Prime Minister’s Address

Speech to the (virtual) inaugural Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders’ Meeting, 9 June 2022

- E ngā mana, e ngā reo, tēnā koutou katoa [All peoples of the world, all speakers, greetings to all that are gathered here]. Warm Pacific greetings.
- Bula vinaka Chair, Secretary General Mr Henry Puna, esteemed leaders, and distinguished representatives of our Blue Pacific whanau. Kia ora also to my Minister for Women, the Hon. Jan Tinetti, who is representing Aotearoa New Zealand at this important gathering.
- It is my honour and pleasure to address the inaugural Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders’ Meeting. I recognise the effort that has gone into establishing this as a standing meeting on the Forum calendar.
- I extend my gratitude to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Forum Chair, Fiji, for their work in bringing us together virtually. With border restrictions beginning to ease, I hope we can all reconnect in person at future meetings.
- With the underlying premise of this meeting to advance gender equality, I am reminded of the whakataukī “He waka eke noa.” This Māori proverb signifies we are all in this together, and has been a strong and consistent message from the New Zealand Government and the values we promote for equality.
- We know that women and girls in all their diversity continue to face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and persistent barriers to the realisation of their fundamental human rights.
- Gender inequality stagnates social and economic progress. Gender equality is an essential foundation for building peaceful societies, thriving economies, sustained development, regional resilience, and the realisation of full human potential.
- Unfortunately, women and girls across our Blue Pacific Continent experience unacceptable rates of violence, limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic insecurity. These challenges and hardships are amplified by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and disasters.
- These myriad challenges highlight the magnitude and urgency for our collective action, and I would emphasise the importance of action beyond just dialogue. But we can be confident that our shared commitment to eliminating all forms of gender inequality and exclusion remains firm.
- The Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders’ Meeting is well placed to inform and advise Forum Leaders on gender issues in our Pacific region. It will strongly position the region to action our shared gender priorities.
• Meaningful leadership and participation of all women and girls is critical to changing the status quo. Women and girls are powerful agents for change and will best drive improved outcomes for women and girls in all their diversity.

• Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to addressing gender inequality and realising the rights of all women and girls both domestically and globally, recognising we still have a lot of more to do.

• Aotearoa New Zealand’s Pacific Resilience policy reinforces our commitment to increased representation of women in leadership, politics, and decision-making as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In line with this, we recently appointed Ms Louisa Wall as Aotearoa New Zealand’s Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific) / Tuia Tāngata.

• I look forward to seeing how this meeting strengthens the wider Forum architecture, and drives our commitment to the realisation of human rights for all people in our Blue Pacific Continent.

• I wish you a productive and empowering day.

• Ngā mihi tino nui. Vinaka vaka levu.

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