



53rd Commission on the Status of Women

**Item 3: Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a focus on
the shared responsibilities between men and women**

Statement by

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for

Pacific Islands Forum

**Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands,
Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands,
Tuvalu, Tonga, Vanuatu, Australia, and Niue**

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Chair

I have the honour of making this statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group of countries, namely Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, Vanuatu, Australia, New Zealand and my own country Niue.

Chair,

On the occasion of the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women, the Pacific Islands Forum reiterates our commitment to the Revised Pacific Platform for Action, the Pacific Plan and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and their respective follow-up reviews, as the blueprint for achieving gender equality, development, peace and security. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the theme of this year's Commission, which is the *"the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS"*.

We approach this subject recognizing the vast political, economic, social, cultural and geographic diversities within and between Pacific countries, and with particular vulnerabilities associated with climate change. In many Pacific Island countries, the traditional and cultural context perpetuates gendered roles of women and men and define their responsibilities in their families and communities thereby entrenching gender inequality. In this context, we recognize that girls, young women, rural women, migrant women and women with disabilities experience gender discrimination and inequalities in diverse and often complex ways. Migration is also affecting the unequal sharing of responsibilities. Temporary labour migration provide much needed employment opportunities but generally mostly for men. Women therefore bear the "the double burden" of their domestic and caring responsibilities, but also assume the additional tasks that were once male dominated, for example in the area of agriculture.

Whilst the unequal division of labour is not unique to the Pacific, women and girls continue to be responsible for the majority of underpaid and unpaid care-giving, domestic work and in many cultures, subsistence farming. In addition to this, increased labour mobility of women and men in the Pacific has significantly increased pressure on the extended family structure, particularly on women as economic providers and care-givers. Subsequently, in some of our countries, the low economic status of women impedes their participation in all levels of decision-making, including in traditional and family structures. This situation is reflected in low levels of women's participation in the political leadership of our countries. One example of this, as the Secretary General's report points out, is the participation of women in public life including in decision making. Pacific Island Countries (excluding Australia and New Zealand), have an average of only 4.2% women members in their national parliaments.

Chair

Last year, we emphasized concern over increasing rates of HIV and AIDS in our region which impact the full range of sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. We welcome the opportunity to focus on the gendered nature of the implications of care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS which are serious and long-term for families and their communities.

The level and intensity of care required in the context of HIV and AIDS is currently very diverse within the Pacific Islands. For example, in Papua New Guinea, HIV has become a generalized epidemic, exacerbating existing burdens on women as care-givers. In other Pacific countries, prevalence rates remain low and the primary focus remains on prevention. Pacific Island countries are however extremely vulnerable to the spread of HIV and AIDS, and this is being reflected in statistics indicating a rapid spread of the disease in the region, a trend that is likely to be exacerbated by the consequences climate change, such as drought and flooding, and the current global financial crisis. Providing care to persons living with HIV is currently being undertaken by family members who are most often women. Caregivers often must forego paid work and have limited time to undertake domestic work or caregiving of others, including their children.

While we recognize the recent adoption of the Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV and other STIs for 2009-2013, this must be seen as a stepping stone for the development of national-level legislation which implements this Strategy and other supporting national strategies, with the inclusion and meaningful participation of persons living with HIV and AIDS. The Pacific Islands response to HIV and AIDS focuses heavily on prevention, testing, care, and leadership and forms part of the joint Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV and Other STIs. However, there is limited data, analysis and research in the area of care for persons living with HIV and AIDS. We welcome the recently approved study by the Commonwealth Secretariat to look into the time use of HIV carers in six countries as well as in the Pacific, and hope that this will provide information to consider practical policy options.

We value the partnership with faith-based organizations, NGOs and CSOs in providing prevention, care, treatment and support measures for persons and families living with HIV and AIDS, through strengthening Country-Coordinating Mechanisms for HIV and AIDS.

Chair

In the Pacific Islands, restrictive gender roles are reinforced and perpetuated by discriminatory laws. There is an urgent need to repeal discriminatory employment laws and to adopt legislation providing equal rights related to family, marriage, divorce and access to land. Some progress has been made in the reform of family law. Other areas of law reform have also been considered in line with the CEDAW and CRC Legislative Compliance Reviews that have been completed for

most Pacific Island Countries but we recognize that more must be done in terms of implementation at national level, with supporting from the international community. Combatting gender-based violence must also remain a key priority. We would welcome enhanced assistance from the United Nations and other partners to address this critical challenge in order to support Pacific Islands ratification and more so the effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Before concluding, I should note that there have been some positive developments in the region to assist in promoting equality of work for men and women. These include the launch of a new gender statistics framework by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, which will provide Pacific island countries with tools to collect better statistics on the relative situation of men and women. There is also a vibrant process taking place around women's participation in public life and in decision making, including consideration of the need for temporary special measures to address women's under-representation in Pacific parliaments. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat together with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and other development partners convened the first Sub-Regional Workshop on Temporary Special Measures for Women in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea last September.

Implementing the 'gender mainstreaming strategy' is significant to our Pacific island nations in recognition of our commitment to CEDAW, a human rights based approach to development to and MDG 3 on the promotion of gender equality. Some of our island nations have identified and diagnose the gender related barriers and opportunities for poverty and sustainable development. What is now needed are '*Gender Responsive Strategies*' that are '*Country Specific*' to ensure it is mainstreamed into our main government machinery to enhance growth and well being. In this regard, there is a need for comprehensive gender and social analyses of financial, economic and trade policies.

Chair,

The Pacific Islands Forum values the opportunity to exchange views with other regions about the Secretary General's report on the theme and measures to break down gender stereotypes, improve equal access to paid work for women and promote the recognition of the value of women's paid and unpaid labour, including caregiving. We look forward to strengthening partnerships with civil society and to an enlightening discussion of the theme of this Session, as well as the implications of the current financial crisis and of women in decision-making.