There is no current international framework for this discussion, but New Zealand cannot wait for the world to catch up with this issue. As part of this Committee’s inquiry, Caritas believes New Zealand will need to be one of the first nations to develop a response to assist those affected as part of our responsibilities as a good international citizen.

Governance

7. Caritas believes in the Catholic social teaching principle of Participation which states that people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Everyone has the right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions necessary for human fulfillment, such as work, education, and political participation.

8. Not all of the countries of the Pacific have had histories of good governance, and for some this continues to be the case. New Zealand has at various times responded to requests by governments of the Pacific Forum in the deployment of Peace Keepers and Police to bring order to trouble spots in the region. New Zealand

9. These include the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), deployed in 2003 to assist the Solomon Islands Government restore law and order, reduce corruption, strengthen government institutions, and re-invigorate the economy following wide-spread civil unrest.

10. New Zealand also played a key role in Bougainville after the end of civil war in 1997, sending Police and Defence Force personnel to assist with the establishment community-based policing and effective law and justice systems.

11. Caritas sees both these instances as examples of New Zealand building good relationships with governments in the Pacific Island forum. As a country with a well-respected democracy we have been able to assist other countries, through the deployment of Peacekeepers and Police, as they make the transition from civil unrest to participating members of the global community. Caritas would like to see this work continue provided it remains in response to invitations from governments.

12. While Caritas on the whole has a good view of the work done by New Zealand Police and Peacekeepers there are some concerns we wish to raise. The unrest in Tonga in late 2006 raised questions about Tonga’s democracy that were to a certain extent pushed aside with the
deployment of Peacekeepers. Caritas would rather see the New Zealand Government working alongside the people of Tonga in assisting them to establish a healthy democracy, as has been done in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, where all the citizens of the country can participate and have a voice in how the country and its resources are managed.

13. Caritas would like to see more women and non-governmental agencies involved in peacekeeping so that it is seen not only in the context of a military operation.

14. When it comes to issues of good governance, especially in times of unrest within the Pacific, Caritas would like to see the New Zealand Government play a mediation role with integrity built on solid principles that respects human rights for all citizens.

Aid

15. Every single person is created in the image of God. Therefore, they are invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. The dignity of the person grants them inalienable rights – political, legal, social, and economic rights. This is the most important principle because it is from our dignity as human persons that all other rights and responsibilities flow.

16. Caritas applauds the recent Budget decision to increase overseas development assistance (ODA) to 0.30 percent of GNI in 2007/08 and of setting a target to 0.35 percent by 2010/11. The bulk of this funding has been ear-marked towards development work in the Pacific, which Caritas sees as a commitment by New Zealand to the region and as part of its role as a good international citizen.

17. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand works with some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities, regardless of ethnicity, nationality or religion. Through partnerships with local organizations and Church structures Caritas is able to effectively work alongside communities in areas such as primary health-care, education and small business initiatives.

18. A number of the programmes Caritas is involved with are in the Pacific. These include: Working with women to address the unequal rights they have in society, responding to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic, drug rehabilitation programmes and election awareness raising in Papua New Guinea. In Tonga Caritas is working with families on low incomes as well as addressing the issues of youth unemployment and crime.

19. Caritas believes is imperative to ensure that aid level and type of aid is given to countries in the Pacific Island Forum is appropriate. From our experience, Caritas believes that the important areas to target are governance, health care, (including HIV/AIDS which is a growing problem in the Pacific, especially Papua New Guinea) education, women’s rights and initiatives to improve livelihoods.

20. Caritas feels that one of the most effective ways of targeting aid, to ensure it gets to where it is needed, is through working with local, grassroots organisations that understand their communities needs and are part of that community.
21. In addition to development work Caritas is also involved with providing relief in times of disaster. Caritas donors responded to the recent earthquake and tsunami in the Solomon Islands through donations of around $60,000. Through Church and diocesan links Caritas and Caritas partners were able to respond quickly and effectively in the distribution of aid materials to those affected.

**Conclusion**

22. As a country in the top half of the OECD, New Zealand has a moral obligation to assist its neighbours of the Pacific Island forum when they are need. In this submission, Caritas has focused on Environment, Governance and Aid as three areas that New Zealand has had an input in and believes should continue to do so as part of its responsibilities as a good international citizen.

23. In terms of the environmental effects of global warming, New Zealand will have to become a world leader in how it deals with environmental refugees – the first of which are going to come from the Pacific.

24. New Zealand has a strong reputation around areas of governance and Caritas would like New Zealand to remember that it needs to act with integrity and responsibly in future deployments of peace-keepers or police to trouble spots in the Pacific region.

25. Aid is an important mechanism used by Pacific Forum countries to improve the situation for many of the regions inhabitants. Caritas believes that the areas of focus need to be on healthcare, education, governance and livelihood building. Caritas also believes that when distributing aid the Government should consider recipients with good links to grassroots organisations to ensure the aid is targeting effectively and efficiently.