



Pacific Islands Forum
with United Nations Missions

Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji,
Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau,
Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands,
Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

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PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM STATEMENT FOR THE SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

MINISTERIAL ROUND TABLES INTERVENTION

H.E MR. ISAIA TAAPE

MINISTER OF HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE AND GENDER AFFAIRS

ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

15 -26 March 2021

a. Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

Honourable Chair, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Members I would like to share some good practices from the Blue Pacific.

1. Ensuring women and girls are part of decision-making and leadership towards an equal, inclusive, and just future is critical to our Blue Pacific. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration of 2012 is the demonstration of our Leaders' continued collective commitment to gender equality. This is further translated to sectoral national and regional frameworks which integrate gender commitments.
2. All Forum Members have developed national sustainable development plans aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and track and report on SDGs including SDG5 on gender equality.
3. The Pacific has a high ratification rate of the key human rights treaties and conventions such as CEDAW, CRPD and CRC. In 2020, Samoa hosted

the 84th Extraordinary Outreach Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the first time any of the UN human rights treaty body committees formally met outside its Geneva and New York headquarters. This provided an opportunity for the Committee to better understand the Pacific context, and importantly allow for the wider participation of Pacific stakeholders.

4. There is increased engagement between our national women's structures and government agencies mandated for climate change, disaster risk responses and management in the Pacific to ensure that women are part of the decision making in climate change action.
5. Efforts to pass and implement temporary special measures have had mixed success. In Samoa a 10% quota for women in the national parliament has worked well, and Vanuatu has measures that reserve one seat for women on local governments. In 2014 Solomon Islands passed the Political Parties Integrity Act that requires parties to reserve 10% of candidatures for women.¹
6. In three Pacific countries (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) work is ongoing to ensure marketplaces in rural and urban areas are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. This includes women's involvement in market vendor associations as members and presidents, so they are part of the decision-making processes determining how markets operate, how they are built and ways they are managed.
7. Most Pacific governments have enacted laws and policies providing compulsory education at both primary and secondary levels resulting in most countries achieving gender parity in primary enrolment while secondary enrolment shows girls outnumbering boys.
 - i. Several Pacific governments, in recognition that primary and secondary education is a right for all citizens, have introduced laws and policies to ensure that education is accessible to all.
 - ii. Policies on bullying and sexual harassment in schools have been introduced by several countries.

¹ <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Biennial-Pacific-Sustainable-Development-Report.pdf>

- iii. Curriculum reviews are underway in several Pacific countries to incorporate values of social citizenship and human rights in the school curriculum.
 - iv. The adoption of new, rights-based initiatives to provide a supportive environment for girls to pursue their education has been gaining traction. Several Pacific countries have ended the practice of expelling girls who become pregnant while at school and are supporting their re-entry to school following childbirth.
8. In 2019 the Regional Working Group on the Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation was established to bring together the lead coordinating Ministries in Pacific countries that had passed Domestic Violence/Family Protection legislation. This group provides a platform to encourage south-south learning on implementation of legislation.

I thank you. Fakafetai.

b. Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

Honourable Chair, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Members I share some examples on how the Blue Pacific is working to create an enabling environment for our women and girls.

1. Recognising that women's participation and decision making in public life remain low in the Blue Pacific, there are still some positive achievements to share.
2. The 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration is the demonstration of our Leaders' continued commitment to gender equality. It invigorates our collective efforts to lift the status of women in the Pacific and empower Pacific women and girls to actively participate in economic, political and social life.
3. The Pacific has developed innovative approaches to address gender-based violence and ensure an enabling environment for women.
 - a. Australia and Fiji are in the process of developing and implementing National Action Plans to End Violence Against Women and Girls

which focuses on primary prevention of violence. This ensures that we are addressing the root causes of gender-based violence.

- b. Solomon Islands has developed a progressive Domestic Violence Counselling Guideline, a first for the Pacific.
4. Work by faith-based organisations in the Pacific on equality theology is changing people's understanding of biblical texts, with evidence of changed attitudes and behaviour in family life. This is important given the key role that religion plays in our communities.
 5. The adoption of new, rights-based initiatives to provide a supportive environment for girls to pursue their education has been gaining traction. Several Pacific countries have ended the practice of expelling girls who become pregnant while at school and are supporting their re-entry to school following childbirth.
 6. We have also undertaken gender-responsive institutional reforms for the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming. The Republic of the Marshall Islands National Gender Mainstreaming policy has seen the review and revision of legislation and policies across government to include gender responsive procedures and practices. Samoa has made gender analysis a requirement in all aid project proposals and Fiji has designated gender focal point positions across sector ministries.
 7. Women's economic empowerment is an ongoing area of work in our region:
 - i. recent efforts to engage rural women more actively in different levels of agricultural and handicraft value chains are showing positive results².
 - ii. Central and private sector banks across the Pacific have undertaken financial inclusion initiatives that are empowering women and enabling them to maintain control over earnings.
 - iii. In Fiji and Solomon Islands, national financial inclusion taskforces have undertaken sex-disaggregated surveys on financial inclusion and decision-making on household income³.

² <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Biennial-Pacific-Sustainable-Development-Report.pdf>

³ Ibid

iv. Civil society organisations are developing savings clubs and value chain support programs that provide basic financial training for women across the region.

8. The Pacific acknowledges the importance of recognising traditional Pacific women's leadership and the strengths of cultural and traditional structures in advancing women in power and decision-making. At the same time we also acknowledge and work to change the negative aspects of culture and traditional structures that restrict and obstruct women's access to leadership opportunities and decision-making⁴.

Hon. Chair, our Pacific Leaders are committed to ensuring an equal, inclusive and just future that involves and includes Pacific women and girls in decision-making and leadership.

⁴ Ibid