

**SUB-REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON SPECIAL MEASURES FOR WOMEN
25-26 SEPTEMBER 2008
PORT MORESBY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Background

In 2004 the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum called for action to address the low levels of women in decision-making, within the framework of the Forum's Pacific Plan and consistent with the Pacific Platform for Action on gender equality. In April 2006 a "Pacific Regional Workshop on Advancing Women's Representation in Parliament" was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands. One outcome of that workshop was agreement that the Forum Secretariat, with international and regional partners, would initiate and coordinate sub-regional workshops on special measures and electoral reforms to promote the political representation of women.

2. The first such sub-regional workshop, focused on Melanesian countries, was convened in Port Moresby from 25-26 September 2008. The Workshop was convened by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in partnership with the Department of Community Development, Government of Papua New Guinea, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre (UNDP PC), the International Development Law Organisation (IDLO), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and with support from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and PNG Sustainable Development Program Limited (PNGSDP).

3. The Workshop was opened by the Right Honourable Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, and was attended by the Honourable Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development from Papua New Guinea, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Francesca Semoso and Minister the Honourable Laura Ampa from the Autonomous Bougainville Government, along with current and former parliamentarians, senior officials and civil society representatives from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Supporting partners, international organisations and selected experts also participated in the workshop.

The Workshop

4. Opening the Workshop, Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare voiced his strong support for the advancement of women in public life, including increasing women's representation in parliament. The Prime Minister emphasised the shared responsibility of men, women, members of the legislature and voters in working together to change perceptions and recognise the need for both genders to be represented in parliament and public life, in order for Pacific nations to realise their full potential in the global environment. He said that custom could no longer be used as an excuse to justify the exclusion of women from politics, when Pacific countries aspired to embrace many western ideals and concepts. The Prime Minister noted

options currently under discussion in Papua New Guinea for increasing the low representation of women in parliament, including activation of the provisions in PNG's Constitution for appointed seats, and/or introducing reserved seats for women; and expressed his support for continued work toward the implementation of such measures.

5. Participants considered and discussed the low level of women's representation in Parliaments in the Pacific region by global standards, and analysis of the reasons for women's lack of success in recent Melanesian elections. The Workshop noted a large number of factors including institutional, cultural and financial, which constrain women from political success. The Workshop discussed the reasons why special measures were needed and justified, noting in particular participating countries' international and regional commitments to gender equality, as well as the very practical reasons women should be proportionally represented in parliaments, including fair representation, and the valuable perspectives and priorities on crucial social issues offered by women.

6. The Workshop examined the technical and legal options available for special measures to increase women's representation. Participants recognised that differences between countries such as their respective electoral systems and the strength of their political parties, have an effect on the choice and potential effectiveness of special measures.

7. During the Workshop, each delegation provided information on the situation in its country, actions presently underway to increase women's political participation, and remaining challenges. Examples of special measures already in place in the region were examined, including reserved seats for women in the Motu-Koita Assembly in Central Province and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, and party quotas in Australia. Participants were also advised about special measures presently under consideration in Melanesia, including utilising constitutional provisions allowing for nominated seats in the national parliament in PNG, and a submission to introduce reserved seats for women as part of the constitutional reform process in Solomon Islands.

Key Outcomes

8. In discussing special measures in their countries, Workshop participants recognised that it is essential that such measures be owned, led, and supported by the women and men of each country, drawing on regional and international assistance where needed.

9. The Workshop further emphasised that strategies to increase women's representation in parliaments must be holistic and comprehensive. As such, participants identified some key considerations relevant to all four countries in developing strategies for special measures, including:

- The importance of **increasing knowledge** about political, electoral, parliamentary and legal issues **among those working towards women's representation**, in order to develop and implement fully informed and effective strategies, and participate in political discussions on an equal level with their male counterparts;

- The importance of **working with men** and including men in advocacy, education and strategy to increase women's representation;
- The need for a **united purpose and strategy** among woman candidates, national women's machineries, women's groups and NGOs, in order to maximise impact;
- The need for greater attention to **education of voters at the community level**, both women and men, to raise understanding of political issues in general, gender issues, and the importance and value of women's participation in public life;
- The need for **further study of the psychology of voting** and voting patterns in Melanesian countries in order to comprehensively understand voter behaviour and inform strategy;
- The great importance of **mobilising financial resources** to enable women to campaign effectively for election;
- The relevance of broader measures to **combat corruption** in politics and elections, in order to ensure that electoral competition is fair and transparent.

10. With these considerations in mind, each delegation commenced work to develop a **national strategy** for identifying and implementing appropriate special measures to increase the representation of women in Parliament:

- **Fiji** identified that a coalition of government agencies, women's machinery and NGOs should work together on both short- and long-term strategies to achieve the goal of a minimum of 30% of women in Parliament:
 - In the short term, working towards making quotas mandatory through legislation, while at the same time lobbying political parties to adopt and implement voluntary quotas for women in their party manifestos, and lobbying for the appointment of more women to the upper house of Parliament;
 - implementing the "gender elections cycle" presently being developed in cooperation with the Office of the Supervisor of Elections;
 - a long-term approach to promote constitutional amendments to entrench party quotas in the lower house of the Parliament, as appropriate to the electoral system.
- **Papua New Guinea** also identified short- and longer-term approaches:
 - In the short term, working to implement the existing NEC (Cabinet) decisions on special measures. This means promoting amendment to the Organic Law on Integrity of Political Parties, to remove the ability of members in nominated seats to participate in motions of no confidence to block budget bills. This would remove a present blockage to NEC endorsing the activation of constitutional provisions to appoint women to 3 seats in Parliament;
 - Working to put in place an Organic Law on Gender Equity, or reserved seats legislation of some sort to provide for the election of women to reserved seats in parliament, ready for the 2012 elections. The number and distribution of such reserved seats would require further consideration and discussion;
 - As a longer term goal, encouraging a broader review of the electoral and political system in PNG;

- In addition, PNG proposed that a study be conducted to document the establishment of reserved seats for women and the experiences of women in the Autonomous Bougainville Government, for the information and reference of others in PNG and the region.
- **Solomon Islands** noted its present circumstances including the Constitutional and electoral reform processes underway. In that context, Solomon Islands identified a series of actions to be taken following the Workshop, including reporting back to the Office of the Prime Minister, head of the National Peace Council, Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Electoral Commission, and the general public through forums and media awareness, involving RAMSI where appropriate. Solomon Islands proposed the production of a simple report on options for special measures in Solomon Islands, which could be translated into the main languages of Solomon Islands for wide consultation. Possibilities to be canvassed may include the ten reserved seats to be elected by both women and men already proposed, split constituencies and other options.
- **Vanuatu** favoured the introduction of reserved seats in parliament for women, to be elected by both women and men. Options include introducing a reserved seat for women for each province and municipality, or reserving a set number of seats for women in each multi-member constituency: the specifics of the number of such seats and their distribution should be a matter for further public consultation. Vanuatu emphasised the importance of educating ni-Vanuatu voters to fully understand and support such measures, through mass media and voter education programmes by Government and NGOs. Other key elements of Vanuatu's strategy included building networks, identifying and working with male champions, lobbying and working through political parties and members of parliament, research, and obtaining technical assistance where necessary. Once public support was secured, necessary constitutional and/or legislative amendments should be clarified and pursued. Finally, Vanuatu noted that each of its provincial governments included 4 appointed seats, one of which was for women, and these should be filled immediately following the November 2008 provincial government elections.

11. Participants expressed their appreciation for the support from regional and international partners for the Workshop and the ongoing efforts to increase women's political participation in Melanesia. The Workshop requested that donors and partners continue to provide technical and other assistance as appropriate for the further development and implementation of their strategies.

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
26 September 2008