



**On the Occasion of the
Fifty Seventh Session
Commission on the Status of Women**

**Statement by
Lord Vaea
Minister for Internal Affairs
Government of the Kingdom of Tonga**

New York
5 March 2013

Check Against Delivery

Madam Chair

His Majesty's Government is committed to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. It has in place legislative and policy frameworks to address violence against women and all members of the family.

The Family Protection Bill was drafted last year and has been posted for public consultations. It will be submitted to the next Parliamentary session in June. The Prime Minister launched the first National Domestic Violence Report in 2012. The Government recognizes that ending violence against women and girls needs to be addressed at the highest level. This involves upholding core Tongan cultural values of reciprocity, respect and love.

As part of the first democratically elected Government in Tonga, a new Ministry of Internal Affairs was created in July 2012 to consolidate community development through local government, outer island affairs, employment, sports, culture, youth, women's affairs and a Church Leaders Desk.

Madam Chair

We recognize that violence against women and girls must be addressed at all levels of the community as not doing so will be a risk to human security. We are all accountable every time a woman or girl is a target of violence. We must ensure national ownership by raising awareness, thus, equal protection under the law and equitable access to justice.

The Government's recent efforts to counter prevalence involves:

- establishing a National Taskforce on Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2011,
- reviewing its 2001 National Policy on Gender and Development in 2012,
- participating in the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme in 2012 with the Australian Federal Police and the New Zealand Police, and
- committing to expand and ensure access by survivors of violence to critical health services, information and care.

Tonga's Strategic Development Framework has 9 priority areas to provide for its economic policies and to guide her activities for the period 2011 – 2014 that includes:

- empowering women and eradicating hardship,
- implementing a national policy on gender and development, and
- improving implementation of outer island and rural development programmes.

The Government's recent activities relevant to women's rights include:

- completing a second Universal Periodic Review before the Human Rights Council in January 2013 which involved recommendations on CEDAW,
- "Real Stories: Real Women" *Breaking the Silence that Causes Violence*, which is the 2013 theme for International Women's Day in Tonga, and
- efforts to engage men and boys, including at school and in the community, to commit to relationships free of violence.

Madam Chair

Our Government is proactive in improving women's access to quality education, health-care services, employment, security and social-economic status. Areas in need of assistance include:

- mainstreaming gender and capacity building to increase women's participation in the economy and in decision making,
- conducting research and collection of gender disaggregated data, and
- conducting research to better understand the obstacles that disabled women have in accessing health-care and their augmented vulnerability to violence.

In closing we thank all donor and development partners (both regional and international), relevant CSOs and NGOs, who have assisted us with our efforts to advance gender issues and look forward to their continuing commitment and support in the future.

Thank you for your attention.

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