



FIJI

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Madame Chair

The Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands welcomes the draft declaration issued at this forty-ninth session and re-affirms her commitment to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (BPFA) and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. In doing so, we wish to note the important linkages to our commitment to the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the attainment of the MDGs and the 2002 Johannesburg Plan on Sustainable Development.

Fiji welcomes this global appraisal of our collective efforts and congratulates you Madame Chair and the Division for the Advancement of Women for your preparations and Stirling efforts to bring this session to a successful conclusion. We cannot underestimate the usefulness of these forums. For they act as monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of our work. In this instance, the progress of the implementation of the BPFA. Events such as these forums provide opportunities where we learn from each other's best practices and benchmark against quality yardsticks, where we take a break to reflect on our achievements and challenges. These forums are an important source of inspiration, motivation and I believe that most of us will return home rejuvenated with renewed sense of energy and urgency to further implement strategies and practices for continued success.

Participation in preparatory meetings to global review

As a lead up to this Beijing + 10 review, Fiji, in June 2004 hosted and chaired the seventh Commonwealth Ministers' of Women Affairs Meeting at which we launched the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015. Fiji again hosted and chaired the Second Pacific Minister's Meeting in August 2004 which also launched the Revised Pacific Platform for Action 2005-2015 to advance our commitment to gender equality and equity. Fiji also actively participated at the ESCAP Regional High Level Meeting and its outcome document the Bangkok Communiqué which was presented at the high level plenary at this session.

Policy and Strategy Development

Through our National Strategic Development Plan 2003 — 2005 titled "Rebuilding Confidence for Stability and Growth for a Peaceful, Prosperous Fiji" Government is committed through its Gender and Development goal to creating an enabling environment for women to participate fully in the socio-economic development of the country, to mainstream women's concerns in government 's policies and programmes to augment gender equality.

Madame Chair

There have been improvements and progress in legislation. These include:

- The 1997 Fiji Islands constitution which provides in its human rights provisions for non discrimination on the grounds of gender.
- In 1997, the Fiji Law Reform Commission commissioned the review of laws in relation to the family including marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, affiliation and a revamped institutional mechanism through which family grievances are dealt with by a specialised court known as the family Court. The result is the Family Law Act which is now in force.
- Fiji has established a human rights commission under the Human Rights Act 1999.
- Fiji has received positive feedback on its first report on CEDAW and implementation is continuing.
- Submissions have been made in the Domestic Violence Reference, the Mental Health Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Penal Code.
- The enactment of the social justice Act in 2001 created special recognition for the disadvantaged in society including increasing the participation of women in socio-economic development.
- A review of the National Security and defence has been undertaken and the establishment of a national security framework in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. We call for the protection of women and children in conflict situations and from the use of rape and sexual abuse as a strategy of war, protection of women's human rights defenders, and cease the recruitment of child soldiers.

A new Industrial Relations Bill to be tabled in Parliament provides for equal opportunities in employment by prohibiting discrimination based on personal characteristics, ensuring equal rates of pay for work of equal value and specifies the exceptions to discrimination.

- Increased collaboration with NGOs in the provision of legal literacy training for women has been an important aspect of assisting women understanding their human rights and their protection in law.

Gender Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming gender perspectives and concerns in the planning process has been partially achieved through the engendering of policy documents and project appraisals. Gender audits have been conducted in two line ministries to date: the Ministry of Agriculture (Food Security Policy) and the Ministry of Health (HIV/AIDS Policy).

The mechanisms set up to implement the WPA included a National Women's Advisory Council, an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women, Gender Focal Points in government ministries, and five taskforces consisting of very senior in government officials, with representatives from the private sector and civil society.

Micro-enterprise development

Promoting the establishment of Small and Micro-Enterprises is recognised by our government as a key strategy to providing employment opportunities and livelihood. Providing disadvantaged women with access to savings and credit mechanisms has met with some success, with most recipients of micro-finance services being women.

Some of the initiatives include:

- The Women's Social and Economic Development programme (WOSED), which has assisted 587 women and their households.
- Establishment of a Micro-Finance Unit in 1999
- Establishment of the National Centre for Small and Micro-Enterprise Development (NCSMED) in 2003.
- There has been considerable growth in the number of women who have accessed micro-credit assistance.
- Progress is being made in establishing a Women's Development Fund.

Shared decision making

There has been a reasonable increase in the number of women represented on Government Boards and committees. Currently, women comprise 22.8% of these bodies. At present, there are only six women in the 71 member Parliament. Of the five women in government, two are cabinet ministers and three are Assistant Ministers. The other female is from the opposition.

At a recent consultation held in November 2004 by UNIFEM, National Council of Women and NGOs a review of the Women in Politics project review resulted in another project the WISDM project — Women in Shared Decision Making. One of the specific tasks now being carried out to accelerate the achievement of gender parity and equal representation in decision making at all levels, is research into a specific Law on gender equality.

In 1999, the public service commission put in place an Equal Employment Opportunities policy. Women make up 46% of those employed in the public service. Of the 46% there are 14% at the senior executive level, with 13% at the Deputy Secretary level and only 8% (3 out of 23) are Chief executives Officers at the helm of the public service.

Violence Against Women and Children

Violence against women is still largely viewed as a domestic issue to be resolved by the family. However, due to the increased efforts by NGOs in awareness raising and training of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, this view is rapidly changing.

In 1995 the Fiji Police adopted a "No Drop Policy" on all reported cases of domestic violence. The result of this policy meant that all reported cases of violence against women are investigated and charges laid. In May of the same year, a sexual offences unit was established in the Police Department handling specific cases of sexual assaults and abuse and also making referrals for counselling. Recently, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has been targeting the disciplined forces including the Fiji Police and the Fiji Military Forces through its male advocacy programme.

Government will continue to work in this area and we urge the United Nations to extend its work in this area to more countries in the pacific region.

The largest share of our national budget goes to education, with education being free up to the 6th form. The second largest goes to health and women now enjoy better health facilities and quicker and easier access to health centres in rural and remote areas.

Even though Fiji has made substantial progress in our efforts to implement the BPFAs, there are challenges and gaps which we will be focusing on to intensify our actions. The remaining areas of critical concern in the BPFAs also need to be addressed within the context of emerging issues. These include:

1. Review of Mechanisms for gender mainstreaming

The mechanisms for mainstreaming gender concerns and the role of the Ministry for Women need to be reviewed for more effectiveness within the context of the civil service reforms and the strengthened role of NGOs and Civil Society organisations.

2. Strengthen collaborative partnership with NGOs

Much of the advances for women in Fiji over the past decade can be largely accredited to the efforts of NGOs, and community based organisations and we recognise the need not only to strengthen collaboration but also to formalise partnership structures.

3. Research and collection of sex desegregated data

Data collection and analysis continue to challenge us. Sex desegregated data is not available to a large degree and therefore impacts on resource allocation for social and economic development planning which emphasises the importance of gender balanced policies, plans and programmes.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

This is a major challenge. Underdeveloped reporting, and the lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms continue to be an obstacle along with the lack of accountability which is a constraint when requesting funding or assistance for similar projects.

Emerging Issues

Gender and poverty reduction

The goal of reducing poverty by 5% annually is a priority for our government. The national poverty study of 1996 identified 85% of those in poverty being female headed households. The

economic empowerment of women is a key strategy in the integrated, multi-sectoral approach being developed to tackle poverty reduction linking macro policies and micro programmes.

HIV/AIDS

Fiji now has a cumulative total number of HIV positive at 171 as at December 2004, seventy of them are women and 134 between the ages of 20-39 years. This is a rise from 49 reported cases in 1999, of which 14 were females – an increase of nearly 300% in only 5 years. With women making up almost 50% of those infected compared to 20% previously. The particular vulnerability of girls and women to the virus and their inherent subservient role in society is a concern to be addressed.

Feminization of migration

Unemployment is a challenge which is compounded by rapid urbanisation and globalization. There is insufficient employment for the young school leavers and university graduates. Professional and skilled workers are lured by better opportunities in developed countries. The recruitment of men for peacekeeping and security assignments elsewhere has a social impact on women and families.

Peace and security

Fiji has undergone political upheaval and the present government places great importance to peace and security. As an initiative of the Prime Minister, Cabinet declared 2004 the national year of prayer and 2005 the year of forgiveness in government's quest to achieve peace and security for its people.

Conclusion

Madame Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, in conclusion, Fiji is here today in this General Assembly of the United Nations to recommit to our global partnership for the advancement and empowerment of women and the attainment of gender equality. The greater challenge is to turn these high level talks into action that is not about statistics but about people.

I thank you.