



**Statement by**  
**Honorable Minister Kouraiti Beniato**  
**Minister for Internal and Social Affairs**  
**Kiribati**

**On behalf of the**

**Pacific Islands Forum Group**

**55<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women**

Chairperson

I am honored to address the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Status of Women on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group of countries which are members of the United Nations.

2. Congratulations on your election and assumption of Office.

3. I wish to commend the report of the Secretary General on “access and participation of women and girls in education training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work” and sincerely welcome the inclusion of a discussion to review the Beijing Platform for Action in the agenda. We also commend and support the idea that the outcomes and discussion for this session feed directly in the 2011 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)<sup>1</sup>.

Chairperson

4. The countries and territories of the Pacific are at different stages of achieving our gender commitments and all have inadequate levels of resources to meet them fully in the immediate or long term. Despite this, improving gender equality in the Pacific island region is a major concern and we in the Pacific continue to discuss, support and implement our national, regional and gender commitments.

5. In August last year, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community convened the 11<sup>th</sup> Pacific Triennial Conference for Women in Noumea, New Caledonia. The focus of this meeting was a detailed review of national and regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with an emphasis on discussing strategies and innovations for accelerating progress.

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<sup>1</sup> The AMR which was mandated at the 2005 World Summit assesses the *progress made in the implementation of the MDGs and the other goals and targets agreed at the major UN conferences and summits* over the past 15 years, which constitute the United Nations Development Agenda (UNDA). Each year, the AMR focuses on a specific aspect of the UNDA. In 2011 it is: *Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education.*

## Chairperson

6. Gender Equality in access to education has been achieved or is close to being achieved in primary and secondary school in most countries of the Pacific. However, some disparities exist whereby girls' participation is significantly lower than boys'. As of 2009 women still have higher overall levels of illiteracy than men in a few Pacific countries.<sup>2</sup>

7. A Pacific review of the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in 2010 showed that a key priority under gender and education is the transition of women and girls into traditionally male-dominated subjects such as trades and sciences and their participation in all levels of educational decision making. Women's on-going marginalisation in each of these areas is a result of social attitudes and practices that classify women into particular domains of activity and specific fields of work. For example, national studies carried out in Kiribati and Samoa has confirmed that women's involvement in science and technology was not equal to men's; women did not have careers as engineers or scientists or in science-based jobs. Even where women had been leaders in localising new technologies, they were overlooked when assessing community needs. Rather than lacking in aptitude some reasons for not taking the science path is a lack of career counselling and the lack of female role models in science subjects in science related careers.

8. A major constraint is that available educational data relate almost exclusively to access. More scarce are data on the quality of education, including the extent to which it may be perpetuating gender stereotypes. Definitions of literacy also warrant further research. For example, does literacy mean reading and/or writing or even in English and/or the vernacular?

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<sup>2</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (2010), Beijing +15: Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island countries and territories. SPC, Noumea, New Calédonie and The Pacific Education Framework (PEDF) 2009 – 2015.



9. Whilst the Pacific has considerable way to go to fulfill this critical area of concern it would be remiss of me to not provide some examples of successful policies, projects and programmes carried out by member countries and other stakeholders. From a regional perspective the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat monitors the Pacific Education Development Framework (the framework) which is the education mandate for all Pacific Island Forum countries. The idea of having a regional framework to further the development of Pacific education has been strongly supported by Pacific Forum countries through their education ministries. The approach also has the support of development partners. The Framework seeks to coordinate regional activities and provide advocacy and a leadership role in policy dialogue at the regional level. Whilst it guides, it does not direct the work of Education Ministries at the national level. Gender is a cross-cutting theme through the Framework and some priorities include development of strategies to increase participation of girls in upper secondary and the implementation of cost-effective strategies for service delivery to remote and outer island communities.

10. In the Pacific we also recognize the powerful role teachers and academics can play in advocating for human rights principles. The Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) has been instrumental in carrying out human rights and legal literacy to educate teachers from a number of Pacific nations for this role. The University of the South Pacific (USP) has recently included gender studies into its academic curriculum and this course of study is being further explored by a full-time Coordinator for the gender studies programme.

11. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Community and Education and Training Centre (CETC) continues to be the only regional institution offering community development training for Pacific women. Recently the CETC has recognised the need to broaden and strengthen training programmes offered so that they are better equipped to among other things understand, analyse and address the gender dimensions of critical and emerging issues such as the use of ICT in community development.

12. Gender equality measures are in place in most education ministries, largely (but not only) as a result of donor influence. Gender officers are now included in some curriculum writing teams, for example in Solomon Islands and Samoa.

13. Given these realities, the priority now is for governments to strengthen technical and vocational training for women in fields where the greatest opportunities lie, and for the integration of women into non-traditional tertiary educational fields.

14. I am delighted to report that in 2010, Palau, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Australia submitted their respective reports under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and are all scheduled to appear before the Committee this year. Kiribati appeared before the UPR committee in 2010. In the same year, the Governments of Australia presented their sixth and seventh reports, New Zealand their seventh report and Papua New Guinea (PNG) presented their initial, second and third country reports respectively to the United Nations CEDAW Committee. The challenge now is to implement the respective recommendations and more importantly to make available the resources to do this.

Chairperson,

15. No Pacific statement is complete without a plea to the world for their urgent attention and assistance to the Pacific Islands vulnerable to the impacts of the climate change. We recognize the importance of the inclusion of gender in developing mitigation and adaptation activities such as through improved access to resources including scientific research, training, technology and information and empowering women to become agents of change. It is also important to take into account women's specific priorities and needs and to make full use of their expertise, traditional knowledge and practices in the development of new technology and approaches to address climate change.

16. May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the representatives of PICTs governments, civil society organisations, the United Nations agencies working in the

Pacific and the development partners that we work with who are present here at this meeting.

17. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the valuable contributions made by New Zealand, Australia, the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations working in the Pacific in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

18. Chairperson, I thank you once again for this honor to address the Commission on this important issue of “access and participation of women and girls in education training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work” and to share the Pacific experience.