



**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM STATEMENT
FOR
THE SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON
THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

(SHORT VERSION)

DELIVERED BY

**THE HONORABLE LORD VAEA, MINISTER FOR
INTERNAL AFFAIRS FOR THE KINGDOM OF TONGA**

ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

11-22 MARCH 2024

***Priority theme: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality
and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty
and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender
perspective.***

Hon. Chair, Excellencies,

2. Malo e lelei and warm Pacific greetings on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, a regional bloc of 18 member countries working towards a region of peace, harmony, security, gender equality, social inclusion, and prosperity, so our people can lead free, healthy, safe, and productive lives.

3. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent – our blueprint to advance Pacific regionalism for the next three decades, places people at its centre, particularly women and girls in all their diversity.

4. Despite the great challenges faced by the Pacific including the stronger and more frequent impacts of climate change and disasters; high rates of non-communicable diseases; gender-based violence; and plastics and pollution in our ocean; we know we are a region of great strengths - through our faith, diverse cultures, resilience, ocean and land resources, and connection as people of the Blue Pacific. We know collectively we can achieve our 2050 vision.

Progress in the Region

5. In 2012 our Pacific Leaders endorsed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, a commitment to progressing gender equality. Last year (2023), our Leaders revitalized this Declaration to reaffirm their 2012 commitment.

6. Aligned to the 2050 Strategy, the revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration focuses on a broad range of priorities to create economic opportunities for women in all their diversities, and promoting the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises to address poverty, and recognizing; those working in the informal and unpaid care economy, women and girls with disabilities, and women in rural, remote, and maritime areas.

7. The revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration urges for new transformative partnerships and investments for the wellbeing of all Pacific peoples, particularly for women and girls in all their diversity.

8. The revitalized Declaration, along with other key regional policy frameworks, provide an integrated approach to key issues that impact economic resilience such as climate change and disasters.

Key Challenges and Responses

9. While the region has made some progress, there is more that needs to be done.

10. Climate change, disasters and their impacts continue to be our biggest threat which causes poverty and leads to increased gender inequality. Climate change and disasters have affected crop production, contributing to food insecurity. In addition, shifting rainfall patterns and salinity intrusions significantly impact access to clean and safe water for consumption.

11. Gender-based violence continues to be an endemic problem in our region and contributes to women's increased economic hardship and limited access to income and timely and essential services including access to justice. This is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, cybercrime, illicit drug trade.

12. In some of our countries, women-headed households make less money and are more likely to experience financial hardship and live in poverty. Many women in the Pacific work in the informal economy, including the tourism and the cultural industries sector, with limited social protection such as childcare, pension schemes and insurance. Many women often lack opportunities to access training, skills, and collateral and start up finance.

Way Forward

13. Honorable Chair, we must all work together for our women and girls in all their diversity, and call for support to:

- a. Target efforts that encourage the full, effective and meaningful participation of women and girls, in addressing the impacts of the climate change crisis, and climate poverty, including women's initiatives in the green and blue economy.
- b. Recognize the link between poverty and gender-based violence and the protection of women's human rights. We affirm that the economic empowerment of women can be a catalyst for women's health, wellbeing and safety.
- c. Acknowledge that women and girls' economic empowerment includes innovative financing mechanisms such as our very own

Pacific Resilience Facility, and gender-responsive social protection schemes, including those working in the informal economy.

14. We call on all partners including the UN system to support the Pacific to implement the 2050 Strategy and revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, to ensure that any investments and partnerships will support national and regional initiatives and guarantee lifelong learning, health, security, and wellbeing of all Pacific peoples in all their diversity.

Excellencies, I thank you.