

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



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Distinguished Chair,

Traditionally, our Marshallese society has been matrilineal, with general custody over land, and related responsibilities, passing through the mother; while it was both men and women who tended the land, it was the women who nurtured the clan and thus tended the spirit of its legacy.

In our contemporary – and rapidly globalizing – world, our clan needs often outstrip what the land and its shores can provide. New opportunities have emerged – and with them new challenges for Marshallese women, who face hurdles in addressing a high incidence of domestic violence, a low-number of women-owned business and a need to boost women in decision-making posts. The resiliency of our legacy is threatened.

The Marshall Islands, since ratifying CEDAW in 2006, needs to fully implement relevant provisions including through the adoption of a National Women's Policy. Even more important than policies is the need to upscale national action against domestic violence, to build matrilineal system capacities, to boost education opportunities for women, and to further open the door to economic participation. And perhaps one of the most daunting questions remains climate change – without concerted global, national and local action to address adaptation including its gender dimension – our low-lying nation faces unprecedented risks to our development – and our very security.

Our government is challenged by limited capacity and resources. However, we must note critical progress which has emerged, and needs to be strengthened – this includes the 2009 establishment of the national Resource Development Committee, tasked with CEDAW and CRC issues, recognition of gender issues within national planning – and in particular energy and land development, as well as some progress on MDG 3 in relation to gender advances in education and employment. Our ongoing initiatives and aspirations include addressing:

- Violence against Women – through boosting law enforcement and legal protection, networking and community awareness, and women/children protective services
- Economic and Political Participation – through leadership training, boosting targeted jobs and educational opportunities
- Gender & Climate Change – through mainstreaming awareness and consultation into national and local adaptation and energy strategies and sustainable land development

The Marshall Islands – working through both the government and WUTMI, a national NGO of which I am a member – is taking steps with our partners to upscale progress. A spread of projects are showing promising results – working with assistance from Iceland to strengthen national legislation – and working in an innovative coalition with government assisted by the UN Trust Fund – to address domestic violence.

Yet critical gaps remain, and we have the solutions to address them. Our projects show progress, and we urge partners to consider how partnership to advance the rights of women in the Marshall Islands and the Pacific region is also a critical investment in our collective global future.