

## **Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Submission to the Pacific Plan Review 2013**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. This submission has been prepared by the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships (PWPP) Reference Group. The PWPP was mandated by the current Pacific women Members of Parliament, who participated in the PWPP Forum held in Sydney, Australia in February 2013, to write this submission on their behalf.
2. The PWPP supports the Pacific Plan Review and views it as a timely opportunity for Pacific leaders to:
  - recommit to the four key areas of the Pacific Plan endorsed in Madang in 2005;
  - consider the current status of women in the Pacific region and identify where women do not share equal opportunities or standing;
  - refine the key areas of the Pacific Plan to include actions and indicators to actively address these inequalities.

### **Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Pacific Region**

3. There is substantial evidence confirming that globally, women are under-represented in decision-making and political leadership mechanisms at all levels. Data indicates that as at January 2013, women only represented over a fifth of the world's parliamentarians.
4. The Pacific region has the world's lowest proportion of women parliamentarians. In the parliaments of Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members, women represent a mere 4.5% of all members.<sup>1</sup> Women are completely absent from the parliaments of Nauru, the Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu and the lower house of Palau.
5. There has been little positive change in women's political representation in the Pacific region in the past decade. Increasing women's participation in democratic processes, at both central and local government levels, is crucial to their democratic development and sustainability. Systemic, institutional and cultural barriers inhibiting participation must be removed if gender equality in the Pacific region is to be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> See UNDP Pacific Centre, <http://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>.

## **PACIFIC PLAN KEY AREA - GOOD GOVERNANCE**

6. The PWPP would like the Review Team to refine the success indicators for monitoring progress on good governance. We believe the indicators are too broad and require further specificity so that an accurate picture of gender equality can be gathered across the Pacific region. Although the PWPP's focus is on parliament, we believe the Pacific Plan's indicators and measures should be extended to include good governance at the judicial and local government levels, within government agencies and the public/civil service, as well as within political parties.

### **PWPP Priorities**

7. At the February 2013 meeting the PWPP reached consensus on priorities to address the paucity of women in Pacific parliaments, and the capacity of those parliaments to address gender equality issues. These priorities and indicators should be recognised and supported by the Pacific Plan.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Proportional Representation within Parliament***

8. Governments throughout the Pacific region have already signed or made commitments to targets to improve political participation within their own countries.<sup>3</sup> The PWPP therefore recommends that the Review Team include the Beijing +5 participation targets of 50% representation for women for Australia and New Zealand, and 30% representation for women (eventually rising to 50%) for other PIF member parliaments in the Pacific Plan.

### ***Networking Opportunities for Women Parliamentarians***

9. With regards to networking opportunities for women parliamentarians, the Pacific Plan should support:
  - an annual forum, to sustain networks and momentum on gender equality issues for women, possibly hosted by a different Pacific nation each time;
  - mentoring opportunities between women parliamentarians, both within the Pacific and with Australian and New Zealand parliamentarians, and ensuring gender balance in all twinning programmes and delegations between Pacific nations, Australia and New Zealand;
  - the development of an on-going relationship between the PWPP and the PIF.

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<sup>2</sup> The complete list is outlined in the Outcomes Statement, available at [www.pacificparliaments.net/pwpp.html](http://www.pacificparliaments.net/pwpp.html).

<sup>3</sup> See for example the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Beijing +5 Women's Political Participation Targets; United Nations Millennium Development Goal 3 to promote gender equality and empower women and the Gender Equality Declaration signed by the 16 members of the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2012.

## **Capacity Development**

10. The Pacific Plan should also include:
  - regional and in-country gender-sensitive training workshops for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to improve the effectiveness of work within cultural contexts and parliamentary accountability;
  - the identification, training and support of male champions of gender equality within Pacific parliaments.

## **Gender Equality Resources**

11. The PWPP recognises there are limitations on existing resources to support gender equality in Pacific parliaments. Priority should be given to the development of information technology infrastructures that facilitate participation, while still maintaining traditional mechanisms to keep all parliamentarians connected and informed.
12. Existing and alternate media sources should promote the work (and issues) regarding women in parliaments in the Pacific region. The Review Team should also note the findings of Professor Pippa Norris's report, *Gender Equality in Elected Office in Asia Pacific*,<sup>4</sup> produced for the UNDP in September 2012. In particular, the Review Team should note the six step action plan promoting gender equality in elected office which covers constitutional rights; electoral systems; legal quotas; party rules and recruitment procedures; capacity development; and parliamentary reforms.

## **Gender Equality Mechanisms**

13. The Pacific Plan should include:
  - the creation of a Cross-Party Parliamentary body (including both male and female representation) responsible for ensuring gender equality issues are considered in parliamentary mechanisms such as the development and implementation of legislation and policies;
  - a report, through the PIF or other meeting mechanism, on progress by each country on outcomes they signed up to in the 2012 *PIF Declaration on Gender Equality*. The forum or meeting, where the report is presented, should also include in its agenda, time to debate and review the findings from the report.

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<sup>4</sup> This report can be downloaded from <http://www.undp.mn/publications/DG-2012-GenderEquality.pdf>.

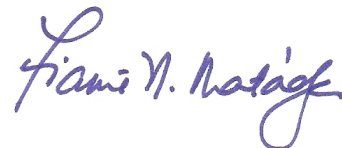
## CONCLUSION

14. Promoting gender equality is a human rights issue and it is also a means to other critical ends. It is about improving both the lives and status of women and as new research indicates, meaningful economic and social change can only occur when women and girls have the opportunity to participate equally in their societies. It is critical that women in the Pacific region are provided equal opportunities to actively participate in their communities and societies. This includes at critical leadership and decision-making levels, such as Parliament.
15. Pacific nations currently have the lowest rates of women's representation of any region in the world. This must change. Moreover, this change can only occur within the Pacific region if it is embedded within the context of the *PIF Declaration on Gender Equality* – a collective and dedicated commitment to equality between men and women within the context of parliamentary participation.



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*on behalf of*  
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**Reference Group**  
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