



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

DELIVERED BY

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ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM***

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Mr. Chair, Excellencies

1. *Talofa*, and warm greetings from the Blue Pacific! It is my honour to deliver this Statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, a regional bloc of 18¹ Pacific countries and territories including my own country of Tuvalu.
2. This year's priority theme is timely as women's participation and decision making in public life remain low including in the Blue Pacific.
3. We recognise that advancing women in leadership and decision-making extends beyond attempts to elect women to local and national governments. It is also about shared decision-making and leadership in households, and communities.
4. The threats brought on by COVID-19 require renewed attention and collaboration to significantly increase women's participation in decision making. Women have a wealth of knowledge and skills to share. It is our individual and collective responsibility to provide the enabling environment.

¹ Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

5. The Pacific has a proud history of harnessing regionalism to address common issues. We invoked the *Biketawa Declaration* to establish the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 to address the impacts of the pandemic and facilitate the transportation of critical medical and humanitarian supplies across the Pacific to assist our people. This confirms that we must draw on our collective strength to ensure that the challenges we face do not become insurmountable.

Progress in the Region

6. Our Pacific Leaders remain committed to realising gender equality demonstrated through the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the integration of gender commitments across regional and national frameworks. These lift the status of and empower women and girls in our Blue Pacific to realise their human rights by actively participating in economic, political and social life.
7. Most Pacific governments have enacted laws and policies to provide 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.
8. Several Pacific countries have developed innovative approaches to reducing rates of gender-based violence:
 - i. 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.
 - ii. The Solomon Islands has developed a progressive Domestic Violence Counselling Guideline, the first in the Pacific.
 - iii. All Forum countries now have legislation or pending laws that provide protection for women from gender-based violence, criminalizing domestic violence against women and recognizing marital rape as a crime.
9. Climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of Pacific people. We are seeing increasing engagement between national women's structures and government agencies mandated for climate change, disaster risk responses and management in the Pacific. This is

testament to women's voice, skills and experiences as vital to climate change action and disaster risk preparedness and response efforts.

Key Challenges and Regional Responses

[Leadership and Decision-making]

10. *Hon. Chairperson*, despite this progress, there remains a significant gap between men and women's participation – in leadership, decision-making, and in most aspects of life. The fulfilment of our commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action remains a challenge.
11. The Pacific acknowledges the UN Secretary General's Report on this year's Priority Theme, recognizing that women's representation in Parliament in the Pacific is low: on average holding only 8.8 percent of seats and in three countries there are no women in parliament.²
12. Pacific women's full and effective participation in public life remains limited. While there are no legal impediments to women contesting elections, social barriers are a reality, particularly negative perceptions of women in politics and public life.
13. While Pacific women and girls from diverse backgrounds and abilities have proven their capability in leadership and decision-making in all sectors, we must continue to empower them, so they equally participate in, contribute to and benefit from development outcomes.

[Triple Impact of Climate Change, Natural Disasters and COVID-19]

14. The vulnerabilities of our communities and our women and girls are further intensified within a multi-hazard environment as faced by the Pacific - with the climate change crisis and natural disasters further exacerbated by COVID-19.
15. The effects of the climate change crisis on Pacific women and girls are significant. We need to support and uphold their resilience to climate change and natural disasters by using their knowledge and skills to strengthen climate resilience and mitigation initiatives, and gender-responsive and disability inclusive social protection systems and climate-resilient infrastructure.

² Report of the Secretary General 2021 on CSW65 Priority Theme. Statistics from <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>

16. Our Pacific Leaders recognise that women's leadership plays a critical role in the response to COVID-19, and future pandemics and crisis. Women's Leadership in all aspects of the recovery process is critical as our Pacific countries reopen borders, begin or complete vaccinations, build economies and strengthen interventions for heightened resilience.
17. Gender inequality increases vulnerability to any global crisis. It is critical that, in the remaining decade of the 2030 Agenda, the global community commit and accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs and actions that address root causes that further perpetuate gender inequality.
18. Violence against women and girls is an issue magnified by COVID-19 with severe and disproportionate impact on women and girls including increasing economic insecurity, rising levels of gender-based violence, and the continued inaccessibility to essential health, education, justice, police and other social services.³
19. The Pacific region remains resolute to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We need to be part of the solution and welcome partnerships with nations and organisations to realise gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Way Forward

Hon Chairperson,

20. In a constantly changing world, I urge the international community not to lose sight of the compounding and intersecting barriers on women and girls full and effective participation to address issues such as climate change, natural disasters, COVID-19, harmful social norms, gender based violence and conflict.⁴
21. Women's representation and effective participation at all levels of decision-making is central to achieving gender equality. We must accelerate actions, break down barriers and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Only then will we realise our Pacific Leaders' vision for gender equality

³ *Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting Outcomes* held virtually on 14 October 2020, can be found at <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/11/09/2020-forum-foreign-ministers-meeting-outcomes/>

⁴ Report of the Secretary General 2021 on CSW65 Priority Theme

and the strategic intent of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

22. *Hon. Chairperson*, we call for:

- i. Continued support from the international community and development partners in accelerating women's full and effective participation in decision making and public life, and the elimination of all of forms of violence against all women and girls;
 - ii. Ambitious climate change action now through decisive and transformative action, including in UNFCCC platforms, to secure our children's future. COVID-19 recovery is an opportunity to reset our global development agenda to one that is climate- smart, gender inclusive and leaves no one behind. The climate change crisis exacerbates impacts on women and girls;
 - iii. Global recovery efforts on humanitarian disasters and pandemics through greater participation of women to support disaster risk reduction and develop climate resilience, build health infrastructure, and social services and protection systems that render inclusive access for all women and girls.
23. We must continue to combat challenges together for a better present and a greater future, especially for our women and girls. The onus is on us to ensure that in the remaining years to 2030 decisive action is taken to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Mr. Chair, I thank you. Fakafetai!