



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
8 December 2017

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **A Pacific Feminist Statement by We Rise Coalition & DAWN**

We are feminists from the Pacific. Our strength lies in our diversity. We work towards transformative change by upholding the human rights of women, young women, girls, and gender nonconforming people. Our work and love is focussed toward achieving human rights and gender justice for all women and people on our many islands and atolls, and the whole planet.

We recognise the specific challenge of geographical location in the complexity of the vast Pacific Ocean. This is especially true for Pacific island women in rural and remote areas. We also acknowledge our geopolitical histories and their contemporary manifestations as part of the global economic south. We are in solidarity with south communities in the global north, such as indigenous, ethnic minority, Pacific diaspora and climate frontline communities.

As feminists in the Pacific we stand together and share knowledge, skills and strategy to challenge and transform inequality in the lives of women living in rural and remote areas.

Implementing CEDAW Article 14 and General Recommendation 34 will advance national policy and practice that is inclusive of women and girls in rural and remote communities.

#### **Violence against Women and Girls**

Women and girls of the Pacific experience one of the highest rates of gender based violence in the world. Improvements are required for women living in rural and remote areas to address minimal or absent State services, inadequate access to justice, poor infrastructure, and harmful traditional practices and gender norms. We must end all forms of VAW and girls, including early and forced marriages, intimate partner violence, rape within marriage, torture and extrajudicial killings under the guise of eliminating witchcraft and sorcery, violence during and after conflict and disasters, and violence based sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, sex characteristics, race, ethnicity, cultural background and health status.

#### **Health care and services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights**

There are significant barriers to access to health care services for women and girls from rural and remote Pacific. In the words of a participant at the DIVA for Equality facilitated circle on 'Rural Women, Social, Economic and Ecological Justice' at the 2017 Triennial of Pacific Women, "services have not reached all communities." Those services that have arrived are far apart and cost of transport is high, making it even more difficult for rural women with disabilities and diverse gender identity to access them.

We welcome the commitment of Pacific Governments to achieving and funding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 (PPA). Within rural and remote Pacific communities, targeted investments are needed to address non-communicable disease related illness, disabilities and deaths. Governments must explore and partner to deliver innovative strategies and new technologies to achieve quality, comprehensive, and inclusive evidence-based health systems.

## **Economic Justice**

Pacific women face income gaps, vertical and horizontal segregation of labour force and value chains, discrimination, sexual harassment, and other economic injustices. In rural and remote locations women bear the burden of unsustainable export oriented economic growth, with environmental issues exacerbating persistent poverty and injustice. Globally, nearly 90 percent of global fish stocks are either fully fished or overfished and ocean acidification is increasing. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development forecasts a 17 percent rise in fish production by 2025. This is an unacceptable policy by global North countries with a detrimental impact on women in rural and remote Pacific Small Island Development States (SIDS). Irresponsible distant-water fisheries and over-consumption of fish by developed countries must end. The CSW must address linkages between gender and human rights, macroeconomics, trade and development.

At Triennial, rural women delegates also identified multiple challenges of participating in local formal economies: the lack of facilities for women traders in local markets and experiences of violence at the market and in travel to/from markets; prohibitive cost and lack of public transport; harmful gender norms giving male traders greater power in value chains and access to resources; persistent lack of access to savings and finance. We welcome the PPA commitment to review legislation and policies that limit women's access to finance, assets, land and productive resources.

We call on Pacific governments to affirm that care and social reproduction is intrinsically linked with the productive economy. We also call on Pacific governments to secure food sovereignty and recognise smallholder farmers, particularly women, as key economic actors whose sovereign right to use and own land must be protected through legally binding safeguards, including against land grabbing.

## **Infrastructure Development and Transport Access**

Infrastructure development in the Pacific requires a gender just approach to meet transportation and communication needs of women in rural and remote communities. There is need to ensure reliable, accessible, safe and affordable transport for remote and rural communities, in schedules that suit the paid and unpaid work of women. Particularly for rural women with disabilities, lack of infrastructure and transport brings additional social isolation, exacerbates health and other crises, and greatly diminishes any chance of income generation and independent living.

## **Education, Training and Development**

Supporting the education, training and development of women and girls in rural and remote areas is critical, particularly when their places of learning are vulnerable to repeated and worsening disasters. Women need safety and security in their learning spaces and gender equitable education curricula that challenges harmful norms and includes comprehensive sexuality education.

It is also important for Pacific communities to support mechanisms for second chance and lifelong learning, access to technical and vocational education and training, and support for women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and economics. We welcome the PPA commitment to work for gender parity in informal primary, secondary and tertiary education and training opportunities.

### **Leadership, democracy and peacebuilding**

In rural and remote Pacific communities, women contribute to conflict prevention, building peaceful communities and rebuilding democratic structures through formal and informal leadership. In so doing, they challenge and transform harmful social norms and behaviours that discriminate against women and diminish their leadership. However, work in small, rural and remote communities can make women human rights defenders particularly vulnerable to attack. This, despite regional commitments such as the UNSC Resolution 1325, the Biketawa Agreement and the Pacific Regional Action Plan on WPS.

Stronger efforts are required to guarantee rural women's equal, full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making, including in peace processes. We welcome the PPA commitment to adopt temporary special measures to increase the number of women elected to government, in customary institutions and in senior decision-making positions.

### **Rural Women's Leadership, Participation and Media and ICTs**

We challenge the current security paradigm that invests heavily in militarized peace and security. Particularly in post conflict situations and political transitions, community media creates safe spaces for sharing and dialogue to break cultures of silence and document the lived realities of women in all their diversity. Appropriate and accessible ICTs, including community radio, bridges the information gap and enables women's leadership. Strong ICT policy and regulations and funding are required to develop safe online spaces for diverse rural women to act as producers, broadcasters with editorial control. Feminist community media/radio networks deliver rural women's leadership models that enable and empower women to demand inclusive and just development - including fisheries and aquaculture, agroecology and permaculture food systems, infrastructure development, climate change and disaster risk reduction and response.

### **Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction**

We support the call of the Pacific SIDS to substantially strengthen institutional and human capacities to address the interlinked challenges of gender, climate change, and disaster risk reduction and response. We highlight the necessity of including women-held, feminist, indigenous, local, and diverse knowledge in responses to climate change and disasters.

The creativity, knowledge and expertise of women and local communities must inform climate change and disaster risk management, and ensure localisation and dignity in all humanitarian responses. Governments and development partners must support Pacific-women led innovations such as the "Women's Weather Watch", "Pacific Partnerships on Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Development", and the "Women Defend The Commons" campaign.

### **Sustainable Development**

All of these approaches will be strengthened by implementing the SDGs, and translating gender equality and human rights commitments into legislation, policy and budget allocations. In particular the SDGs highlight the importance of gender-responsive budgeting, which Pacific Women's Ministers reaffirmed at their 2017 Meetings. Funding feminist and women's human rights organisations within this context, particularly in rural and remote communities, is vital.