



**PERMANENT MISSION
of the KINGDOM of TONGA to
the UNITED NATIONS**

**Statement by: Hon. Vatau Mefi Hui, Minister of Internal Affairs of the
Kingdom of Tonga.**

**On the Occasion of the Sixty Fifth Session of the Commission
on the Status of Women, 15th – 26th March, 2021**

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Check Against Delivery

Mr. Chair,

I would like to congratulate you on taking the chair for the United Nations CSW 65th Session with the priority theme for women's participation and decision making in public life and the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The theme for this session of women's participation and decision making in public life is timely for the Pacific Island countries including Tonga noting the upcoming parliamentary elections in Tonga scheduled for November 2021. A national survey has been conducted, supported by the Government of Australia, to determine the current perspectives of women in decision making and political leadership in Tonga. The outcomes of this survey are being finalised with a view to develop strategies to support women in decision making, and in the upcoming election in 2021.

Mr. Chair,

There is genuine political will for ensuring gender equality in Tonga to addressing gender-based violence and to end all forms of violence against women and girls. Tonga



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has enacted laws and policies for women's empowerment and gender equality with the Family Protection Act of 2013, confirming Government's commitment to eliminating gender-based violence. Tonga recently launched a Service Delivery Protocol for the use of both Government and CSOs service providers, which will inform and empower women with knowledge to guide them in receiving efficient help that may save their lives. During the 2020 marking of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, Tonga's counselling framework for Domestic Violence was launched, and the first registered counsellors were awarded by Government.

Mr. Chair,

Tonga remains COVID-19 free and is one of 11 Pacific Island countries out of 14 globally with no COVID cases. With the global number of deaths at more than 2.6 million as reported by WHO, the pandemic continues to threaten our achievements in enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and their full and effective participation and decision-making in public life. We need to act decisively to realize the 2030 agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Mr. Chair,

The National Committee of the Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction addresses the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of Tonga. There is increasing engagement between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Women's and Gender Equality Division which recognises the importance of including women's voice, skill and experience in climate change action and disaster risk preparedness and response efforts. A sub-committee established under the National Advisory Committee on Gender and Development will further enhance this strategy.

It is critical that we all continue to recognize that domestic violence is not a private affair. It impacts all aspects of life. As a community, it is our collective responsibility to ensure



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the safety of each member of our families by spreading the word, sharing information, promoting education around gender-based violence and domestic violence. We need to play our roles in setting positive examples. We must become champions and advocates of attitudinal change, to change the current narrative.

Mr. Chair,

Despite these wins, there remains a significant gap between men and women's participation in leadership, decision-making, economics and in most aspects of life. The fulfilment of our commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action remains a challenge.

Resources for integrating gender equality priorities and implementation remain limited. Despite modest increases in government budget allocations in some countries, there is still a need for adequate and sustained financing.

Mr. Chair,

Women's full and effective participation and decision making in public life, including in electoral systems, remains limited. Social barriers are a reality, particularly negative perceptions of women in politics and traditional views of leadership and decision-making being a man's role.

It is crucial that an increased commitment to transform these political culture, social norms and practices at the regional and national levels, is critical to ensure women's full and effective participation.



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Mr. Chair,

In conclusion we call for continued support from the international community and development partners. Considering this year's theme and the work that we have achieved, good practices learnt, challenges we faced, and strategies we have developed, there have been good progress made, in the past 25 years since the Beijing Declaration. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new reality, which can only encourage us to build back better. We will continue in our endeavour to pursue a favourable outcome for the women and vulnerable people of Tonga.

I thank you.