



Statement by

Honorable Minister Kouraiti Beniato

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Kiribati

On behalf of the

Pacific Islands Forum Group

55th Commission on the Status of Women

Chairperson

I am honored to address the 23rd session of the Commission on Status of Women on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum group of countries which are members of the United Nations.

2. Congratulations on your election and assumption of Office.

3. I wish to commend the report of the Secretary-General on "Access and participation of women and girls in training, science and technology including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work" and sincerely welcome the inclusion of a discussion to review the Beijing Platform for Action in the agenda. We also commend and support the idea that the outcomes and discussion for this session feed directly in the 2011 Annual Ministerial Review.

Chairperson

The countries and territories of the Pacific are of different stages of achieving our gender commitments and all have inadequate levels of resources to meet them fully in the immediate or long term. Despite this, improving gender equality in the Pacific Islands region is a major concern and we in the Pacific continue to discuss, promote and implement our national, regional and gender commitments.

5. In August last year, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community convened the 1st Pacific Triennial Conference for Women in Noumea, New Caledonia. The focus of this meeting was a detailed review of national and regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and accelerating progress.

¹ The AMR which was mandated at the 2005 World Summit accords the priority to the major UN conferences and summits over the past 15 years, which constitute the United Nations Development Agenda (UNDA). The AMR will focus on a specific aspect of the UNDA in 2011 if it is possible to bring the internationally agreed goals and commitments into greater coherence.

Chairperson

6. Gender Equality in access to education has been achieved in primary and secondary school in most countries of the Pacific. However, some disparities exist. In 2009 women still have higher overall levels of illiteracy than men in a few Pacific countries.²

7. A Pacific review of the education system in 2010 showed that a key priority under gender and education is the transition of women and girls into traditionally male-dominated subjects such as trades and sciences and their participation in all levels of educational decision-making. Women's marginalisation in each of these areas is a result of societal attitudes and practices that classify women into particular domains of activity and specific fields of work. For example, the 2010 study in Kiribati and Samoa has confirmed that women's involvement in science and technology was not equal to men's; women did not have careers as engineers or scientists, and in science-based jobs. Few women were noted as leaders in local new technologies, even as they were overlooked when assessing community needs. Rather than lacking in aptitude some reasons for not taking the science path is a lack of career counselling and the lack of female role models in science-related careers.

8. A major constraint is that available educational data tends almost exclusively to access. More scarce are data on the quality of education, including the extent to which it may be perpetuating gender stereotypes. Definitions of literacy also warrant further research. For example, does literacy mean reading and/or writing or oral in English and/or the vernacular?

² Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) 2010. *Review of the Pacific region's progress in implementing the Pacific Platform for Action in Pacific Island countries and territories*. SPC Office of Communications, Noumea, New Caledonia and U.S. Pacific Education Framework (PEF) 2009-2015.

9. Whilst the Pacific has considerable way to go, it would be remiss of me to not provide some examples of successful policies, projects and programmes carried out by member countries and other stakeholders. From a regional perspective, the Pacific Education Framework (PEF) is a key initiative. The PEF is a framework which is the educational management and teaching framework for the Island Forum countries. The idea of having a regional framework to further the development of Pacific education has been taken up by all 11 Island Forum countries through their education ministries. The approach has attracted support from development partners. The Framework seeks to coordinate regional activities and provide advisory and a relationship role in policy dialogue at the regional level. Whilst it guides, it does not direct the work of Education Ministries at the national level. Considerable work is being done through the Framework and a number of key priorities include development of strategies to increase participation of girls in sport and other key areas and the implementation of cost-effective strategies for service delivery to rural and hard-to-reach communities.

10. In the Pacific we also recognise the important role of teachers and academics in play in advocating for human rights principles. The Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) has been instrumental in carrying out human rights and legal literacy to educate teachers from a number of Pacific nations for this role. The University of the South Pacific (USP) has recently introduced gender studies into its academic curriculum and this course of study is being further explored by a full-time Coordinator of the Gender Studies programme.

11. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Community and Education and Training Centre (CETC) continues to be the only regional institution offering community development training for Pacific Islander. Recently the CETC has been able to broaden and strengthen training programmes offered so that they are better equipped to address the things and understand, analyse and address the gender issues that are critical and emerging issues such as the use of ICT in community development.

12. Gender equality measures are in place in most education ministries, largely (but not only) as a result of donor influence. Gender officers are now included in some curriculum writing teams, for example in Solomon Islands and Samoa.

13. Given these realities, the priority now is for a shift in emphasis on technical and vocational training for women in fields where the greatest opportunities lie, for the integration of women into traditional tertiary educational fields.

14. I am delighted to report that in 2010, Palau, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Australia submitted their respective reports under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and are all scheduled to appear before the Committee this year. Kiribati appeared before the UPR committee in 2010. In the same year, the Governments of Australia presented their sixth and seventh reports, New Zealand their seventh report and Papua New Guinea their fourth report to the United Nations CEDAW Committee. The challenge now is to implement the respective recommendations and more importantly to make available the resources to do this.

Chairperson,

15. No Pacific statement is complete without a plea for the world for their urgent attention and assistance to the Pacific Islands vulnerable to the impacts of the climate change. We recognize the importance of the inclusion of gender in the planning and adaptation activities such as through improved access to resources including scientific research, training, technology and information and empowering women to become agents of change. It is also important to take into account women's specific priorities and needs and to make full use of their expertise, traditional knowledge and practices in the development of new technology and approaches to address climate change.

16. May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the representatives of PICT's governments, civil society

Pacific and the development partners that we work with who are present here at this meeting.

17. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation for the contributions made by New Zealand, Australia, the United Nations, various Australian governmental organisations working in the Pacific in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

18. Chairperson, I thank you once again for the honour to address the Commission on this important issue of "access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology" including for the promotion of women's equal access to employment and decent work and to share their life experience.