



**Statement by the Minister for Social Welfare, Women & Poverty Alleviation of the
Government of the Republic of Fiji
54th SESSION of the COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
NEW YORK, 1-12 MARCH, 2010.**

Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Warm greetings from the Peoples and the Government of the Republic of the Fiji. And I thank you for this opportunity to present a review on Fiji's progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Mr. Chairman,

The importance of the Beijing Platform for Action to Fiji cannot be overemphasized. Not only has it provided the blue-print for the empowerment of women in my country, it has by and large guided our work in ensuring that our domestic laws and policies are of international standards and more importantly meets our social needs and challenges.

As we embark on a new decade, policies on women are now incorporated into the second Women's Plan of Action (2010-2019) which will further progress the efforts by the current Government in achieving the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. This new Plan of Action is further strengthened by its incorporation into Fiji's national policy framework under the *Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2009-2014*. In its endeavour for an inclusive process, the Government has established a Women's Federation which is tasked to coordinate the implementation of the Plan of Action by all stakeholders, including women's NGOs and faith based organisations and provide an advisory role to the Minister concerned.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite our challenges, the Government has made significant developments. Fiji is currently taking constructive steps to introduce a new Constitution in 2012, which will for the first time in our national history provide an electoral system of one person-one vote without regard to race or creed. Our country will go to General Elections in 2014 under this new Constitution. In the meantime, existing legislation remains in force and new legal measures are made by way of promulgation of decrees.

Over the past 12 months, we have adopted new laws targeted at the further protection of our women and enhancing their status in our society. Some of these laws include the:

- Domestic violence law, which criminalises acts of violence committed in a family situation, including those which occur in a *de facto* relationship;
- Crimes law, which now incorporates the requirements of the Rome Statute, for instance by making it unlawful for any person to benefit from the sexual exploitation of women. More importantly, it also prescribes harsher penalties for crimes committed against women and children; and
- Employment law, which ensures gender equality in employment, including women receiving full pay during maternity leave for their first 3 children, adherence to the Sexual Harassment Policy in the workplace, and provisions for Domestic Workers to receive their full pay for maternity leave and sick leave.

Mr. Chairman,

The global economic crisis has highlighted for the Fiji Government the critical role played by our informal sector, which is dominated by women. In the last few months, the Government has mandated our Central Bank to hold national consultations with stakeholders of its informal sector with the objective of receiving constructive outcomes. A special highlight of current achievements is that, of the 24,000 beneficiaries of the Small and Micro Finance Scheme, 90% are women.

Fiji's target of having 30% representation of women in all boards and committees is slowly progressing. At community level, since 2008, more than 300 women, mostly in rural areas, became members of Hospital Boards introducing them to sitting at decision making bodies. Women are also represented in all spheres of the civil service. In accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Fiji continues to value the significant contribution and the role of our women serving in UN Peace Keeping missions in Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan and the Multinational Forces Observers (MFO) in Sinai. Additionally, there are plans to address women representation in Parliament under Fiji's new Constitution to be developed in preparation for the General Elections in 2014.

In advancing the issues on women, the Government realises that formal education is fundamental to its understanding. This is the reason the Government places great emphasis in the education of our children. Currently there is 99% school enrolment in Fiji. To sustain this high level, Government has put in place certain measures including:

- free tuition up to the twelfth year of education, paying for daily transport to school for children whose parents earn below \$15,000.
- Working progressively to provide free text books to cover all primary school children by the year 2012.
- To ensure quality education, teachers are required to register every two years after satisfying a criterion that encourages continuing education.
- Furthermore, Fiji now has three Universities to provide students with more opportunities for tertiary education, where females outnumber males.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I wish to reiterate that these positive developments have been achieved because of the contributions of the UN Family, the civil society, funding agencies and development partners. I take this opportunity to thank them for their continuous support for our women in Fiji.

Vinaka vakalevu.

Thank you.

