

**Tenth Triennial Conference of Pacific Women
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**Excellencies
Friends and colleagues**

BACKGROUND

The **goal of promoting equality between women and men** has been on the agenda of the international community since the founding of the United Nations. The UN Charter declared faith in “the equal rights of men and women”. At the Millennium Summit in 2000, it was recognized that gender equality is a precondition for the achievement of development that is truly sustainable. World leaders assembled at the 2005 World Summit at the UN in New York affirmed that “Progress for women is progress for all”.

Over the past six decades, strong **global policy and legal frameworks** for gender equality have been put in place - the Platform for Action adopted in consensus in Beijing in 1995 and the human rights treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 and now endorsed by 185 states. Specific mechanisms have been established at international, regional and national levels to support the implementation of these critical frameworks.

At global level, the **Commission on the Status of Women** – the intergovernmental body comprised of Member States of the United Nations – develops policy recommendations in critical areas and advocates for and follows-up on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. A Committee of 23 independent experts, the **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**, is charged with monitoring the implementation of obligations of States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Division of the UN Secretariat in which I work, the Division for the Advancement of Women, supports the work of these two bodies.

In the context of the **Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific**, Member States in this region also identified region-specific priorities and addressed implementation at national level. Regional Action Plans have been adopted and are followed-up at regional and sub-regional levels.

At national level, Governments have established **national mechanisms** for the promotion of gender equality. Most countries of the world have established ministries, or departments within ministries, dedicated to the promotion of gender equality. The past decade has also seen the establishment of a range of other mechanisms at national level working on gender equality, including Gender Equality Commissions responsible for oversight, gender focal points in line ministries, Ombudspersons Offices, and caucuses or networks of parliamentarians. The Division for the Advancement of Women produces an

annual Directory of National Mechanisms. I welcome the opportunity to update the information on mechanisms for gender equality in the Pacific for the directory at this meeting.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Governments have prepared **national action plans** on implementation of the Platform for Action and contributed information to the **five- and ten-year reviews** of the Platform for Action in 2000 and 2005, both at the regional level through the ECA, and at global level through the UN in New York. In 2005, only a few Pacific countries provided responses to the questionnaire on the status of implementation of the Platform for Action at national level.

Countries which are States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are required to **report regularly to the Committee** on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Some Pacific countries are among the 9 countries which have not yet ratified the convention in the Pacific.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a critical role in advocating, supporting and monitoring the work on the promotion of gender equality at all levels – global, regional and national. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility of gender equality issues and recognition of their importance for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation at national level of the commitment made by Governments has been particularly significant.

Despite all these efforts at global, regional and national levels, there remains today a **significant and serious gap in implementation** of both the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women at national level. There are many reasons for this discrepancy between policies and commitments/ obligations made at global level and sustained action on the ground – including insufficient awareness, political will, capacity and resource allocations.

At the **ten-year review of implementation** of the Platform for Action carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005, Member States adopted a declaration which called for “full and accelerated implementation” of the commitments made in the Platform for Action.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

In my presentation today, I will focus on the work of the **Commission on the Status of Women** to advocate for, support and monitor increased implementation of the Platform for Action at national level.

The Commission on the Status of Women was founded in 1946 and commemorated its 60th anniversary and its 50th session last year. It is composed of 45 elected Member States. The history of the Commission is marked by significant achievements. It ensured provisions for gender equality in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and organised

and followed up the four world conferences on women (Mexico, 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995). Over the past ten years, the Commission has systematically reviewed progress in implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action, and it was responsible for the preparations for the five year review of implementation in 2000 and the ten-year review in 2005. The Commission continues to provide unique opportunities at its annual sessions for exchange of ideas, experiences, good practices and lessons learned to enhance implementation of commitments at national level.

A major achievement of the Commission was the preparatory work carried out on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979, and the preparation of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, adopted 20 years later in 1999. The fact that 185 countries are now party to the convention, and 85 have ratified the Optional Protocol, attests to the importance of these two instruments.

In the Declaration adopted at the ten-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005, the Commission recognized that the implementation of the Platform for Action and the fulfilment of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. The policy and legal frameworks of Member States and the United Nations and other international and regional organizations should build on both instruments.

I have distributed a brochure on the Commission (in English and French) which will provide you more information on the Commission.

NEW WORKING METHODS AND PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Commission adopts a multi-year programme of work which allows Member States to know in advance which issues the Commission will be considering at different sessions and facilitates effective and timely national level preparations.

In 2006, the Commission revised its working methods to ensure a stronger focus on implementation at national level and adopted a programme of work for 2007 until 2009. The Commission would normally adopt a five year work plan, but since the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action will be in 2010, the Commission decided that it would review implementation of its working methods in 2009 and at the same time take a decision on the commemoration of the 15th anniversary in 2010.

An important innovation in the new working methods is the decision to only focus on one priority theme per year to allow for more in-depth consideration of the themes. It is also a significant innovation that the Commission agreed to review at each session one set of recommendations adopted at a previous session. The review takes place through interactive dialogue among Member States. In addition, the Commission considers an emerging issue each session, the topic of which is decided by the Bureau of the Commission, in consultation with Member States, prior to the session.

At its 52nd session in 2008, the Commission will focus on the priority theme: *“Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women”*. It will also review progress in implementation of the recommendations it adopted in 2004 on *“Women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding”*. The emerging issue will be decided on at a later date.

At its 53rd session in 2009, the Commission will focus on: *“The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.X”* as its priority theme. It will also review the recommendations on: *“The equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels”*, adopted in 2006.

THE VALUE OF THE ANNUAL SESSIONS OF THE COMMISSION

Attending the Commission on the Status of Women provides a **unique opportunity to meet and discuss with gender equality experts** at different levels, including Ministerial level, from all parts of the world. The interactive events organized by the Commission are addressed by experts on the different themes the Commission is considering - the priority theme, the review theme and the emerging issue. Following these introductory presentations by experts, the discussions are opened up to Member States, UN entities and non-governmental organizations to share information on achievements, lessons learned, gaps and challenges in different national contexts. These interactive exchanges are invaluable learning opportunities.

Although the Commission has 45 elected members, **all interactive discussions are open to all Member States** attending the Commission, regardless of whether they are members or not. Both members and observers at the Commission can also present national statements outlining the progress made and remaining challenges in relation to the three themes at the Commission.

In addition to the formal programme of the Commission, there are also a large number of **parallel events** – workshops, panels, film viewings, etc - organized during the two weeks of the Commission. At the last session, in February/March this year, there were around 60 events in the UN itself and approximately 200 organized by NGOs at the Church Centre, just opposite the UN headquarters.

Many Member States and regional groups take the opportunity to organize events to provide information on importance developments or challenges in their countries or regions. Such an event was organized by Pacific countries at the last session of the Commission which was an important means to galvanize interest in developments in the Pacific.

Even if countries or regional groups do not organize events at each session of the Commission, the opportunity to attend those events organized by others, and to learn from the experiences of countries experiencing the same problems, for example women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, exploitation of women in armed conflict or domestic violence, is a very important one.

In most regions, **opportunities for face-to-face meetings between national machineries** are infrequent. In Africa, for example, the national machineries of the region normally meet only once a year in Addis Ababa. Some countries may of course meet again at meetings at sub-regional level, such as this one, but such meetings also tend to be infrequent. Many countries participating at the CSW sessions therefore take the chance to organize regional or sub-regional meetings for general discussions on the work on gender equality in the region or sub-region.

Such meetings may be also used to develop **regional or sub-regional positions** on the issues being discussed at the CSW, in order to be able to effectively influence the development of the recommendations (agreed conclusions) on the priority theme.

For many countries, attendance at the CSW provides important potential for **meeting with representatives of donor organizations**, both bilateral and multilateral – to discuss existing support or seek new support. All of the countries providing bilateral development assistance are represented at the Commission. Many of the critical UN agencies have their headquarters in New York, such as UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and UNIFEM and meetings can be organized in advance of coming to New York. Representatives from headquarters of other UN entities located outside New York also attend the Commission.

PREPARATIONS FOR AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE COMMISSION

Successful sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women are dependent on effective preparations and follow-up at national level. The Commission is increasingly focused on ensuring outcomes which are relevant to the priorities and needs on the ground and to systematic and effective follow-up at national level.

The Commission encourages all stakeholders – Member States, UN entities and NGOs to engage their constituencies around the world in **preparation** for the Commission. A number of good practice examples are emerging, where, for example, NGOs organize their own electronic discussions on the themes of the Commission or hold meetings at different levels to discuss which priority issues should be raised in relation to the theme.

It is important that there is the broadest possible **awareness** around the world of the themes the Commission is considering prior to the session. The Division for the Advancement of Women attempts to foster such awareness, for example through dissemination of **information materials**, such as the two-page fact sheet on the 52nd session which I have distributed here today, and through the **webpage** on the Commission on the website of the Division.

The Division also organizes an **on-line discussion** on the priority theme, around six months prior to the session. The on-line discussion provides an opportunity for many different stakeholders – representatives of Member States and UN entities, and women's groups and networks, as well as researchers, practitioners and other interested women and men - to take part in preparations by identifying critical issues to be addressed at the Commission and providing information on experiences, lessons learned and good practices. The online discussion on "*Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women*" will

take place in mid June this year. The report will be made available on the website of the Division and will be distributed at the Commission.

To gain in-depth access to the experience of researchers, activists and other stakeholders working with the girl child at national, regional and international level, and support the preparation of the Commission, the Division organizes an **Expert Group Meeting** on the theme, about six months before the session. Around 10-12 experts from all regions meet to identify the key issues, assess progress in implementation and formulate recommendations. Last year, the Pacific region was represented at the Expert Group Meeting on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child*. The Expert Group Meeting on *Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women* will take place in September this year. The report will be made available on the website of the Division and will be distributed at the Commission.

Follow-up to the outcomes of the Commission is equally important. For the recommendations of the Commission to have any impact, they must be broadly **disseminated and utilized** at national level. Implementation can only be accelerated at national level if the recommendations are well known and systematically and effectively used by many different stakeholders.

National machineries have a key responsibility in this context – to ensure that they use the outcomes effectively in their own work, disseminate them broadly to all relevant stakeholders, particularly in line ministries, and follow-up on implementation in different ways. Practical alliances can be developed with NGOs to ensure effective follow-up and implementation.

Follow-up to the **priority theme** should take into account that the Commission will review the implementation of the recommendations adopted at each session in 2-3 years time. It will be important in planning follow-up to consider ways to effectively measure progress and to bring attention to remaining gaps and challenges during the future review session.

We need to develop innovative ways of engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the work of the Commission and documenting the practical impact of the work of the Commission at national level.

THE POTENTIAL OF NETWORKING AMONG NATIONAL MECHANISMS

There are clearly tremendous network opportunities during the Commission on the Status of Women. It is equally important, however, to maintain effective networking in between sessions. In some regions, such as Europe, networking through the new information and communication technologies is well developed. This facilitates active collaboration on preparations for the Commission as well as on follow-up. In other regions such networking is still under-developed.

In Africa, for example, the Division for the Advancement of Women recently completed a project to support the development of a regional e-network to promote

greater networking among national machineries in the region. It consists of an information portal (website) for the national machineries which provides information on all national machineries in Africa. The national machineries update this information as new developments occur – such as new policies, strategies and publications.

The website also contains information on important global and regional processes. We hope that in the future it will be possible to include information on national machineries in other regions and sub-regions, such as the Pacific, by linking to similar websites to expand the potential for national machineries from different regions to learn from each other.

Through the portal, it is also possible to involve the national machineries in interactive discussions. One discussion list, which aims to support the day-to-day work of national machineries, can only be accessed by national machineries. Through this discussion list, national machineries can openly and freely discuss with each other – share information on new developments in their organizations or countries, raise issues of concern and request or share information. It can be used for very concrete purposes, for example, to identify the best ways to address problems, request names of good consultants in particular sector areas, or get feedback on draft terms of reference or reports.

A second discussion list will be used for moderated thematic e-discussions on priority topics. For example, the national machineries in Africa selected as their first priority theme, women's participation in decision-making. This discussion to be held in July/August during a four week period, will be open to other ministries, NGOs, donors, and other organizations from all around Africa. Electronic discussions provide a unique opportunity for the national machineries to get access to the latest thinking and practical experience in the region on the issues being discussed.

The reason I raise this new development in Africa here is because the portal and discussions lists can also be used to share information on the latest developments at global level, for example with the Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or the regional body focused on gender equality at ECA. It can also be effectively used to help national machineries prepare for participation in the regional body or the Commission on the Status of Women. Information can be shared and discussions can be organized on the themes to be taken up by these bodies in order to develop regional or sub-regional positions.

The e-network for national machineries in Africa is very new, but we hope that it will prove to be an effective instrument for increasing networking and sharing of experiences among national machineries in Africa. If similar mechanisms can be set up in all regions, there is potential for linking national machineries all around the world. This could facilitate improved preparation for global meetings from all regions and greater regular exchange and sharing of knowledge, experiences and good practices. It would enable national machineries to get the maximum out of global processes and ensure that these processes remain relevant to the priorities and needs at national level.

I understand that in the Pacific you communicate through, PACWIN, which is managed by SPC. I hope that this list could be used more in the future to disseminate

information on the Commission on the Status of Women - both before and after the annual sessions.

It might also be useful to consider the possibility of setting up a portal on the national machineries in the Pacific and linking to the portal in Africa, and to others that will hopefully be developed in other regions.

We in the Division for the Advancement of Women would be delighted to have improved opportunities to communicate directly with you here in the Pacific on the Commission on the Status of Women and other issues and events.

CONCLUSION

I recognize that travel to New York for the Commission on the Status of Women is long and expensive. However I would encourage more active participation from national machineries in the Pacific. If it is only possible to attend one meeting, apart from the sub-regional meetings such as this one and the annual regional meeting at ESCAP, I would suggest that it should be the Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

I would encourage both multilateral and bilateral donors to consider providing funding for participation of national machineries in this important meeting, since the practical benefits of such participation are many.

For those who cannot attend the Commission on the Status of Women, we need to find new ways, using new information and communication technologies, to ensure that they are aware of the themes being considered, are as involved in preparations as possible, have access to the outcomes of the discussions and become actively engaged in ensuring full implementation of recommendations on the ground.

Thank you.