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

DELIVERED BY

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ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

14 – 25 MARCH 2022

Hon. Chair, Excellencies,

Bula Vinaka on behalf of the 18 Member States of the Pacific Islands Forum, acting as one Blue Pacific Continent and stewards of over 40 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean - the world’s largest, most abundant ocean with its many islands and rich diverse cultures and people.

2. With this in mind we are developing the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, asserting the Pacific Island Forum’s centrality in shaping the destiny of our region.

3. Excellencies, at the outset, we join the international community in raising our concerns for the millions of women and children being displaced by the war in Ukraine and exposed to violence and abuse.

4. The theme for CSW66 is critical for the Pacific. While COVID-19 is our immediate crisis, climate change persists as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.

5. Pacific Island Forum Leaders have expressed grave concern for our collective future as global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, reaching record levels. Based on the science and current trends, we will exceed 1.5°C by as early as 2030 and reach 3°C or more by the end of this century. The shared prosperity and security of our Blue Pacific can only safely exist if we pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as set out in the Paris Agreement.

6. The science is non-negotiable. Urgent action by the international community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is critical to keep us on the 1.5°C pathway. Equal and full participation of all women and girls must be central to global action.

7. Excellencies, our region has contributed the least to global warming and climate change but is impacted the most. Five out of the 15 countries most at risk of disasters in the world are in the Pacific. Weather-related events are becoming more extreme and increasing in intensity and frequency across the region.

8. The recent volcanic eruption in Tonga caused tephra ash fall, tsunami, and severe damage to submarine telecommunications cable. It altered the geographical landscape and affected our Blue Pacific continent and beyond.

9. Our people continue to fight. Their resilience and fortitude have defied insurmountable odds. I am proud to say that Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, continue to play a critical role in building our resilient communities.
10. Recognizing women’s and girls’ knowledge, capabilities, and skills and empowering them, is vital to the safety and security of all Pacific families.

11. Our Pacific Forum Leaders have taken a strong stance on climate change and disaster resilience through milestone regional agreements such as the Kainaki II Declaration on Climate Change Action Now, the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, and the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise. These underpinning frameworks highlight the threat that climate change presents and the urgent global action required to protect our shared needs and interests.

12. The Pacific has demonstrated strong, global leadership in calling for urgent action on oceans which led to the adoption of SDG14 and its targets. The potential of the ocean to meet sustainable development needs is enormous, but only if our oceans can be restored and maintained to a healthy and productive state.

13. The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific highlights the need for an integrated approach to climate change and disaster resilience. This includes equal opportunities for women in all spaces, spheres and levels to better understand their specific experiences.

14. The Pacific Resilience Facility is a Pacific led and owned initiative aimed at building resilience amongst our grassroots communities in the region particularly those disproportionately affected by climate impacts including women and girls.

15. Translating regional and international commitments into national gender-responsive climate change and disaster management policies and laws, or practices has not been easy.

16. However, Pacific Island countries are moving in this direction to ensure that gender-inclusive standards and practices are supporting women to lead climate change action and demonstrate their capabilities to their communities and peers.

17. In Pacific communities, women are a critical part of the adaptation frontline. Women have a history of adapting to climate change impacts to provide food and water for their families. Each day, they draw on traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices – these must be valued and supported to build and manage adaptation.

18. Pacific disaster management processes are now more likely to be gender-responsive, bringing a new acceptance and respect for women’s role in disasters, and the transformation of social inclusion from a household to community responsibility.

19. We are also renewing and revitalizing the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, endorsed by our Leaders in 2012, to strengthen national and regional efforts in addressing gender inequalities.

**Key Challenges and Regional Responses**

20. Significant challenges remain. Climate change and related disasters disproportionately impact women, girls, indigenous persons, and persons with disabilities, particularly those living in rural and remote communities that are highly dependent on natural resources.
21. Shifting rainfall patterns and salinity intrusions caused by sea-level rise have substantial impacts on women in agriculture, as women in some Pacific countries have restricted land ownership and limited access to resources. Women in the Pacific are highly dependent on marine and coastal resources for food security, but gender inequalities are still prevalent in fisheries resource management.

22. We know that the climate crisis, coupled with the scourge of gender-based violence, is borne most heavily by our Pacific women and girls. The Pacific has one of the highest rates of violence globally. On average, two out of every three women experience violence throughout their life. Global evidence indicates the link between disasters and climate change, and gender-based violence. In the Pacific, we have seen increased reports of domestic violence cases and the need for psychosocial support after disasters, and those displaced by disasters are at higher risks of gender-based violence than those who remain in their communities.\(^1\)

23. Women already bear the responsibility of unpaid care work. During disasters, they are subject to increased workloads and care responsibilities and must travel further to look for water and food. This is exacerbated by the increasing levels of non-communicable diseases in rural and remote areas, where traditional sources of food are either inaccessible post-disasters or affected by climate change.

24. A lack of adequate sexual reproductive health and outreach services are worsened by climate change and related disasters. Protecting reproductive health rights for women and girls is fundamentally linked to building resilience to the impacts of climate change.

25. Despite women and girls bearing the brunt of climate change impacts, and their crucial role in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, women’s knowledge and resilience continue to be undervalued and overlooked.

26. Climate finance also often fails to take account of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Countries in the Pacific face a large finance “gap” and figures show that women have access to less than 2% of climate finance.

Way Forward

27. The way forward is clear. We must work together; build coalitions of support to progress our gender equality commitments and urgent climate change action. The countries of the Blue Pacific continent cannot do this alone, we need the support of our partners.

28. Honorable Chair, we call on the international community - governments, development partners, donors to:

   a. increase gender-responsive climate, environmental, and disaster risk finance to recognize, acknowledge and ensure equal participation of women in the utilization of financial resources.

   b. ensure women and girls are actively involved in crisis response and recovery decisions, ensuring humanitarian and recovery programmes are gender responsive and enhance accountability to affected populations.

\(^1\) Pacific Women, Thematic Brief: Women and Climate Change in the Pacific.
c. promote women and girls’ full participation and leadership in climate, environment, Ocean, including biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) action and governance at all levels

d. strengthen the capacities of women and girls through accessible training and gender-responsive policies and programmes;

e. ensure women and girls’ have access to essential services during crisis situations, including psychosocial support particularly for those affected by gender-based violence.

f. increase investment in national gender statistics which ensures gender-disability-geographical disaggregated data in the gender-environment nexus.

**Conclusion**

29. **Excellencies**, we need ambitious, transformative gender-responsive climate change action now across all platforms to secure our collective future. We must achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and pursue efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees above preindustrial levels. COVID-19 recovery and recovery from recurring natural disasters is an opportunity to reset our global development agenda to one that is climate-resilient, gender-inclusive, and leaves no one behind.

30. We need more women leading global responses to climate change. Their voices must be recognized and acknowledged to shape our global agenda for action. We know that any approach involving women and girls amplifies and provides richer, more inclusive, and sustainable impacts.

31. Civil Society initiatives including those of women led organisations and gender focal points, are evidence of this approach. These groups are a key source of information on climate change and know the specific impacts on their communities, on women and girls, and other at-risk groups.

32. Organisations of and for persons with disabilities, the elderly, mothers, and children are also important partners to ensure the diverse needs of Pacific communities are addressed, as we experience ongoing extreme weather events and other effects of climate change.

33. Excellencies, we echo the clear and urgent call of Pacific Leaders, for high ambition and action to take us away from code red, back to a certain future for all humanity.

34. The time for talk is over. We need action! We need positive and sustainable change! We owe it to future generations. We owe it to the future of all women and girls.

Excellencies, I thank you.