

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

**HONOURABLE TOLOFUAIVALELEI FALEMOE LEIATAUA
MINISTER FOR WOMEN, COMMUNITY
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

AT THE

**FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and gentlemen.

Samoa aligns itself with the statement already delivered on behalf of the member states of the Pacific Islands Forum. Allow me therefore to provide Samoa's perspectives on this year's theme and to share with member states some of the developments that had taken place since we last met two years ago.

1. Firstly, after many years of trial and error, Samoa now has in place a National Policy and National Plan of Action for Women which was endorsed by our Government in November 2010. This document provides the overall direction for addressing the priority strategic areas for women and the work on gender equality for the next five years. This Policy for Women is complimented by the National Policy and Plan of Action for Children, the National Policy and Plan of Action for Youth and the National Policy and Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities which address issues for the girl child and women and girls with disabilities.
2. In terms of our legal framework, work is ongoing to try and strengthen our women's legal protection and access to justice through the Family Safety Bill and the Crimes Bill which are almost finalized before referral to our national Parliament for consideration and approval.

Another historic development of note is the recent tabling in Parliament of a Bill to amend our Constitution to guarantee that at least ten percent of Parliamentary seats will be held by women with effect from our next General Elections in 2017. This constitutional amendment provides for the first time a specific legal provision to support the political participation of women in Samoa.

3. In terms of health and education, there is noticeable improvement in research availability in relation to gender indicators. This has consolidated the strategic direction for work undertaken in the health sector, especially in relation for example, to HIV and AIDS and Sexual Reproductive Health.

4. At the grassroots level, much of our focus in the last two years has been on strengthening the work of rural women through the village women representatives who act as the interface between government and the women in the rural villages. The Village Women Representatives Network falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. Their work is inclusive of our Government's strategy for poverty alleviation and they are gender champions responsible for delivering and monitoring of all social, economic, health and cultural development programs in the rural villages. Work in the past year has resulted in increased engagement and participation of women and girls in gender violence advocacy, disaster preparedness and response management programs, school enrolment and vocational training opportunities, improved birth registration for children and livelihood programs for the unemployed mothers and young women to name a few.

Chairperson,

Despite these achievements, work in this area continues to be challenged by pressures brought on by the ongoing financial crisis, climate change as also alluded to in the Pacific Forum Group statement, ad-hoc interventions, and the many woes of the modern society verses traditional norms. These challenges call for:

- i. an integrated and coordinated multi - sectoral approach to gender equality;
- ii. strong leadership and maintaining genuine partnerships at all levels;
- iii. access to financial and technical assistance that is sensitive to country needs; and
- iv. a systematic monitoring and evaluation framework for national application.

In closing, I would like to commend the work of our local counterparts, the non government organizations, community-based networks and our partners from the private sector, our regional and international partners - who have all contributed to the national translation of the Beijing Platform for Action into expected outcomes for our women and girls and in particular, those living in the rural areas.

Thank you.