



APIA STATEMENT

National Human Rights Institutions on the Rights of Women and Girls in the Pacific Region

The *APF Pacific Roundtable for National Human Rights Institutions on the Rights of Women and Girls* (the Roundtable) took place in Apia, Samoa from 4 to 5 September 2018. It was organized by the Asia Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions (APF) and co-hosted by the APF and the Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI Samoa.

The Roundtable brought together national human rights institutions (NHRIs) government representatives, UN agencies, and regional and civil society experts in the region working on gender equality and the rights of women and girls.

Contributions to the Roundtable were made by NHRIs from Australia, New Zealand, Samoa and Tuvalu¹; government and civil society representatives from countries establishing NHRIs – Cook Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Nauru; regional organizations – OHCHR (Pacific Regional Office), Pacific Community Regional Rights Resource Team, UN Women (Fiji Multi-Country Office and Samoa Field Office); and government and civil society organizations in Samoa – Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development; Samoa Victim Support Group and Samoa Lifeline.

The Roundtable adopted the *Apia Statement for National Human Rights Institutions on the human rights of Women and Girls in the Pacific Region*.

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- 1 The *APF Pacific Roundtable for National Human Rights Institutions on the Rights of Women and Girls* affirmed that women and girls' rights are human rights which are guaranteed in all human rights treaties. These human rights include political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights.
- 2 The Roundtable highlighted the indivisibility and interrelatedness of human rights recognizing the compounding factors that can impact on human rights violations experienced by diverse groups of women and girls.
- 3 The human rights of women and girls are enshrined in international treaties, declarations and in political commitments at international, regional³ and national levels. The Roundtable stressed that it is essential for Governments to fully implement and report against these commitments and obligations. The Roundtable also stressed the obligations on Governments to progress their commitment to Agenda 2020: Sustainable Development Goals (including SDG 5: Gender Equality).

1 The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission was unable to attend the Roundtable.

2 This statement acknowledges the Amman Declaration and Programme of Action (November 2012) of the Global Association of National Human Rights Institutions which sets out steps that NHRIs around the world agreed to undertake to promote and protect the rights of women and girls. Available at www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/amman-declaration/.

3 Note key regional gender equality commitments – Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality 2018 – 30; Pacific Leaders' Declaration on Gender Equality 2012; Samoa Pathway 2014 (paras 76 & 77).

- 4 The Roundtable recognized the ongoing efforts of national and regional actors towards the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls. It also acknowledged that significant human rights issues remain for women and girls in the region.
- 5 Priority areas identified by the Roundtable included:
 - political participation and participation in decision-making, including women in leadership
 - constitutional and legislative/policy frameworks promoting and protecting gender equality and the rights of women and girls, and implementation by Government
 - access to appropriate and quality services such as health, social welfare, justice, finance, education
 - relationship between human rights principles, beliefs and practices and cultural values and norms
 - most vulnerable groups of women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination through the intersection of gender and other bases of discrimination
 - economic empowerment of women and girls including, but not limited to, gender discrimination in employment
 - gender-based violence
 - availability of gender statistics and disaggregated data, and its use to monitor and evaluate progress toward gender equality
 - climate change including food and water security, land degradation, housing, natural disasters, internal/external migration policies.
- 6 The Roundtable emphasized the important role of national human rights institutions to progress these issues. It acknowledged the efforts of those countries who are in the process of establishing NHRIs and encouraged them to continue to progress the establishment of these institutions without delay.
- 7 The Roundtable recognized the overarching mandate of the Paris Principles that relate to the status and functioning of national human rights institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights. It also acknowledged that within this overarching mandate, countries develop those human rights mechanisms most appropriate for their contexts.
- 8 The Roundtable recognized that Paris Principles compliant NHRIs make a significant contribution to the promotion and protection of women and girls in the Pacific Region. In order to target and strengthen these efforts, they proposed that NHRIs focus on the following activities:
 - research/inquire into country-specific issues for women and girls, gather disaggregated data
 - develop robust monitoring and evaluation tools and processes
 - report on country commitments to women and girls, including by tabling status reports in parliament
 - use their mandate and influence as an independent body to work with public leaders and to hold government to account
 - work to align cultural principles, beliefs and practices with human rights principles, approaches and practices
 - build internal and external capacity on the human rights of women and girls
 - receive and address complaints of human rights abuses experienced by women and girls
 - facilitate partnerships and collaborations with civil society, governments and regional and international organizations
 - ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout the organization.

The Roundtable recommends that:

Pacific Region National Human Rights Institutions

- i) facilitate and implement processes and mechanisms for appropriate, sustainable and targeted partnerships and collaborations with public (government) and private (business) sectors and those organizations and institutions that make up the civil society sector.
- ii) continue to collaborate with other NHRIs, countries and key regional and international actors to strengthen existing NHRIs and support the establishment of new national human rights institutions.
- iii) ensure inclusion in all activities of the voices and perspectives of diverse women and girls and how they reflect other hierarchies of disadvantage.
- iv) commit to planning and implementing an internal gender mainstreaming strategy.

Pacific Region Governments

- v) maintain and accelerate the momentum toward establishing NHRIs in Nauru, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Cook Islands, including ensuring that women are involved both in the establishment of NHRIs, as well as in the composition of NHRIs including in the consideration and appointment of leadership positions.
- vi) ensure that financial and other commitments are adequate, sustained and protected in order that existing and establishing NHRIs can carry out their mandate as required of them by the Paris Principles and in-country contexts.

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- vii) continues to work with, and encourage existing NHRIs in the region, to prioritize the human rights of women and girls' in their work and in the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming, in their internal planning, policies and practices.
- viii) continues to cooperate with, and provide support to, those countries in the region establishing NHRIs to encourage them to do so in compliance with the Paris Principles, and to provide advice to them on the importance of gender equality in the mandate and composition of NHRIs, including in the consideration and appointment of women to leadership positions within these institutions.

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