Statement by H.E. Mr. Mahe Tupouniua, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Tonga to the United Nations on Agenda Item 28: Advancement of Women, at the Third Committee of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, 14 October, 2013

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Kingdom of Tonga expresses its gratitude to you for convening this meeting to discuss crucial issues under agenda item 28 of the Third Committee and to also acknowledge with appreciation the relevant reports submitted by the Secretary-General.

Tonga associates itself with the statements delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

May I also take this opportunity to share Tonga’s recent developments and challenges that are important to us as a Pacific Small Island Developing State.

Mr. Chairman,

The Tonga Delegation firstly welcomes the important work of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in emphasizing women’s human rights and empowerment for a better future. Moreover, Tonga supports the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and General Equality 2005-2015, which serves as a key benchmark for Pacific Island Countries to promote gender equality for sustainable development in the Pacific Islands Region.

Like its neighbouring countries, Tonga is committed to overcoming the challenge of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Although the social status of women in Tonga is the highest in the Pacific Region, there is ample scope to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision making. Their informal contribution to the economy and re-assurance of protection and security at home and work places need to be recognized.

The 2012 Tongan National Policy on gender and development essentially focuses on the following five outcomes:

i). Enabling familial and social environment for gender equality; ii). Equitable access to economic assets and employment; iii). Increased women’s leadership and equitable political representation; iv). Create equal conditions to respond to natural disasters and environmental and climate change; and v). Enabling environment for mainstreaming gender across government policies, programmes, and services.
A national consultation on peace and unity was conducted in Tonga as a joint initiative between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on strengthening capacities for peace and development (CPAD). Its local committee is chaired by the Speaker of Parliament with members comprising the Honourable Minister of Internal Affairs, Government Officials, representatives of the Civil Society Forum, and Parliament Officials. Their role is to foster civil society through Government collaboration on peace-building and unity endeavours and assist national stakeholders with identifying and discussing challenges to peace and unity, including resilience processes and resources to strengthen priority areas.

Access to adequate health care services has resulted in low maternal death rates for Tongan women. Throughout National Development Plans and National Strategic Plans, the government of Tonga has prioritized maternal and child health programs over the years with the Reproductive Health Division receiving the largest share of 62%. To eradicate hunger and poverty reduction, the Tongan Government is working on improving transportation, social, and basic services. With the declining trend in remittances, the Tongan Government is intervening to provide a social welfare scheme and a social protection scheme. In addition, a national campaign has been ongoing to reduce non-communicable diseases for the whole population, including women, and as a priority of focus of the MDGs Acceleration Plan for Tonga.

Mr. Chairman,

The Family Protection Bill was recently passed in the Tongan Parliament on 24 September, 2013 to provide protection to especially women and children. A parliamentary group is also expected to conduct community consultations on this Bill as well as the CEDAW. Gender Statistics will also be integrated into the current review of the Statistics National Development as a joint effort between the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Government of Tonga.

Gender inequality is recognized as a risk to the governance system of disaster risk management, climate change, and environmental management. In that regard, the UNDP’s 4-year Pacific Risk Resilience Programme in Tonga will work with Government counterparts to extend its development efforts to the community level. Furthermore, the UNDP 4-year Tonga Governance Strengthening Project will attempt to promote women participation in district, Parliament, and high decision-making levels through the consolidated efforts of an integrated Civic Education Strategy between the Tongan Parliament, the Tonga Electoral Commission, and the Civil Society Forum of the Kingdom of Tonga. The Gender analysis and mainstreaming arm of the Women Affairs Division will be supported with a new system and tools of development, gender statistics, and a monitoring and evaluation tool to strengthen its role. The UNDP will also be supporting the planning and budgeting process for its implementation and the UN Women’s Ending Violence Against Women Programme (EVAW) is funding local NGOs Development Programmes to address this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

Tonga supports the call for gender equality to be included in the broader Post-2015 development agenda and looks forward to further consultation on this issue at the 2014 SIDS Conference to be held in Samoa.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.