Secretary-General Puna

Prime Minister Bainimarama

Minister Akbar, Prime Ministers, Ministers, and friends.

Warm greetings from Australia.

I would like to Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land from which I speak today and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

I acknowledge the Blue Pacific we meet across and the people who share it. Wherever we are joining from today, it connects us all.

Secretary-General, on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Hon Penny Wong, and the Minister for Women, The Hon Katy Gallagher and the Australian Government I
congratulate the Pacific Islands Forum for establishing the PIF Women Leaders Meeting.

And Minister Akbar, our Chair, thank you again for Fiji’s hosting of this inaugural meeting. We deeply appreciate your personal leadership on gender equality and Pacific women’s issues.

This inaugural meeting is a strong demonstration that in the Pacific we value women in leadership.

It is critical that we use this new piece of PIF architecture to raise our collective ambition and effort in addressing gender inequality and eliminating gender-based violence.

At the heart of this is the need to ensure women can play a central role in decision-making on issues affecting their lives and communities.
We look forward to working with our Pacific partners to ensure these objectives are given the highest priority at Leaders level.

The Australian Government, led by Prime Minister Albanese, is firmly committed to working with all partners to improve gender equality and reduce gender-based violence across the region, including in Australia.

In Australia’s recent federal election over a dozen more women have been elected to the Australian Parliament. This includes a number of newly elected First Nations women, bringing the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in our Parliament to ten.

The Hon Linda Burney is the first First Nations woman to be appointed Minister for Indigenous Australians.

Not only is this representation critical in Government, but evidence shows that when women are represented in senior
leadership roles in the private sector the gender pay gap reduces and profitability and productivity improve.

In the Pacific, it is impressive that women’s participation in senior management in the private sector and on boards is above the global average.

But of course, when we speak about gender equality and women’s empowerment, we speak to this as a shared challenge – we all still have far to go on the journey towards true gender equality and we have much to learn from each other.

One in four Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner since age 15.
We know this is a problem well known to the Pacific, where two in three women have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner. For all of us, this is unacceptable.

Australia is committed to working with Pacific nations to end violence against women and girls and promote gender equality – including by sharing experiences and learning from each other.

Building a stronger Pacific family together requires us to make real progress towards gender equality in all aspects of our communities.

Our societies, our economies, our security all benefit when women are in leadership.

This is why an early priority for the new Australian Government is making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a key objective of Australia’s development program.
And it is why we will ensure at least 80 per cent of Australia’s aid investments address gender issues.

Our region faces multiple challenges to its security and prosperity – with the ongoing economic health and safety impacts of the pandemic, natural disasters wreaking havoc on communities and the climate crisis affecting us all, but especially the most vulnerable.

The Australian Government recognises that nothing is more central to the security and well-being of the Pacific than climate change.

In committing to work with our Pacific family to address the deep impacts of climate change and disasters, we understand that women and girls are disproportionately affected.

We also appreciate that women are powerful leaders in the region addressing this critical issue.
Through our *Pacific Women Lead* program, Australia is working in partnership with PIF Secretariat, the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific women’s organisations and development partners on women’s leadership and women’s rights in the region.

This work builds on nearly a decade of support, following on from the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration made in the Cook Islands in 2012.

Australia looks forward to our work together on a refreshed Declaration on gender equality that is both ambitious and practical, and which speaks to Leaders and Pacific citizens alike and keeps us all accountable.

Today, we take another step as women leaders and advocates to secure prosperity for all, now and into the future.