

Australia, New Zealand failing Pacific on climate: Fiji PM

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Fiji PM Voreqe Bainimarama, pictured in the nation's capital Suva, in 2014

Fiji Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama on Wednesday called for an end to Australia and New Zealand's "undue influence" on the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), saying they had failed the region on climate change.

Bainimarama said he would continue to personally snub Oceania's largest

regional grouping while Canberra and Wellington's dominance continued.

"We do not see Fiji's interests reflected in the stance being taken by Australia and New Zealand... especially on the biggest threat to our security we have ever faced collectively as Pacific islanders -- the rising sea levels caused by [climate change](#)," he said.

Bainimarama singled out Australia for criticism, accusing it of "dragging its feet" and failing to meet its international obligations on climate change.

"Rather than side with us, Australia in particular is siding with what I call the coalition of the selfish," he said at a function in Suva.

"Those industrialised nations which are putting the welfare of their carbon-polluting industries and their workers before our welfare and survival as Pacific islanders."

The PIF has 16 member nations if Fiji is included, mostly comprising impoverished small island states.

In recent years it has taken a leading role in raising global awareness about climate change, which directly threatens the existence of some of its low-lying members such as Kiribati and Tuvalu.



New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key (C) speaks to the press during the annual Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) summit, in Auckland, in 2011

But Bainimarama said the European Union had showed more concern about Pacific climate change than either of the organisation's two largest members.

He said Australia and New Zealand should be relegated from full PIF members to "development partners", which would give them observer status on the sidelines like the EU, China and India.

The PIF suspended Fiji in 2009 in the wake of a Bainimarama-led coup, then invited it back in October last year after the former military strongman won a general election.

Bainimarama said Fiji would participate in low-level PIF activities but

he would not attend its annual leaders' summit, scheduled for Papua New Guinea this year, until the organisation was reformed.

He denied the criticism of Australia and New Zealand was payback for their leading role in condemning his coup, which resulted in years of diplomatic isolation for Fiji.

"This is not me 'mouthing off' as the New Zealand Prime Minister (John Key) so condescendingly put it," he said.

"As we see it, Australia and New Zealand have been put to the test on climate change and been found wanting... They simply do not represent our interests as we face this critical matter of survival."

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