



Australia
Federated States of Micronesia
Fiji
Kiribati
Nauru
New Zealand
Palau

Tonga
Chairman of Pacific Islands Forum

Pacific Islands Forum Group

Papua New Guinea
Republic of Marshall Islands
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu



Pacific Islands Forum
United Nations Member States

**Statement by
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Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Tonga to the
United Nations**

**On Behalf of the
Pacific Islands Forum Group**

During the 52nd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women

**New York
27th February 2008**

Mr. Chairman

1. I am honored to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group including Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.
2. Congratulations on your election and assumption of Office.
3. I commend the report of the Secretary General on “financing for gender equality” and welcome the inclusion of climate change and HIV, two very important issues on to the agenda. Climate change and natural disasters impact the most vulnerable including women. The role of women in mitigation measures including through the use of traditional and indigenous knowledge can help to build resilience against climate change and catastrophic events. The gender dimensions of rapidly rising rates of HIV in our region are of serious concern. This impacts the full range of sexual and reproductive health issues which is linked to high rates of gender based violence, the effects of which are exacerbated in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Mr. Chairman

4. Improving gender equality in the Pacific island region is an ongoing concern. Our leaders acknowledged this when they endorsed the Pacific Plan in 2005. The Plan provides a roadmap for the region and is based on the pillars of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security. It is now in its initial implementation phase and its activities are being progressed by a partnership of regional agencies and institutions, development partners and the members of the Forum Group themselves. Gender equality is a key strategic objective of the Pacific Plan and the main challenge we are face as a region is to integrate gender equality across the Plan. It is also central to the Revised Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women endorsed by Pacific Ministers for Women. This action plan is aligned to the Beijing Platform of Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, and affirms the commitment of Pacific Island governments to ratify human rights treaties.
5. The countries and territories of the Pacific are at different stages of achieving these commitments and are constrained by inadequate levels of resources. This year’s session and subsequent follow up meetings provides a unique window of opportunity to focus on resourcing issues and to raise the level of resources for advancing gender equality in the Pacific region.
6. In May last year, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community convened the 10th Pacific Triennial Conference for Women and the 3rd Pacific Women Minister’s Meeting. These meetings called on governments in the region to strengthen processes for developing and implementing key gender mainstreaming tools, including establishing gender-responsive budgets and budget systems as part of broader budget financial reform

processes. They also reiterated earlier commitments to strengthen national women's machineries by ensuring that they were adequately resourced and financed.

Mr. Chairman

7. Financing for gender equality is a challenging concept for the Pacific islands where governments are faced with competing demands on limited resources; persistent budget deficits and dependency on external assistance to finance a large percentage of their development budgets.

8. Specific data on the national levels of financing of gender equality activities in the Pacific is relatively poor. Anecdotal evidence places the domestic budgetary financing of gender activities at 1% or less of the total budget. Most of these domestic resources are deployed for core operational costs of national women's machineries leaving little or no resources for critical programmes such as gender based violence and gender and HIV.

9. Government agencies responsible for gender equality have struggled to achieve adequate and sustainable levels of domestic resources. Overseas development assistance is therefore a critical source of financing for the development and capital budgets. Further research and analysis is needed to determine the full range and quantity of financial resources dedicated to gender equality flowing into the Pacific island region.

10. Development partners have become increasingly active in the development of national gender policies including innovative resource allocation approaches and systems to better integrate gender initiatives in the planning, budgeting and institutional policies of governments. However, efforts to implement these on a sustainable basis are severely constrained by limited technical capacity in both national women's machineries and other related government agencies.

11. Local ownership and commitment are often exacerbated by the absence of formal institutional arrangements, institutional capacity and awareness of gender financing concepts and approaches. While many Pacific governments have undertaken budget reforms to focus on outputs, this has impacted on the capacity of finance and planning ministries to better target and manages public finances in support of improved gender equality outcomes.

12. The findings of the report of the Secretary General and the core areas identified under the Monterrey Consensus capture and reflect the situation in the Pacific as denoted in the recent report on "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Pacific region."

13. I urge our development partners to recognise several critical factors in working towards improved financing for gender equality. Firstly, the need to raise awareness and understanding of gender financing concepts and approaches is just as critical as ensuring that frameworks are set-up to implement them. This should include having gender focal points within the agencies responsible for making decisions on financing, and not just in

national machineries for women. Secondly, efforts must take into account local circumstances and national capacity issues, including adequate resource allocation to national women's machineries and continued support for gender-based organizations. Any technical assistance for gender financing must address and build the local capacity to assume responsibility for the reforms and to sustain them.

14. Our experience with gender responsive budgeting projects in the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa and Fiji encountered such challenges. It demonstrated the need for strong and sustained political commitment as well as active participation of civil society. Once there is local ownership at strategic levels then we can implement and realise the benefits of the gender budgeting approach.

15. There is also a need to strengthen investment and support at both regional and national levels for rural women operating in the informal sector such as through micro-credit and small business development. The majority of Pacific women work in the rural sector to support their families and adequate attention must be given to integrate them into the national and regional economy as a strategy to reduce poverty and sustain livelihoods in our region.

Mr. Chairman

16. The Pacific faces unique challenges of vulnerability which arise from its geography and population issues. They include insularity, and the continued use of practices that are immersed in culture and tradition. These vulnerabilities influence the capacity of countries to embrace and reflect gender equality and require sustained external support.

Mr. Chairman

17. Let me up-date you on developments in the region since last year's Commission Session. In 2007, the Governments of Vanuatu and the Cook Islands presented country reports to the United Nations CEDAW Committee. The challenge is now to implement the Committee's recommendations which require additional resources including addressing gender based violence and legislative reforms. The Pacific has taken the lead in developing legislative compliance indicators for monitoring progress on CEDAW in ten countries. Pacific Island Forum Leaders in the Kingdom of Tonga in October 2007 for the first time, called for enhanced participation in decision making by women in parliamentary processes. Several activities have subsequently been undertaken in support of the Leaders' decision.

18 Work on improving availability and use of gender statistics and indicators is ongoing focusing on strengthening the capacity of national statistics offices to collect and analyse data. This includes the recognition of women's unpaid work in national accounts and the application of this information to priority-setting and gender budgeting processes.

19 The Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) which comprises eleven agencies plays a critical role in the implementation of gender commitments. A comprehensive gender stock take of these organisations was completed in 2007. Key findings and recommendations are now being considered to ensure that gender is integrated into technical services and programmes delivered to countries in the region.

Mr. Chairman

20. The Pacific recognises the vital role of the United Nations agencies in advancing gender equality in our region. We are therefore keen to see the implementation of reforms that will establish a strengthened single UN agency dedicated to the advancement of women led by an Under Secretary General and that combines normative and operational functions. We hope this will lead to increased UN engagement and support in the Pacific; improved coordination and collaboration amongst UN agencies at both regional and country level; and more effective engagement with regional organisations on this issue.

21. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the valuable contributions made by New Zealand, Australia, the European Union, the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations working in the Pacific in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women. We also recognise that there is a need to step up and diversify current efforts to fill the resource and funding gaps and invite support from other development partners including the countries of the Nordic region.

Thank you.

