

CSW52, 2008

INTERVENTION - GENDER AND HIV

Gender and HIV

Thank you Chair.

On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group which consists of Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Tonga.

I thank you again for the inclusion of the subject of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV – on this years agenda.

Women are the principal care-givers in Pacific societies and as a consequence are the main caregivers of people living with HIV.

In the Pacific, stigma and discrimination remains an issue for people living with HIV and women often bear the brunt of this discrimination, even as carers who do not have the virus, and sometimes face rejection by their communities.

Our cultural and religious barriers can serve to increase stigma and discrimination, especially against women and we beginning to recognise this and address these challenges by working with faith based organisations and traditional institutions.

Chair, besides the Caribbean, the Pacific is the only region working collaboratively under a single regional strategy to tackle this issue. The Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV, has been further extended by our Pacific Leaders for a further 5 years from 2009-2013.

The implementation plan for the strategy is a partnership involving many different stakeholders such as UN agencies, regional bodies led by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, civil society organisations and development and government partners. While the revised regional strategy has a stronger recognition of the importance of gender in HIV, especially the links to gender inequality and gender based violence; we recognise the need for further work to ensure gender impacts and concerns are ingrained in the strategy. I am also pleased to report that a theme group on gender and HIV will be established to develop and coordinate a rigorous response through the strategy to the gender dimensions of the rising incidence of HIV in our region.

Chair, in conclusion, I wish to thank the various partners who are making substantial technical and financial contributions to our region's fight against the spread of HIV.

These include: the UN Global Fund and major bilateral donors and international financing institutions such as Australia and the Asian Development Bank. However, I also wish to make the point that in many cases in making these contributions there are no resources tagged to gender specific activities and outcomes and this makes it difficult to provide the necessary resources to address the gender dimensions of HIV in this region. There needs to be flexibility in these grants for this purpose and/or funding dedicated to addressing the very fundamental relationship between gender and HIV if we are to make real and lasting progress in this area.

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