

PACIFIC REGIONAL FORUM ON WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

4TH APRIL, 2011

WAIPUNA HOTEL, AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY FILIPE JITOKO, SOCIAL POLICY ADVISOR

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

DEPUTY MAYOR HULSE

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND OBSERVERS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

1. KIA ORANA, AND ALLOW ME TO JOIN DEPUTY MAYOR HULSE IN EXTENDING TO YOU ALL, A VERY WARM WELCOME TO AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, AND SPECIFICALLY TO THE 2ND PACIFIC REGIONAL FORUM ON WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES.
2. ON THE SAME TOKEN, PLEASE ALLOW ME, AT THE OUTSET, ON BEHALF OF ALL OF YOU, TO EXTEND OUR SINCERE GRATITUDE TO DEPUTY MAYOR HULSE, FOR GRACING US WITH HER PRESENCE HERE THIS MORNING, TO ADDRESS THIS IMPORTANT GATHERING OF DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS.
3. WE MEET HERE TODAY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FOR A COMMON PURPOSE, WHICH IS TO VIGOROUSLY PROMOTE AND TO WORK FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGION.

4. I AM INDEED MOST PRIVILEGED AND HONORED TO BE PART OF THIS OCCASION, AND I THANK THE PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM FOR THE INVITATION AND OPPORTUNITY TO DELIVER THIS STATEMENT, WHICH I HOPE WILL CONTRIBUTE TO SETTING THE TONE FOR THIS MEETING.
5. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MOST OF YOU WILL KNOW THAT THE PACIFIC ISLAND FORUM LEADERS ENDORSED THE PACIFIC PLAN IN 2005.
6. THE PACIFIC PLAN IS THE PREMIER REGIONAL PLAN THAT GUIDES THE REGIONAL PRIORITIES FOR FORUM ISLAND COUNTRIES.
7. FURHTER, THE PLAN HIGHLIGHTS GENDER EQUALITY AS AN OVER-ARCHING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE.
8. THE 8TH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE OF THE PACIFIC PLAN UNDERPINS THE PRINCIPLES AND PILLARS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE, SECURITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.
9. IT IS HIGHLY ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THAT NUMEROUS PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES HAVE RATIFIED AND ARE PARTY TO A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL GENDER COMMITMENTS SUCH AS CEDAW, THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) AND THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 (UNSCR1325) ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY.
10. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS ALSO COMMITMENT TO THE COMMONWEALTH PLATFORM FOR ACTION, AND THE REVISED PACIFIC PLATFORM FOR ACTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (REVISED PPA).

11. YOU WILL ALSO BE AWARE THAT MEMBER COUNTRIES ARE ALSO PARTY TO DISABILITY CONVENTIONS SUCH AS THE BIWAKO MILLENNIUM FRAMEWORK AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, BETTER KNOWN AS CRPD, BOTH OF WHICH INCLUDE GENDER AS CROSS CUTTING ISSUES.
12. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES ARE INTRINSIC TO MEETING OUR COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND DISABILITY FRAMEWORKS.
13. IN THIS REGARDS, I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND AND PAY SPECIAL RECOGNITION TO MEMBER COUNTRIES WHO HAVE NOT ONLY RATIFIED OR SIGNED THE CRPD BUT HAVE GONE A STEP FURTHER IN IMPLEMENTING IT NATIONALLY THROUGH ENABLING LEGISLATION OR POLICIES THAT NOT ONLY PROMOTES THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BUT ALSO PROTECTS THEIR CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS.
14. I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO COMMEND THE FORUM MEMBER COUNTRIES IN RATIFYING THE CRPD AND ENSURING THAT WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITY ARE NOT FURTHER MARGINALISED NATIONALLY.
15. I ALSO WISH TO WARMLY CONGRATULATE THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS FOR PASSING THE DISABILITY ACT 2008, WHICH IS PAVING THE WAY FOR A MORE HUMANE AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND MORE PARTICULARLY WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES.
16. I UNDERSTAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS HAS ALSO COMPLETED THE FIRST CRPD REPORT FROM THE PACIFIC, AND INDEED, I LOOK FORWARD TO THE DISCUSSIONS ON HOW THE ACT WAS IMPLEMENTED AND THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED.
17. OBVIOUSLY LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MUCH WORK HAS PROGRESSED AT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS TO MEET THESE COMMITMENTS, AND FOR THIS WE ARE INDEED GRATEFUL TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND THE

ORGANIZATIONS WHO HAVE PASSIONATELY WORKED TO PROGRESS THIS AGENDA, AND WHO HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY TO BREAK SOME CHALLENGING BARRIERS.

18. IN LINE WITH GENDER COMMITMENTS, FORUM LEADERS' DIRECTED THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT IN 2008 TO WORK WITH MEMBER COUNTRIES TO EXPLORE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES.

19. FURTHER IN 2010, PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS NOTED THAT SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE WAS A RISK TO HUMAN SECURITY AND A POTENTIAL DESTABILIZING FACTOR FOR COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETIES ALIKE.

20. AS SUCH, THE LEADERS MANDATED THE SECRETARIAT AND FORUM MEMBERS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, IN COLLABORATION WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS, TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE [SGVB] AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PACIFIC.

21. TO BE EFFECTIVE, THIS ISSUE OF SGBV, OF COURSE, HAD TO BE ESTABLISHED FIRMLY ON THE POLITICAL AGENDAS OF FORUM MEMBERS.

22. IN RESPONSE TO THIS, THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT HAS SINCE SET UP A REFERENCE GROUP COMPRISING MEMBER COUNTRIES AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS TO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, DISCUSS AND IDENTIFY NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES CONTRIBUTING TO SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE REGION.

23. THE GROUP WAS ALSO TASKED TO IDENTIFY FUTURE CHALLENGES TO THE PACIFIC REGION IN THE AREA OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND TO IDENTIFY PRECAUTIONARY ACTIVITIES THE FORUM SECRETARIAT COULD SUPPORT TO ADDRESS THEM.

24. PARALLEL TO THIS, THE SECRETARIAT ALSO CONVENES REGIONAL CSO DIALOGUE SESSIONS SPECIFICALLY FOR REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM (PDF), TO

DISCUSS KEY PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS ON HUMAN SECURITY AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FORUM REGIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE.

25. THE SECRETARIAT CONTINUES TO WORK WITH DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND MEMBER COUNTRIES TO ADVANCE THE ISSUE OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING AND MOST RECENTLY, RECEIVED FUNDING UNDER THE UN WOMEN CATALYTIC FUND FOR GENDER EQUALITY.
26. THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF THIS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IS TO DEVELOP TWO REGIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR SMALLER STATES OF THE PACIFIC ISLAND FORUM, NAMELY; THE COOK ISLANDS, KIRIBATI, NAURU, NIUE, PALAU, THE REPUBLIC OF MARSHALL ISLANDS AND TUVALU.
27. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FIRST REGIONAL ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES WAS DEVELOPED FIRSTLY BY MEMBER COUNTRIES THROUGH NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS.
28. THIS GENERATED INTO A 5-YEAR SUB-REGIONAL ACTION PLAN WHICH WAS DISCUSSED AND ENDORSED IN NOVEMBER 2010 IN NADI, FIJI.
29. THIS MORNING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I WOULD LIKE TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE DISABLED PEOPLES ORGANIZATIONS AND THE VARIOUS GOVERNMENT MACHINERIES OF WOMEN.
30. THE LINK AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL BETWEEN DPOS AND THE GOVERNMENT MACHINERIES FOR WOMEN ARE HIGHLY IMPORTANT, AND SUBSTANTIALLY RELEVANT, IN STREAMLINING WOMEN'S ISSUES.
31. I SAY THIS BECAUSE THIS COOPERATION WILL ENSURE REPORTING ON GENDER EQUALITY COMMITMENTS, AND AT THAT AT REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS, THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES WILL BE ADDRESSED.
32. SIMPLY PUT, ENSURING THE VOICES OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IS INCLUDED IN REPORTING PROCESSES MEANS INCREASED REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ATTENTION TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR NEEDS AND CONCERNS, AND THEREFORE MORE

INCLUSIVE AND SENSITIVE PROGRAMMES, POLICIES AND LEGISLATIONS WILL BE IMPELEMENTED

33. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR MEMBER COUNTRIES TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES HAVE A PLACE IN UN REPORTS SUCH AS CEDAW, CRC AND OTHER UN TREATIES RATIFIED BY MEMBER COUNTRIES.
34. THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW CAN ALSO PROVIDE FOR INDEPENDENT MONITORING IN RELATION TO THE FULL REALISATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS ENCAPSULATED UNDER THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SPECIFICALLY FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES.
35. THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CAN ALSO BE USED AS A GUIDING TOOL FOR ENHANCING THE STATUS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES.
36. FURTHERMORE, THE COUNCIL CAN ALSO BE UTILISED TO MONITOR PROGRESS IN RELATION TO FORUM COUNTRIES' COMMITMENT TO THE CRPD, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY THE FULL REALISATION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL.
37. THE PACIFIC REGION, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, DOES NOT HAVE TOO MANY FUNCTIONING NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS (NHRIS) THAT COMPLY WITH THE PARIS PRINCIPLES.
38. FIJI RETAINS A NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, WHILE PAPUA NEW GUINEA HAS A NATIONAL OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, AS DOES SAMOA, VANUATU, THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THE COOK ISLANDS.
39. MOST OF US ARE AWARE THAT THE COOK ISLANDS DISABILITY ACT 2008 PROVIDES FOR AN AVENUE WHEREIN A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY CAN FORMALLY LODGE A COMPLAINT IF SHE OR HE HAS BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST.
40. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES WILL VIGOROUSLY WORK TOWARDS PUTTING IN PLACE SIMILAR MECHANISMS THAT WILL ENSURE

THAT THE NEEDS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, MORE EXPECIALLY THE NEEDSD OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES ARE ADEQUATELY ADDRESSED.

41. IN CONCLUSION, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I AM SURE THAT YOU WILL AGREE WITH ME THAT THE PACIFIC REGION STILL HAS LOT TO DO WITH REGARDS TO ENSURING THAT THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE FULLY REALISED.

42. WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES MUST BE GIVEN THE RELEVANT RECOGNITION, NOT ONLY AS INDIVIDUALS BUT AS INDEPENDENT CONTRIBUTORS TO THEIR NATION, TO CIVIL SOCIETIES, TO POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE.

43. DISABLED PEOPLES ORGANISATIONS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THIS REGARD.

44. OUR ROLE AS ADVOCATORS AND KNOWLEDGE BEARERS IS CRUCIAL TO ASSISTING MEMBER GOVERNMENTS MEET OUR COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE REALISATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES.

45. TOGETHER, WE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, MEMBER COUNTRIES AND DISABLED PEOPLES' ORGANISATIONS CAN ENSURE A BRIGHTER TOMORROW WHERE WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES ARE RECOGNISED NOT ONLY AS A SPECIAL GROUP BUT AS ACTIVE CONTRIBUTORS TO OUR SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

46. FINALLY, I WISH YOU WELL IN YOUR DELIBERATIONS TODAY, AND WE SHALL ALL BE LOOKING FORWARD TO THE RESOLUTIONS OF THIS VERY IMPORTANT MEETING.

VINAKA AND THANK YOU VERY MUCH.