Connecting Capitals with Missions

[United Nations Headquarters, New York: March 2013] “I appreciate getting reports on the ground. Our advocacy actually becomes more skilful when we are better informed, you are really our eyes and ears and this is vital to ensure missions are better equipped to negotiate on issues that are pertinent to development in our Pacific region,” commented Ambassador Robert Aisi of the Papua New Guinea Mission, speaking to a meeting hosted by the PNG Mission in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat for Pacific Delegates attending the 57th Commission on the Status of Women.

It has often been said that because the Missions are based thousands of miles from the Pacific region, that the key issues at the ground level are often not known by the Missions, and hence when it comes to on-going advocacy and negotiations at the UN, the Missions have very limited and scarce knowledge. The disconnection between the Capitals and Missions is not unique to the Pacific with many other regions reporting similar challenges. However, despite this weakness, the Pacific Delegation attending CSW this year made it a priority to ensure that their Missions are well informed about the work that is currently being undertaken in the Pacific in terms of the priority theme *Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls*.

The meeting was attended by Ambassadors and Mission representatives from the Pacific. Capital representatives were invited to present brief reports on the priority theme. The Vanuatu delegation, represented by Dorosday Kenneth from the Ministry of Justice and Community Services gave a brief report which detailed the development of an operational manual for authorised persons which was critical in improving access to services by victims living in remote and rural areas where police and justice are not easily accessible. “We are taking a multi-sectoral approach in Vanuatu because we understand that everyone can play an important role in ending violence against women and girls,” said Kenneth.

Luisa Apelu from the Ministry of Community and Social Development, representing the Delegation of Samoa reminded the meeting that Samoa was the first country in the Pacific to have undertaken the VAW prevalence study in 2000, and has since then they have been able to use the findings of the research to formulate a CEDAW1 Partners Committee which is chaired by the Ministry of Social Development and Women. “We are using the CEDAW framework to influence legislative reform at the national level and to guide our National Gender Policy and Plan of Action. But also too being here at the CSW, we would also like to have a better understanding of how best we can make the linkages of CSW agreed conclusions to our national polices and plans and also how can we best make use of our time here in New York in terms of networking and creating more awareness of our issues back in the capital,” commented Ms. Apelu.

1 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Anne Kautu from the Ministry of Social and Internal Affairs reporting on behalf of the Kiribati Delegation highlighted the VAW prevalence study undertaken by Kiribati titled the Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS) which revealed an alarming prevalence of VAW in Kiribati. 68% of women aged 15-49 who had ever been in a relationship had experienced some form of violence (emotional, physical and/or sexual), from an intimate partner. “the study was launched by the President which gave it that extra mileage and thereafter we developed a National Action Plan to end Sexual and Gender Based Violence. We have also been able to draft our Family Peace Bill which is currently undergoing consultations,” said Ms. Kautu. In the Kiribati brief there was mention of a five year implementation plan to implement the Preparatory Assistance Program (PAP Project) which is currently being designed to build the capacity of Service Providers funded by UN Women.

Debriefing for Tonga was Polotu Fakafanua-Paunga, head of the Women’s Affairs which sits in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. “We are more or less on the same wave length with what has been reported thus far in terms of the prevalence study which we had undertaken in 2009, we also have a Domestic Violence Bill which will be tabled before Parliament this year which also has a budget attached to it, we also have prevention programs such as those which engage men and boys, and we are also using a multi-sectoral approach to ending VAW and girls and we are looking more positive in terms of CEDAW ratification,” said Ms. Fakafanua-Paunga. Tonga’s debrief also noted the important role that key development partners play in terms of gender equality in the Pacific, namely, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, UN Women and UNFPA. Issues of lack of funding for both National Women’s Machineries and Non Government Organisations was also raised in that it proved a challenge to the work currently being undertaken on the ground.

Tuvalu represented by Asita Moli from the Office of the Prime Minister raised her concerns around Tuvalu not yet being able to undertake the VAW prevalence study but was hopeful that with development partner support that Tuvalu will soon too undertake the study. However, it was noted that Tuvalu like others had reported, has already drafted a Family Protection Bill and a Bill to introduce Temporary Special Measures to increase women’s political participation.

In response to the country briefs, Ambassador Aisi commented on how impressed the Missions were with the high-level attendance and commitment from capitals to the CSW57, “it was brilliant to have the Prime Minister of Tuvalu here to present the PIF- statement on behalf of Forum Member Countries and of course the Tuvalu Country Statement.” Ms. Fakafanua-Paunga also commented on the high-level commitment from the Tongan Government where the delegation included both the Minister and the CEO, “the last time we had a Minister heading our delegation to the CSW was thirteen years ago.” The Samoa delegation was also headed by the Minister of Community and Social Development from Capital.

Key development partners were also in attendance at the meeting; PIFS, SPC, UN Women and UNFPA. PIFS gave a brief on the historical development of commitments around ending Sexual
and Gender Based Violence in the Pacific. “Since 2000 when Samoa undertook the first VAW prevalence study, and now with the most recent studies undertaken and currently being undertaken, it will put the Pacific at a lead in terms of these prevalence studies. All countries have also undergone the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) where a combined 172 recommendations have been made to Pacific countries on Gender Based Violence,” said Seema Naidu, Gender Officer of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat.

Ms. Naidu also spoke about the Pacific Plan and how gender is an integral part of the plan and is a cross-cutting issue. In 2009 the Cairns Communiqué brought a new dimension to sexual gender based violence in the region as a human security issue. As a result, the Sexual and Gender Based Violence Reference Group was developed as an outcome of the Forum Regional Security Committee meeting and is currently looking at the economic costs of violence against women in the Pacific region.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community shared current gender mainstreaming statistics and Gender Stocktaking supported by the secretariat. UN Women and UNFPA talked about their provision of technical support on the priority theme to Pacific delegations attending the CSW57.

As part of the support given to the Pacific delegations to attend the CSW57, a technical guide is currently being developed by the Forum Secretariat for members taking directly from the experiences of this CSW as well as documenting the processes and procedures of how delegations can effectively participate pre and post CSW.

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Photo: Ambassador Robert Aisi of the PNG Permanent Mission hosting the debrief meeting between Capitals and Missions on the Priority Theme.
Photo: PIFS Gender Officer, Ms. Seema Naidu speaking to the meeting on the Pacific Plan and regional commitments and initiatives in ending violence against women and girls by Pacific Leaders
Photo: Capital (Government delegation) and Mission representatives at the debrief

Photo: Vanuatu, Samoa and Tonga Capital representatives at the debrief
Photo: Newly appointed Permanent Representative and Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands Permanent Office, HE Ms Amatlain Elizabeth Kabua RMI ambassador
Photo: Deputy Permanent Representative of RMI
Photo: Sunema Pie Simati, First Secretary Permanent Mission of Tuvalu to the UN
Photo: Samoa Mission Office First Secretary speaking to the meeting on the importance of participating at the CSW.
Photo: group photo following PNG Mission Debrief between Capitals and Missions