Excellencies and Colleagues.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Member States represented at the UN, namely, Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own nation, the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The General Assembly has focused its efforts in paying more than mere “lip service” to the issue, but is actively addressing and encouraging specific measures which turn words into action.

In reviewing both our regional progress, as well as the relevant General Assembly resolutions for this agenda item, improved data capacity, including through cooperation with the UN system, will address a key barrier to regional progress.

Chair.

Pacific Forum Leaders at their meeting last month in Majuro, Republic of Marshall Islands recognised recent progress made in implementing the 2012 Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration.

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have taken the advancement of women seriously, in calling for accelerated efforts to fulfil the 2012 Declaration priorities, with specific focus on: addressing gender inequalities; supporting women with disabilities; adopting temporary special measures to improve women’s access to employment and economic opportunities; and improving sexual reproductive health services. Leaders agreed to continue to support the integration of gender into sustainable development policies.

Overall progress in implementing the 2012 Declaration has been mixed. Despite the achievements, the Pacific region struggles to meet commitments to gender equality and improving women’s human rights. Our regional MDGs Tracking Report, with a key focus on
gender, noted that strong efforts are underway to achieve gender parity in education. However, only a few of us are on track to achieve the broader goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women. Higher education for younger women is not translating to better employment outcomes. The participation of women representation in parliament in the Pacific is the lowest of any region in the world.

Although many Forum Island countries have ratified and reported on the CEDAW, only limited progress has been made in nationalising the Convention. While some have undertaken measures – revising employment laws and sexual office laws, reviewing national gender equality policies – and considering constitutional provisions – much more work needs to be done to turn our political and treaty commitments into results.

Regarding Women and Decision-Making, some of our members, namely Samoa, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu have introduced temporary special quotas for women in government leadership positions, and several others have legislation on similar quotas pending. Parliament training and mock women parliament support is ongoing.

Regarding Economic Empowerment, nearly all Forum Island countries have either mixed results or are off track on MDG 3, though several are developing Women’s Economic Empowerment Plans.

The 2012 Declaration commits to specific action, including progressive implementation of a package of essential services for women and girls who are survivors of violence, and enacting legislation regarding sexual and gender based violence to protect women from violence and impose appropriate penalties for perpetrators of violence.

Strong efforts have been made in many Forum members to advance specific domestic violence legislation and related protective measures. However, efforts to change laws to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence need to be prioritized. Furthermore, enacting gender equality laws is not enough; long term results can only be achieved if laws are fully resourced and implemented.

These efforts have also included civil society and stakeholder participation, including through the Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women. Further, the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme, a joint initiative by the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police and the New Zealand Government has worked to provide assistance to police on the regional and national level.

Regarding health and education, around half of island nations are on track to improve maternal health, but others are exhibiting mixed progress. With the exception of a few, all Forum Island countries are on track to achieve gender parity in education.

Gender progress has also been achieved through the Pacific Regional Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, recognising the importance of UN Security Council Resolutions.
1325 and 1820 in addressing the key role women play across the entire scope of peace and security activity, with efforts underway to oversee the implementation of the Regional Action Plan. Climate change is the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific; strong action is needed to ensure that Pacific-driven climate strategies appropriately address gender issues.

Further, recent Pacific Islands Forum Economic Ministers Meetings have recognised the vital role of women in economic development of member countries. The meeting adopted an Action Plan with specific priorities for women’s economic empowerment.

Chair

Looking forward, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community’s 5th Women’s Ministerial Meeting to be held later this month will have a key focus on the intersections between the MDGs, the Beijing Review, the UN’s Post 2015 Development Agenda and next year’s global SIDS Meeting, as well as implementation of prior agreements.

This Meeting will also address a key challenge - the scarcity of timely, reliable and relevant sex disaggregated data and gender analysis at country level.

Chair

Our important regional progress and commitment to do more faces a very serious barrier – if we do not have adequate and accurate data, decision-makers and implementors alike will continue to struggle. Here, the UN system may further support our national and regional efforts.

UN agencies in the Pacific, particularly UN Women, UNDP, and UNFPA already play important roles with specific regional and national initiatives which address the advancement of women, including efforts to address violence against women, as well as fostering country and regional ownership.

Last year, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and the UN Secretary-General issued a Joint Statement which commits to enhanced cooperation in our region through a broad range of efforts, including measures to address the economic and political empowerment of women and address gender-based violence.

This UN-PIF statement also emphasized key “cross cutting issues” including the importance of adequate data collection and the importance of an enhanced and effective UN presence.

All of us – our leaders, our communities, and the UN Secretary-General – have provided strong political will and commitment to address the advancement of women. Perhaps what is needed most is the continued effort to make some very practical connections.