



REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

“Elimination and Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls”

57th Commission on the Status of Women.

4 - 15 March, New York, 2013

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of my government, I wish to express my nation's support and commitment to the Pacific Statement as it shares our common concerns and issues on this year's theme.

Violence against women and girls is a growing social and economic issue in Vanuatu. The national Prevalence Study of 2010 concluded that at least 60 percent of the women interviewed had experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners and 30 percent had experienced childhood sexual abuse while under the age of 15 years.

For the first time since 2010, Gender Equality is being featured in the highest national plan, the Priority Action Agenda 2012 – 2016. This Agenda aims at accelerating development and coordinating efforts in two specific areas namely:

- A quota of 30 per cent women in Parliament, and
- Mainstreaming of gender perspective into all Government policy processes.

These priorities are critical in achieving gender equality and addressing violence against women and girls who face and are subjected to systemic discrimination in our society.

Elimination of Gender based violence is a main pillar of the mandate of the national women's machinery. Vanuatu is currently working on finalizing its National Gender and Women's Empowerment Policy 2013 - 2023. This policy aims to provide direction and guidance on strategic interventions in addressing gender inequalities. It also acts as a coordinating document for government ministries to integrate and mainstream gender perspective in all policies.

Madam Chair,

The current Law and Justice Sector strategy includes Access to Justice to provide an enabling environment for justice agencies such as the Judiciary, Police and both formal and informal community services. It will develop transparent and effective response systems for gender based violence issues.

In 2009, Vanuatu Parliament enacted its Domestic Violence legislation, the Vanuatu Family Protection Act. This Act criminalises all forms of gender based violence, provides access to protection orders against such violence. It specifically states that customary reconciliation is not a defence. A national Task Force has been established whose members are selected from within the government, non-government organizations and community based institutions. Its role is to oversee and advise the government on the overall implementation of the Act.

The government is currently working with selected communities to pilot the implementation of the Act especially in the current absence of formal legal and support services. It is determined to address the high levels of sexual violence and lack of preventative measures and services to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The Criminal Code has been on the reform agenda for a long while, Family Law is outdated, and while the establishment of the Law Reform Commission is promising, immediate action is needed for comprehensive legislation to eliminate and prevent violence against women.

Madam Chair,

The Vanuatu Women's Centre, established in 1992; focuses on eliminating violence against women and children, provides assistance to survivors of domestic violence and advocates against violence towards women. It has 41 Committees and a national anti-violence Network which has seen an increase in the involvement and engagement of men and boys as partners in addressing violence against women and girls in their respective islands.

The Male Advocacy Program supported by the Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women is another important strategy involving men: chiefs, male leaders and youth in addressing all issues of violence against women.

Madam chair,

Vanuatu supports the call for the recognition of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. This ensures that women and girls have access to health services, maternal health, essential information and counselling.

In concluding I wish to reiterate the appreciation and the value that Pacific countries accord to the work of the Commission in advancing gender equality globally. We wish to register our interest in contributing more to the work of the Commission through participation at its Bureau. As a nation and a part of the Pacific region, we hereby express interest to support Pacific Islands membership to the Commission on the Status of Women in its upcoming elections – 2013 - 2014.

The government of Vanuatu acknowledges the financial and technical support from the Australian Government in its commitment in assisting the region. Vanuatu enjoys a good working relationship with its national, regional and international partners in providing services and support to victims of gender based violence.

Thank you.