

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict-Affected Situations, October 18th, 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Kabua, Permanent Mission of Marshall Islands to the United Nations, spoke on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum States

This is the first time I have spoken on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum States in this Chamber. On their behalf, I want to first offer our sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on assuming the presidency, as well as to thank you and the members around the table for convening and holding this important meeting.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum States represented at the United Nations: Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my small atoll nation, the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Pacific Islands Forum members stand on the leading edge of evolving security issues — situations in which women play a critical role to play in working towards stability. At the same time, despite some very positive overall gains, progress in the region towards gender equality is slow, with only mixed results since the Forum issued the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration last year.

Despite some positive steps, including the number of women serving in important and very senior Government positions, women's parliamentary representation in the Pacific is the lowest of any region in the world. The region has recently witnessed and continues to be affected by armed conflict, civil unrest and local-level conflicts over resources, as well as increasingly violent crimes and political crises. Women and children constitute a disproportionate number of those affected. Women face a variety of security challenges in the Pacific, including water and food security, loss of land, violence, and economic empowerment. A range of potential drivers is apparent, ranging from economic inequalities, land, governance, alienated youth, urban migration and inter-group tensions, with results that inevitably disrupt the lives of women and their families and increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

More recently, the Forum leaders have recognized climate change as the greatest threat to the livelihood and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. Climate impacts can lead to forced displacement, with clear implications for women, and raise security questions that have no simple solutions or easy precedents. In times of natural disaster, which are increasing in the Pacific region, women and girls are more prone to sexual violence in the context of displacement due to the loss of their homes or traditional protection mechanisms through their family or clan structures.

In many violent situations in the Pacific region, women have demonstrated their capacity to contribute to solutions as mediators, providers of safe havens, or in working to improve local communities. Women and young women have also played an important part in conflict prevention, management and recovery in the region. Women have generally been first to actively work across ethnic divides, despite considerable risks.

The Pacific region is working to achieve better participation in formal conflict prevention and management and post-conflict recovery efforts, as well as oversight and accountability mechanisms for the security sector. The region recognizes the value of having women at the negotiating table in leadership roles and the need to provide sufficient recognition and resources to ensure that they are able to do their work.

In December 2010, as part of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), a Pacific regional working group on women, peace and security was established. In June 2011, the Forum Regional Security Committee gave the group the policy task of developing a regional action plan, which has been formally recognized by our leaders. Earlier this year, a regional reference group was established to oversee the regional action plan's implementation.

The action plan provides a detailed regional framework to enhance women's and young women's leadership in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, mainstream gender and ensure the protection of women's and girls' human rights in humanitarian crises and in transitioning from conflict, disaster or post-conflict situations — all with a mechanism to accelerate the implementation of existing international, regional and national commitments on women, peace and security.

The action plan assists in addressing gaps and advancing solutions. A range of further means may be considered, including the United Nations regional gender architecture, United Nations in-country assistance — which is highly lacking — and resource allocation decisions. The Biketawa Declaration sets out the framework for regional conflict prevention and management of political crises. Our regional action plan is a key platform to better integrate gender into that security framework and thus represents a specific response to relevant Security Council resolutions.

In conclusion, the countries of the Pacific Islands Forum are committed to work with like-minded countries to ensure that our necessary local efforts and our contributions to the United Nations will always encourage and support resolution 1325 (2000).