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Third Committee

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Pacific Islands Forum statement on the Advancement of Women

**Statement by Annette Ellis MP
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(Check against delivery)

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

The Pacific Islands Forum is committed to gender equality and ensuring the advancement of women.

As a clear sign of the region's commitment to equal participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in the development of policies related to peace and security, sexual and gender based violence was recently discussed at the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Committee. Despite this commitment we acknowledge that our region is making slow progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Violence against women and the fear of violence are significant human rights violations. Violence causes trauma to women and their families and communities, severely limits women's social, political and economic participation in their communities and puts significant strain on national economies, undermining efforts to end poverty in our region.

Raising the awareness of the link between women's economic empowerment and peace and security is a necessary step in eradicating sexual violence not only in the Pacific community but in all parts of the world.

At the 40th Pacific Islands Forum Meeting held in Australia in August this year, the Forum strengthened its resolve to end permissive community attitudes to sexual violence, and to firmly establish on the political agenda the issue of sexual and gender based violence. We welcome efforts at the local, national and regional levels to address sexual and gender based violence, including through increased Pacific engagement in relevant global initiatives aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls.

However, while we are encouraged by the progress that has been made in these areas, we are also keenly aware of the distance that we still have to go to achieve full participation of women in our society, including the eradication of sexual and gender based violence.

To this end we support international efforts to increase attention on sexual and gender based violence and call on the UN system to strengthen their resolve in collecting evidence based data to support accounts of sexual and gender based violence.

We reconfirm our commitment to the advancement of women and welcome efforts to progress the creation of a new United Nations gender entity through the resolution adopted on 14 September 2009.

We support the recent adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1888 and 1889 which strengthen the commitments to include women in peacebuilding and to address sexual violence in conflict situations.

We also find the characterisation by some governments and military of sexual violence being a 'by-product' of war intolerable, and call on all states to build effective judicial and security institutions to prevent and prosecute sexual and gender based violence perpetrated in conflict situations.

Finally we thank the international community for recognising the role of women in maintaining peace and security.