



Permanent Mission
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty Sixth Session

National Statement

Delivered by

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Check Against Delivery

Madam Chair

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Kingdom of Tonga, delivered by distinguished representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and also statement made by the distinguished representative of Samoa on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum Group. Our Government commends the theme of this session, "the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and climate change".

Rural women in Tonga perform multiple roles as household and subsistence managers, entrepreneurs and active members of churches and community development groups. Their contribution in agriculture is in the form of unpaid work, and mainly to produce food for household consumption. However, it is not captured by official statistics because of its informal nature. In 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forests, and Fisheries created a division called Food, Women, and Youth Community Development to support the development of women in their communities, notably by encouraging agricultural activities such as vegetable gardens.

Madam Chair

Our Government is the first democratically elected Government in Tonga, which came into office in December 2010, and the Prime Minister had the liberty for appointing our members of the Government. We have appointed two Ministers, one of which is the only female Minister and Member of Parliament, the Minister of Education, Women's Affairs and Culture.

Our Government had developed a new medium-term national development plan, the Tongan Strategic Development Framework (TSDF), which focuses on 11 economic priorities, and to be implemented for the period 2011-2014 including:

- building inclusive communities,
- a sound education standard,
- improved health, faith, and the environment,
- environmental sustainability,
- disaster risk management,
- climate change adaptation,

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- better governance for a safer, more stable and democratic society,
- the empowerment of women and eradication of hardships which includes three priority areas; of which one is to build strong inclusive communities, by engaging districts/communities in preparing their priorities and service needs and ensuring harmonized and equitable implementation of strategies of the implementation of the national policy on gender and development, and
- better formulation and implementation of development programmes through local communities

Madam Chair

Our Government sincerely believes this Framework will put Tonga on a firm path to improve its ability to meaningfully achieve the United Nation's MDGs by 2015 and on MDG Goal 1 and Goal 3, Areas of Human Development where continuing hardship facing households and communities in the rural areas and outer islands. Tonga is highly dependent on foreign remittances and its decline predominantly from the US has had far-reaching household incomes significantly thus exacerbating the conditions of rural and outer island households. Our Government plans to introduce a social protection scheme, to mitigate the adverse impacts amongst the more vulnerable and vulnerable members of society.

Our government has made several policy changes and legislative reforms, such as to women's rights,

- in 2010, the Public Service Commission instituted a new policy to extend paid maternity leave from one month to three months for public employees, and to provide for paternity leave,
- in November 2011, Government approved to draft of a Bill on Legislation on Violence Against Women and Children to be tabled in the 2012 Parliamentary Session,
- in December 2011, Government approved to conduct nationwide consultations to reach a consensus as a way forward to consider the ratification of CEDAW,
- in February 2012, the conduct of the first national joint Government - CSO & NGO consultation forum, Tonga's reporting in October 2012 on the Universal Periodic Review, and
- the Tonga National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women will be launched in March 2012.

Madam Chair

The impact of climate change has already negatively impacts women's health, livelihoods and security due to the loss of land and income. Tonga is the first country in the Pacific region to develop her Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management in line with the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for the period 2005-2015 and the Pacific Resilient Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006-2015, where the linkages between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction aim to reduce vulnerability and risk and to enhance resilience to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.

Madam Chair

Our government is proactive in improving women with access to quality education, healthcare services, employment, security and social-economic status. We have identified several areas needing assistance,

- funding assistance and technology transfer to mitigate and to adapt to the impacts of climate change including development projects;
- direct assistance in strengthening of rural infrastructure, health care and education, particularly in rural areas;
- mainstreaming gender and capacity building to increase women's participation in decision-making level; and
- conduct research and data collection of gender disaggregated data, and develop gender indicators for evaluation and monitoring of women's status in all areas, including violence against women

In closing we take this opportunity to thank all of our donor partners who have assisted us with our efforts to advance gender issues and look forward to the continuation of our commitment and support in the future. Tonga continues to be supportive in many UN debates concerning the empowerment of women.

Thank you for your attention