



TUVALU STATEMENT

to the

Commission on the Status of Women – 59th Session

Presented by:

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates, TALOFA:

At the outset, Tuvalu would like to align itself with the statements made by Palau on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and Tonga on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Development States (PSIDS).

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to congratulate you on assuming the chairmanship of the 59th session. I would also like to congratulate the Bureau for the excellent work of convening this 59th session, and we do pledge our full support.

Gender equality is a fundamental principle in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 is the blueprint for the empowerment, value and sacredness of women's lives. As we heard on the first day, women's rights are human rights. We cannot commit to certain aspects of human rights whilst compromising women's rights; they are an indivisible whole.

There have been many progresses on advancing gender equality worldwide. As we transition from the Millennium Development Goals toward the Sustainable Development Agenda, a variety of social, environmental and political challenges have necessitated many of us to readjust and realign to the specificities and realities of changing environments and opportunities. We thank the Secretary-General for the succinct report, *Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcomes of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly*. A stand-alone gender-Sustainable Development Goal that exemplifies the importance of gender dimensions across the post-2015 development framework will be supported by Tuvalu.

Mr. Chairman,

It gives me great pleasure to report on women in development in Tuvalu—their aspirations, their achievements, their challenges and lessons.

For Tuvalu, climate change continues to be a grave threat to the survival of our people, with further complications to our efforts in achieving sustainable development. On the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva earlier this month, our Prime Minister, Hon. Enele Sopoaga, once again confirmed that the impact of climate change in Tuvalu is very serious. Different aspects of climate change, including sea level rise, internal flooding, intrusion of sea water into underground fresh water reserves and ocean acidification, have seriously

compromised the rights of our people, especially the most vulnerable, women and children, the disabled and the old.

Mr. Chairman,

Just yesterday, the Government of Tuvalu declared a State of Emergency for one week. For the past three days, Tuvalu has been severely hit by storm and huge surges caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam. Events of serious damages, seawater flooding and inundation have been reported from all the eight outer islands of Tuvalu following strong winds, but especially caused by huge waves and storm surges, some 4 to 5 meters higher than the islands. Although no human injuries and casualties have been reported, yet, some whole island settlements have been totally flooded which required emergency evacuation and relocation. We can also see clearly the grim reality of the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls. Women and girls often require more time and resources to recoup and mend from crises, but this is often not acknowledged. Concrete actions are needed to protect the rights of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Mr. Chairman,

Supporting and empowering women is a matter of policy and constitutional integrity for Tuvalu. It is also a cultural identity—without women’s contributions, community coherence would be dysfunctional. Women’s active participation in goal setting, budgeting, and resourcing, as well as the pursuit of those goals at their own pace and capacity in the household, community and public arena, have meant that development gains have always accrued to women’s efforts and output.

Mr. Chairman,

We do believe that Tuvalu’s MDG targets on women are likely to be achieved as we have continued to integrate much of the rights of women into our legal framework. Tuvalu has been working on addressing a culture of silence and impunity surrounding violence against women (from both sexes). The Government of Tuvalu has zero tolerance toward violence against women as demonstrated in its legislation, such as the Family Domestic Violence Bill and the Police Powers Act of 2009. The National Gender Policy of 2014 further sanctions the due processes once reports have been lodged with the police.

More women are now in full time employment in both government and private sector in Tuvalu. In the public service, the employment ratio of female: male is approaching equality, especially in the middle to senior management positions. 20% of Permanent Secretaries are females. There is currently one female member in the fifteen-member House of Parliament, and three are competing for this month’s general election. Women have also proven themselves in small to medium scale entrepreneurial activities, despite traditional stereotypes.

Economically, however, the challenge for Tuvalu is to find productive opportunities (employment and decent work) for those below the poverty line. Given Tuvalu's acute structural constraints on domestic and overseas job creation and its susceptibility to external shocks, as experienced in the recent global economic crisis, this has proved to be a tough job. More than 50% of the seafarers' market has been lost due to the financial crisis. But fortunately, the temporary employment schemes of New Zealand and Australia, which are more gender diverse, have been very helpful.

In education and capacity building, Tuvalu has been focused on improving the quality of education, completion rates, and vocational training for women. Almost all Tuvaluan girls and boys are enrolled in primary schools, and there are more girls than boys enrolled in secondary and tertiary education. Training in the Tuvalu Maritime Institute, once a domain of young men, has now been opened up for potential young women.

Mr. Chairman,

Tuvalu is deeply appreciative of the partnership of its donors, civil society, and regional and international partners, in empowering women. Targeted future partnership includes enhancing Tuvaluan women's understanding of their legal rights pertaining to violence against women, discrimination at work places, and furthermore, translating the often "English-scribed" gender empowerment and advocacy pamphlets into local dialects.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.