



PALAU



PALAU MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement

by

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VOICES Palau

at the

53rd Commission on the Status of Women

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New York

Mr. Chairman,

It is an honor to present at the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Palau aligns itself with the statement made by the Pacific Island Forum, as delivered by the distinguished representative of Niue.

Mr. Chairman,

Palau is part of the Pacific sub-region of Micronesian Island Chains and consists of hundreds of tiny islands with a total population of 30,000. Traditionally, Palau's leadership structure was based on equal participation of decision-making by both men and women; this structure was slowly but surely eroded over the past eighty years, as a result of colonization. However, the 1981 Palau National Constitution provides for equal rights to both women and men and more recently, in November of 2008, the people of Palau voted in a national referendum for the adoption of a special constitutional measure to uphold the traditional and cultural heritage of Palauans, thereby recognizing the right of women to participate in traditional leadership roles in partnership with male leaders.

Mr. Chairman,

Until 2008, within Palau's modern democratic government, women held only 1% of seats in national parliament. Although this is a democratic government structure, it demonstrates that Palauan women are still facing barriers to full participation in the political process. On January 15, 2009, for the first time in 28 years of constitutional governance, two women were sworn into the Senate in our bi-cameral national congress, one of whom is now presiding as Vice President of the Senate. In addition to the above, Palau boasts three women elected as state governors and two women were recently appointed and confirmed as members of the President's cabinet, the Minister of State and the Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Palau celebrates its recent accomplishments within the modern system of governance, and is proud of the preservation of its matriarchal traditional decision-making structure. Nonetheless, we recognize the need for the inclusion and participation of women in all levels of decision-making, including the need to implement temporary special measures to help achieve a minimum of 30% seats held by women in national parliaments.

Mr. Chairman,

Palau has a low prevalence rate of HIV and AIDS, with the first case of HIV documented in 1993. As of 2007, Palau has 8 documented cases of HIV and AIDS. Five of these individuals have died, and 3 are currently living in Palau. In 2008, there was one positive test of HIV out of 22 reactive cases, which brought the number of HIV infected people up to 4. This means that since 2003, the cases of HIV and AIDS, in Palau, has increased by 50%. The critical recognition of the effects of HIV in a small island nation is essential in the global response against HIV and AIDS. Palau supports the Pacific Regional Strategy on HIV and other STIs for 2009-2013. This strategy is in

line with Palau's national strategy on HIV and AIDS. Nonetheless, further efforts are necessary to achieve universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support, within a human rights framework and with special attention to the needs of young people.

Mr. Chairman,

The traditional responsibility of women to take care of the sick in nuclear and extended families creates an additional burden for women and girls. This burden extends to caregivers in all aspects, including in the context of HIV and AIDS. Governments and regional and international organizations must recognize the unpaid but essential health care and care-giving services provided by women and girls in their policies and programming. We therefore acknowledge the need for social and security responses to care responsibilities in the promotion of equal sharing between women and men and their access to parental leave, including maternity and paternity leave.

Mr. Chairman,

In light of the current global financial crisis, women are the most susceptible to economic fluctuations and downturns which have serious widespread impact on the real economies and lives of the Palauan people, particularly women and children, when it comes to everyday cost of living and financial responsibilities of caring for families. Women, girls, men and boys all need the skills and awareness to build a society that promotes gender equality, with particular reference to all levels of decision-making. This calls for the incorporation of gender perspectives into all economic policy-making processes and increasing the participation of women in economic governance structures and processes to ensure policy coherence and adequate resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women¹.

Finally, we would like to highlight climate change as one of the major issues facing Palau requiring immediate attention. As we have seen, climate change has a disproportionate impact on women as the livelihoods of many women are dependent on the environment, including in agriculture and fisheries.

Mr. Chairman,

We would thank you for this opportunity to speak and look forward to working constructively with all delegations to make progress on these important issues.

¹ CSW 52 Agreed Conclusions