



# Pasifika Peace Talanoa

**Edition 1, 2017**



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# INVEST IN WOMEN AS FIRST RESPONDERS

by Sian Rolls

There is a need to ensure that humanitarian response during disasters support women-led organisations and amplify diverse women's voices, agency and decision making in disaster preparedness and women-led innovation in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and humanitarian response.

That is the message from organisations like femLINKPACIFIC and Vanuatu Young Women for Change who have been tracking Tropical Cyclone (TC) Donna together in the past week.

"Organisations that are led by women, they have to be able to at least get access to some funding to find some kind of communication strategy to be able to communicate with everyone and to let everyone know what's happening during disaster," recommended Anne Pakoa of Vanuatu Young Women for Change this morning.

According to Pakoa, immediate needs for communities that continue to be battered by TC Donna include sanitary kits, which include sanitary pads, clothes, including for children and underwear, and seedlings.

"We continue, as well, to call for the gender gap in participation and protection in preparedness and humanitarian response to be closed," said Bhagwan Rolls. "There is a need to ensure that responses to disasters like TC Donna are done through a women's rights based approach."

"As partners of the Shifting the Power Coalition, we also amplify the ongoing need for policies and humanitarian responses to be institutionalised in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and human rights commitments. Systems and processes must enable women to take up and be included in formal decision making spaces and processes at national

and local levels. One of the ways in which policies can better reflect the voices of women and girls, is to engage women at the community level to support early warning systems and humanitarian preparedness and response as well as resilience and recovery, with a gendered lens and approach."

In an interview earlier Pakoa noted with concern the damage to communications infrastructure.

"Unfortunately, we're not able to (reach) the families out in Torba province," she said. "That's where the cyclone has been circulating for the last six days."

But, from what information they had been able to gather over the weekend, the islanders are mostly without homes.

"Most of the houses are actually on the beach so people have moved out and a lot of them are actually living in the caves," she explained.

These gaps in communications is why Pakoa is calling for more investment in community based organisations and their communications.

"It's okay having messages from Digicel, that's quite effective, but it's useless when you have all the lines cut off from Torba province especially when the cyclone has been sitting circulating there for over a week now," she explained. "In terms of disaster, the lives of the people suffer."

"It's... very important that the government takes into consideration and support any proposals of women's organisations made to donors to fund community based organisations, women's organisations that can be there, can mobilise themselves and can also engage all women across all sectors from grassroots up to professional working women."

This is one of the reasons, according to Bhagwan Rolls, that femLINKpacific is hoping to develop a Public Emergency Broadcast strategy that builds on its Women's Weather Watch model.



For the podcast from this morning and more, go to femLINKpacific's Soundcloud:



For more information, visit femLINKpacific's website for our ongoing Women's Weather Watch documentation and policy recommendations:



## WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AND THE HUMANITARIAN AGENDA



“Protection with dignity is not just ensuring the absence of violence, a negative peace, but having humanitarian actors not be undignified in their work to provide relief,” highlighted Adi Vasulevu of Transcend Oceania from Fiji at today’s ‘Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection’ Interactive Dialogue.

Vasulevu was speaking following presentations from femLINKpacific’s regional ‘Women’s Weather Watch’ network partners from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu – each outlining their approach to the integrated approach to humanitarian response and women, peace and security throughout the disaster continuum.

“Gender equality is now on (Tonga’s) development agenda but there is still a long way to go,” said Vanessa Heleta of the Talitha Project from Tonga, adding that there was a need to support the small but vital group of active civil society which has been a challenge as the women leaders find their age catching up with them. “There’s only a handful of us at the frontline with all the women behind us.”

Which is why the Talitha Project is working to bridge the gap through the empowerment of young women including through the use of technology.

This focus of work resonated with Ann Sharon Pakoa of Vanuatu Young Women For Change who reflected on models of using media as a tool for social change.

“Women’s Weather Watch and (HEROWINS) would be useful in our country,” she explained. “Data is cheaper for young women in Vanuatu... and with the comic book, it will be easy for

those who cannot read to understand.”

The need to communicate using appropriate and accessible technology was underscored by Lanieta Tuimabu of Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation.

“(Advancement in) technology has given us an opportunity,” she said. “But the messages need to be understandable by all... as people have different disabilities.”

“We are told we are vulnerable... but there is (still) a large gap for women with disabilities in decision making. Allies are paving the way... there are policies but they need to be implemented.”

Without inclusion, they cannot be part of a process to design development, to refine the way in which action is taken and recovery happens.

“You need to have the women in the right spaces,” affirmed Agnes Titus of the Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre from Bougainville.

According to Titus, without the women in the spaces, nothing will start, progress or be completed.

The Interactive Dialogue marked the end of a ‘Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection’ Regional Consultation held in mid-April.

femLINKpacific as the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific Secretariat has a policy advocacy statement for and by the regional network as a reflection of the work before and during the 3 day convening.



## PARTICIPATION, PREPAREDNESS AND PROTECTION



“The women... they are the architects of peace,” said Vanessa Heleta of the Taliitha Project in Tonga, underscoring the importance of recognising and engaging women as leaders in humanitarian response. “So, do you want to speak to the ‘head of the house’ or the one who knows what’s going on?”

Heleta is one of 21 Pacific women building on the Women’s Weather Watch campaign in Fiji at the ‘Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection’ Regional Consultation - working through femLINKpacific’s established regional network to ensure commitments in the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015) can be realised, including through supporting and informing women’s leadership roles in preparation and response to the Pacific’s intensifying natural disasters.

“Now, more than ever, there is a need for the state to ensure that women are empowered to equitably and meaningfully participate with men, their needs and interests are prioritised in strategies and responses and the human rights of women and girls are promoted and protected in all development efforts,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific.

The first of three days for the ‘Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and

Protection’ regional project started with engagement of partners from Regional Inter-Governmental Organisation.

“There’s nothing natural about disasters,” explained Mosese Sikivou, Regional Coordinator of the Pacific Resilience Program of the Pacific Islands Forum. “The hazards are natural, the disasters are unnatural... because we are not resilient enough.”

“Disasters are disasters because of vulnerability and that’s why these groups you represent are important.”

Through unpacking the definitions and causes of vulnerabilities, those in the room stressed the link to the poor representation and participation of women at all levels of decision making across the Pacific.

“There are all these policies in place... they don’t relate (well) to the women human rights defenders in the communities,” explained Agnes Titus of the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Bougainville. “We are not preparing in the way we need to be preparing.”

“When it comes to natural disasters... it is good to take the background of the Bougainville conflict to understand where we’ve come from and by that is conflicts or disasters - we’ve found that they affect men and women very differently. The Bougainville conflict, the men were literally paralysed and take a long time to get moving whereas we’ve found that women are very resilient.”

Without the meaningful participation of women in all diversities, response and recovery from natural disasters are uneven and slow. At the same time, there is a critical need to bridge the information gap that isolates women.

“We also need to see media and communications as a critical part of the humanitarian infrastructure,” outlined Bhagwan Rolls. “We are looking at the appropriateness and accessibilities of the media and communication ICTs.”

“The public media and communications sector (has) to be accountable in responding to the needs of persons with disabilities from pricing to technology convergence as well as the role of public service broadcasting.”

“When we mean information for us, it’s in different formats whether in terms of communications for deaf women, sign language interpreters and text messages that (women living with disabilities) can read,” continued Lanieta Tuimabu of the Pacific Disability Forum. “Information that is accessible - whether it’s on large print or braille or even audio - would (ensure that) the women (are) well informed of the disasters that are coming.”



# REFLECTING AS PACIFIC PEACEWOMEN - BHAGWAN ROLLS WITH SISTER LORRAINE GARASU

by Alisia Evans

“One of the things that really worries me all the time... is the complex issues around peace building,” shared Sister Lorraine Garasu from Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.



femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, caught up with Garasu during the inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) that was held in Suva from the 28th to the 30th of November.

“What really drove the women... what drove us was we just wanted an end to the war and I think the way we did it was we did it our own way, you know the grassroot(s) way,” explained Garasu as she reflected on the pivotal work she and other peacewomen did.

Peacewomen like Helen Hakena, Agnes Titus and Josephine Sirivi, during and despite Bougainville’s civil war from 1988 to 1998.

Garasu continues to build on the legacy of Pacific Peacewomen more than 20 years on - amplifying principles of non-violence, human security and peacebuilding in the adoption of the first Pacific Feminist Charter which emerged from the PFF.

For Garasu, stepping into spaces created for women living in armed-conflict, as she did for the one of the first times in 1994, was an opportunity to learn and share women-led peacebuilding practice from peacewomen from Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines.

“We learned and then we mobilised women a bit more effectively and at the level where we could talk to government,” she said. “We could talk to the factions and then we could educate women around... gender-based violence in times of armed conflict (and) how to end that and how to end violence.”

Six years later, at a meeting of United Nations Security Council members in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women Peace and Security was adopted.

It was landmark in that it recognized the critical work of women in conflict situations and placed women at the centre of the peace and security agenda.

Much of the early groundwork carried out by peacewomen like Garasu can be credited to paving the way to UNSCR 1325.

Unfortunately, Garasu shared that the reality in Bougainville is that despite their role in bringing peace to the region, women are still being negotiated out of the formal peace processes when prompted by Bhagwan Rolls to describe exactly how women are being recognized and supported in Bougainville today.

“I think for people like myself who have been there throughout the process, with Agnes and Helen, I think we at our level also need to contribute at another level towards that (peace building process)... because (of)... the complex issues around peace building,” she explained.

Therefore, the need to continue to engage with communities and identify their peace and security issues has never diminished.

The Planim Save, Kamap Strongpela – Plant the Knowledge, Grow Strong – project of which Garasu partners with UN Women aims to integrate peace-building learning with gender-based violence learning, trauma healing and conflict transformation within communities. Piloted in the southern part of Bougainville in Buin and Siwai communities the results speak for themselves.

“The communities – the people – are actually telling us you know this is what should have happened immediately after the crisis,” said Garasu. “Healing justice, healing what has been destroyed during the crisis.”

Part of that healing, agreed Garasu and Bhagwan Rolls, is also about addressing the militarisation of politics.

“When people discuss that (impact of the crisis on the political system)... then they say so how can we actually build a nation if even the political system is shaky and the people who are representing us in Parliament are actually people who supported the conflict, who fought (in) the conflict?” Garasu continued.

Bougainville is now readying itself towards a referendum in 2019.

What is needed, as Garasu so succinctly puts it, is another level of organizing, mobilizing and educating women and the wider communities on what a referendum actually means for the country’s political future.

However the biggest barrier that is yet to be overcome is the feeling of fear.

“I think that’s what needs to happen and it needs to happen in a space where people are not frightened,” stated Garasu. “For example the people in the communities will tell you how can we vote for a referendum when the guns are still there?”

So how do you prepare the communities including the women to understand that they can have a voice in what the political future of their country should look like was the question Bhagwan Rolls put to Garasu.

“What we are doing with women human right’s defenders and what BWF (Bougainville Women’s Federation) is doing with women across Bougainville those are some of the important things that needs to continue to happen because it continues to raise awareness,” she concluded. “It helps women to become conscious of what’s happening and what’s going to happen and to keep women alert so that they also feel that they have rights and that they can speak up for their rights.”

For more information:





## PEACE IS EDUCATION, UNITY, LOVE AND RESPECT

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

“Peace is education, peace is a way forward and peace is being peaceful during hard times and to stay strong for others,” said Anne Pakoa, reporting on recent a Vanuatu CSO Peace Talanoa was facilitated by Vanuatu Young Women For Change and the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition.



The activities are part of a series of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific network events convened with support from the PIFS-NSA programme supported by the EU, the German Women’s World Day of Prayer and World Association of Christian Communication (WACC).

Focusing on the promotion and localising of gender inclusive conflict prevention and human security, it included interactive sessions on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325,

defining peace and security in Vanuatu’s context, peace network building and linking local and national efforts with regional and global movements to influence peace and security policies.

Participants, including women, girls, men and members of the LGBT community, also shared their definitions of peace and visions for a better, more peaceful Vanuatu:

Peace comes to give us priority to reach our destination.

Peace is unity, peace is my security, peace gives me strength and peace is not to compete with others but to applaud the work of others, peace is sharing with others.

Peace is my mother, peace is loving when there is hate and peace is God’s heart.

Peace is loving everyone, peace is being friendly and socializing with others, peace is my freedom and happiness, peace is doing good to others what you want them to do to you and peace is respecting one another.

Peace is respecting others values, peace is approaching negative things with positive attitude and actions - it is worthless if I am smiling but I don’t have peace - peace is sharing my peace with others who need it and peace is responsibility.

Peace is when you think positive and give the best to those who are in need of it, peace is love, peace is the main foundation of life of a human being, peace is to live in harmony, peace rolls out our responsibility and peace is a human right.

To support the recent demonstration against brutal killings, the group felt that the government of Vanuatu must increase sentencing of those who are caught in the act to life time imprisonment.

As the GPPAC Pacific focal points in Vanuatu, Vanuatu Young Women For Change and the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, according to Pakoa, will continue to partner with other CSOs, like WACC Vanuatu, Vanuatu Women’s Centre and National Council of Chiefs, to ensure that the cries of those whose family members have been taken by brutal killings and rape must be respected and valued by way of increasing the current imprisonment act to full life imprisonment.



# “WOMEN NEED TO TELL THEIR STORIES”

by Alisia Evans

When it comes to defining peace and security it is clear it is more than just the absence of war.

“I think that is something that brings conflicts in the family when there’s no food,” explained Fane Boseiwaqa, femLINK-pacific Tavua and Rakiraki convenor/correspondent. “So, if that can be prevented then the women and men in the communi-



Fane Boseiwaqa

ty can get peace and that is conflict prevention for me.”

“It’s not just conflict in war but also conflict in community, in schools, in church, in parliament because there’s conflict anywhere - everywhere within the families, the work place,” continued Vanessa Heleta of the Talitha Project based in Tonga. “It’s very important that we put in place mechanisms or policies to prevent any kind of conflict - whether it is physical conflict or armed conflict or like a cyber conflict which we see happening right now.”



Vanessa Heleta

“Drunkenness in the neighbourhood every weekend is not peace,” added Ethel Suri of the Pacific Council of Churches. “It is a sign of conflict within the person themselves... personal conflicts - it is what comes out to bigger conflicts.”

“When people are having conflicts within themselves, not at peace with themselves, it comes out... and it moves to national issue and they take it into a national conflict.”



Ethel Suri

This has been a strong and consistent message from a Pacific media and policy network dedicated to localising and progressing the implementation of Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 since 2007.

On the 31st October, 2000,

the United Nations Security Council passed an historic resolution that, for the first time, put women at the centre of the peace and security agenda. UNSCR 1325 recognised the critical role that women played in building peace and preventing conflict.

“We came together as women committed to addressing the root causes of the conflicts and violence we had all experienced in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Fiji,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINK-pacific Executive Producer-Director and the chair of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and the co-chair of the Global Fund for Women.

The network provided input into the 2015 Global Study on UNSCR 1325, bringing the experiences of linking the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda to humanitarian crises such as natural disasters such as with the ‘Women’s Weather Watch’ campaign’s use of media and ICTs as well as amplifying the call

for a shift from reaction to prevention.

Published on the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the resolution, the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 tracked its progress since 2000. Lead author, Radhika Coomaraswamy, listed a series of successes and gaps which included:

- A comprehensive international set of standards of sexual violence in conflict and crimes against women,
- The appointment of a Special Representative of the Security Council on Sexual Violence in Conflict,
- And monitoring and reporting mechanisms at local levels to deal with prosecution of sexual violence,
- And the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women passed a recommendation to guide states on issues related to women, peace and security and the criteria for accountability.

The Pacific region has also seen similar achievements and obstacles served by our regional women’s media and policy network on women, peace and security and the GPPAC Pacific Network.

However in the 16 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the world has changed dramatically; new obstacles to gender equality, peace and security have arisen and old issues come to the fore. Climate change has become an increasingly urgent problem, exacerbating conflicts and raising tensions.

Since 2000, members of our GPPAC Pacific network have experienced a range of natural disasters from severe droughts in Papua New Guinea to intense tropical cyclones in Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji, to earthquakes and flooding affecting the Solomon Islands as well as the wider South Pacific region.

The estimated average annual direct loss caused by natural disasters in the region amounts to USD\$284 million.

As outlined in 2016 at GPPAC Pacific’s Regional CSO Forum by Lisa Horiwapu of Vois Blong Mere Solomons, in the Solomon Islands, women in villages are at the forefront of climate change. She added that, at the same time, securing peace isn’t about the absence of arms but issues like food security and the multiple impacts that rising sea levels are having on rural women’s capacity to provide healthy, balanced meals for their families.

For 16 years, femLINK-pacific has been amplifying the role of women in peace building and conflict prevention from the local to the global level. As advocates of UNSCR 1325, we know that through women’s eyes there is a broader notion of security - one that is defined in human, rather than military, terms.

This is one of the very reasons that we linked humanitarian crises situations to the priority areas of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (RAP) (2012 - 2015).

Still, despite the pre-existing commitments to women’s participation in human security agendas in the Pacific, there have not been any resources to support women’s role in enhancing prevention strategies or advancing a human security agenda.

In fact, neither has there been any resources to ensure development processes and priorities are defined from the community level up, particularly in terms of preventing conflict over resources.

“There is a clear need to reprioritize that the local must come first and we must do proper mappings of what is needed for women in their particular region or community with greater specificity and depth,” emphasised Bhagwan Rolls.

It is simply not enough to just have commitments.

Evidence from recent natural disasters in the Pacific is testament to this - the need to support women’s leadership at every level of decision making is as critical as ever.

“Women need to tell their stories,” said Horiwapu. “They need to come out and let the government know this is what is happening in our community so (these) are the solutions of what is happening in the communities.”

Women’s leadership needs to be recognized and included in preparedness, decision making in planning and implementation of recovery strategies.



## MAKING THE PACIFIC COUNT - STILL A GAP AT GLOBAL LEVEL

by Sian Rolls

“The one size fits all approach is definitely not the way to go even here in the Pacific,” stressed HE Reteta Rimon, Kiribati High Commissioner during the Pacific launch of the Human Development Report in Suva on Thursday the 30th of March.

Rimon was underscoring the regional challenge of data collection – a challenge that led to exclusion of some Pacific Island countries in the 2016 report.

“The reason for the six that are not covered is the lack of data – there is not enough data to calculate the indices,” Salma El Hag Yousif, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Programme Coordinator. “So, there is some call for refining our analysis for shifting away from averages and looking for other sources of data that really enables us to have better analysis to inform our policies and decision making and also important to focus on the quality not only the quantity.”

“For example, education attainment can be... if it’s counted quantity wise it can look good but it’s also a question of how much the children learn in school, are they able to write and read or not. With regards to the policy advice, the report provides (a) ‘four prongs policy’ at the national level and one of them is to reorient human development to reach those left out - that is to make growth inclusive.”

While the launch presentations highlighted the improvement in Pacific Island Human Development Indices (HDI), Yousif outlined that this is not necessarily good news.

“It’s sometimes misleading to look at these numbers from one year to another simply because methodologies change, sources of data change, but still it gives us an indication of the overall trend,” she explained. “Averages do not give the full picture and many people have been left out and we need to understand who has been left out and why in order to put in place policies to address those issues and in many countries, the disadvantaged groups includes women and girls, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, LGB communities, older people – and these need to be included so that human development is for all.”

The Human Development Report 2016 produced several indices to measure human development in each country drawn from life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling and gross national income (GNI) per capita. These were:

- Human Development Index
- Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index
- Gender Development Index
- Gender Inequality Index
- Multidimensional Poverty Index

Country	Rank	HDI
Palau	60	0.788
Fiji	91	0.736
Tonga	101	0.721
Federated States of Micronesia	127	0.638
Vanuatu	134	0.597
Kiribati	137	0.588
Papua New Guinea	154	0.516
Solomon Islands	156	0.515

“We also need to look at the broader development ecosystem and by that we mean moving beyond the quantitative measures and starting to look at indicators that are hard to measure... issues of voice, of participation, of empowerment,” continued Yousif. “These are really hard to measure but they are also very important beyond the quantitative measures that we always use.”

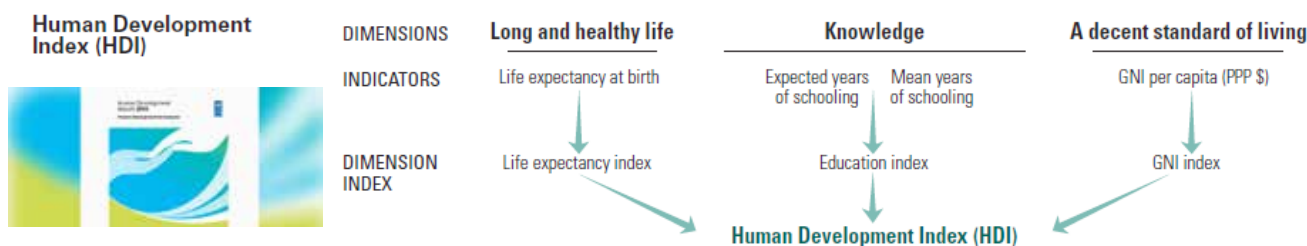
As Rimon echoed the importance of inclusive development, she called for a meaningful and collaborative global effort in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

“(Climate change) is a huge challenge for us to move towards achieving the development goals that have been set,” she said. “I understand there has been a lot of programmes of assistance (and) financial assistance to the region and to Kiribati but over the years, since we gained independence, but we still continue to have the same issues.”

“It makes one wonder what has not been done or has happened, not just at the national level but also within the development communities that have come to assist Kiribati including the UN. I think that is one way forward (is) to really sit down with countries to assess the impact, (as well as the) sustainability of impacts of your programmes at a country level (to) find out what has worked very well, what are the gaps that have stood in the way of achieving the outcomes. I think it is important that partners like UNDP work closely with government, align their programmes and assistance to national systems, national context, adjust to national context to be able to achieve the sustainability of impacts on the ground.”

The UNDP noted, ahead of the Pacific launch of the Report, that although on average human development improved significantly across all regions from 1990 to 2015, worldwide almost 1.5 billion people live in multidimensional poverty – reflecting acute deprivations in health, education and standards of living.

“There is so much more to do and climate change will certainly be a challenge that can stand in our way of achieving this and we need strong partnerships and working together... not just with (governments working with) the development partners but even development partners working with other development partners,” concluded Rimon.



## A LIFE OF ITS OWN - 25 YEARS OF THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

by Sian Rolls

"The beauty of the campaign for me has been – and I think the report also captures that – that there's ownership for every organisation who's participated," reflected Zarin Hamid, program coordinator for Gender Based Violence at the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL). "There's an ownership of the campaign for themselves so I've always liked that."

'A Life Of Its Own' – a title and an embodiment of the journey of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Campaign encapsulated into a report assessing 25 years of activities.

A key finding of the report was the waning use of a human rights framework when commemorating the campaign – something the CWGL "is taking to heart" as global coordinator according to Krishanti Dharmaraj in the document.

"Campaigns tend to be very short, brief things (and) this has been on for 25," continued Hamid. "It's a very apt title in that the campaign does have a life of its own and it is become something that everyone participates in and often times in different ways based on local context and needs and challenges and also perspectives."

This ownership has also meant that not only has the CWGL revisited the campaign as a whole, but also its role as global coordinator – leading to a strategy meeting held during the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61).

"We're having conversations on where do we go next," outlined Hamid. "We had a strategy meeting, of sorts, to talk about both this report that I mentioned, the 25 years, the work that's been done with many other organisations around the world and also the Center and where do we go to from here and one thing that we want to do is to talk about moving the campaign from awareness to eradication (of violence against women)."

"The campaign itself started with awareness in mind. 25 years ago, no one really talked about it – at least outside of our circles – about violence against women being a human rights violation. The campaign really started that conversation (and) really amplified it."

But that discussion has been derailed by state entities and other organisations taking up the campaign as an opportunity for awareness about programmes and activities rather than the overarching discussion about ending this widespread human rights violation.

"I think one of the biggest ways (to address this issue) is to actually start (this) conversation up again (and) saying we're talking about violence against women, we're talking about gen-

der based violence, we're talking about it in the context of a human rights violation," continued Hamid, adding that this is where the media can play a critical role. "The power that I think journalists do have is really to tell the story, talk about who's really affected."

"Don't spin the story, don't make people into victims and don't make victims into the perpetrators. So, tell the story and really be allies."

While the report, 'A Life Of Its Own', does outline that there has been an increasing use of social media in 16 Days of Activism Campaign activities, online platforms are still far from having the same effect, reach and responsibility as traditional media.

"(So) see how you can engage with local journalists (even though) at the end of the day, journalists only have so much power," Hamid said. "It also has to do with who's doing the publishing, who's doing the posting of voices whether it's through, I don't know, newspaper or radio or television."

But creating awareness, just as with working towards eradication of gender based violence, requires resources. While conversation during the strategy meeting acknowledged that there has been an increase in resources for ending violence against women and girls, the pool of funds and power over local actors still remain as barriers to true peace, justice and security.

"The struggle for funding...that's a struggle for everyone," Hamid outlined. "But I think for many people, and people I've spoken with directly throughout the years is 'we want to do more, we want to, highlight GBV around this time period but we actually don't have specific funding allocated for this' because funders don't fund like that – especially for organisations in the Global South."

"There tends to be a lot more nit-pickiness on how money is being spent by organisations working in the Global South, so both of those things are kind of highlighted in the report."

As the conversation continued, Hamid is excited about not just taking some of the recommendations of the report on board, but also responding to the shifting needs and contexts of campaigns across the world.

"Where I'm standing (I'm looking forward to) getting to the next campaign time and having a sense of what we've discussed today – having a better sense of that," she said. "(Then knowing that) this is the trajectory we've been on and now this is where the shift is. I can actually see some pieces falling into place."





# 16 DAYS CAMPAIGN - THINKING GLOBALLY AND ACTING LOCALLY

As part of the annual 16 days campaign GPPAC - the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict asked our Pacific "1325" network to share their perspectives on 2016's theme. Compiled by Sian Rolls - 28 November 2016



1. Why is access to education for all, and particularly for women and girls, important for conflict prevention and peacebuilding?

**Adi Vasulevu:** I think education is a priority security factor for women and girls. It is about staying informed as information is power. It will give clarity and positive direction to women's decision making because this is important in peacebuilding and conflict prevention at personal, interpersonal and intrapersonal level, working with women in families and community development so development at all levels. Also, looking at poverty being conflict, education is preventative for a woman in terms of being able to utilise her achievements towards her employment and even as self-employment as a preventative measure.

**Losana:** They say that education is light and education gives you knowledge. Also, it is our human right. When you are educated, you have knowledge. It could be easy to have a conversation with and understand. You know, you speak on the same level because what I have seen in the community, if one is un-educated, it's very hard to have a conversation with, you know? It's hard to reason with. It's like you're speaking to a stone wall to try to make him understand. Most of the things that you want to say, it will be always wrong to them. So, most of the time, these un-educated persons, you know, it can always provoke conflict in the home and also in the community.

**Fane:** Quality learning especially for us women and girls and as we talk about women's participation, I think it's important as we talk about the gender equality is fundamentally related to sustainable development and for that to happen, it's a neces-

sity for the promotion for human rights. Women still continue to be the first to come out with what they've gone through with TC Winston, I think their participation is important when we talk about peacebuilding and also conflict prevention.

**Frances:** Education, it comes in many forms and one is the power of sharing information. We have seen when women are educated, they are able to make changes, they're informed and also they're empowered to utilise the skills that they have and, in groups, they will share ideas. If women are not educated, not informed, they won't move – nothing will move in their community or in their families.

**Alisia:** I think we need to understand that education is not simply limited to formal education or education in schools. So, there is that phrase that knowledge is power but really knowledge is just the first step. It's what you actually do with that knowledge that kind of determines the kind of power that you have in the communities so while education is important for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, it's really only the first step of the whole process of how girls can really contribute to peacebuilding in their communities.

**Luisa:** For women with disabilities, this is important in the sense that women with disabilities would find themselves in very conflicting situations where they are at risk and they are not protected at the same time. As well as, where there's conflict, we know that obviously there'll be violence and for women with disabilities to be educated, it's really important for them (to) get an education in order to avoid these kinds of situations as well as being more of a confident person and individual in build-

ing relationships and contributing to peace building within the nation and within their communities as well. When we are limited with information or knowledgeable information, as a person with disability, we always feel that we are the last to be heard of and nothing has been actually taken into serious account when we speak. Normally, most of the things are being decided for us, not by us because it's of how others see what best suits us but not how they accept us as who we are to make decisions for even our own selves and how we can contribute within the community and being that actively engaged and involved within our own communities when it comes to decision making as well.

**Anne:** Education is a human right that must be accessed by all women and girls to use it as a tool for lots of reasons such as finding a paid job to improve their social well-being. Studies have proven that educated women and girls are more prone to building and improving their social status and then extending their humanity services to promote lives of others through sharing and peace building therefore it is very necessary that education be mandated by all as the prime most building tool to prevent conflict and to promote peace in our societies today. This will lead to a more sustainable national development.

**Vanessa:** We know that education is a fundamental human right so for women and girls to access education, they need to have a stable, safe environment around them so they can learn well. Also, if they can't access education then that is taking away their future – it robs them of their destiny, it robs them of livelihoods and it robs them of their dignity.

2. How has your own experience with education affected/influenced your efforts in conflict prevention? (Were/are women and girls in your community able to access full education? How does this affect their involvement in peacebuilding and conflict prevention?)

**Adi Vasulevu:** In my experience, being brought up in a rural community, the access to education especially higher education was a big challenge (because) of location and the policies.

**Losana:** As for myself, well, I went up to form 6 level – but I'm always open to any kind of workshops that comes around. I have had so much learning from all these different things that I have attended, I have seen that in the community and in the family, they always come to seek my opinion because of being educated and it has helped me to see things broadly, from both sides and perspectives. It's a big advantage because I am able to, most of the time, mediate between the family conflict and also the community as a whole.

**Fane:** I think with my own experience with education, what is really important now that we need to continue to educate the women more on conflict prevention. Like as I have said earlier, women seems to be the first responders in a disaster. We need to influence and work more on areas of women and girls... give them the full support in terms of education and having them be involved and recognising their leadership role – I think that is the important thing. We need to recognise them and continue to empower them because I think for them, being a woman, they seem to be looked down upon.

**Frances:** My education made me the person I am today – if I was not educated, I would not be able to speak English, I wouldn't be able to communicate, I won't be able to do things, I won't be able to know things and also communicate my stories. It's given me the skills, the ideas and also the same time interacting with others, contributing to intergenerational dialogue and some spaces that I have been involved in. It has also built my confidence to engage.

**Alisia:** Having an undergraduate degree opened my eyes to a lot of conflict in the world. So, through the courses that I was studying, I was really able to see what was happening

in the other parts of the world. But looking back on the work that I do right now, with conflict prevention and peacebuilding, it isn't taught in schools. So, when it comes to a human security perspective and that really is about whether it's conflict within the home, their ability to feel comfortable at home or with their friends, comfortable either going out on the street – that's not taught in schools and in curriculum.

**Anne:** To date, my heart aches to see some of my friends whom I have left behind in primary struggling to take care of themselves and their families - how they make money with the amount of knowledge and skills they have. I have come a long way but, like many of my female friends, I was not going to be financially supported to continue my education to secondary level. Even my Dad, who back then was teacher, listened to his male friends who said if he spent money on my education, he will never harvest in good terms because I would marry out to another family and would support my husband's family rather than supporting him, Mum and my siblings. Mum didn't give up on me – instead, I remember very well that she had only 3 island dress to wear which were so old but she couldn't afford to have new ones made because she was cutting co-pra at my Grandpa's plantation to pay for my school fees to keep me in school. She made that commitment because she never reached year 6 as she got married off to my Dad at the age of 16. Because she missed out on education, she didn't want me to miss out on mine so she sacrificed herself, her time and money to ensure that I get the best education. That is why I am here today. I do not take this for granted but help other women and girls access education. I advocate and lobby to our national government through my voice in public media, national education development and reviews. Education for sure is the right and utmost tool to prevent conflict. The more education gained by an individual female, the better they can understand and make their own decisions about improving their lives and assisting others.

**Vanessa:** For me, I had no idea what peacebuilding or conflict prevention was. I left school thinking that my life was just going to get a degree and join the government. But, over time, I get to know of NGOs and other organisations and I see that I can do my own thing – I can have my own projects. This was my experience and so I feel like it was also the experience of other young women, so that needs to change – women and young women need to know that they can find their own purpose.

3. Could you describe recent positive developments in your community/country which have improved access or quality of education for women and girls? If not, what needs to be changed in order for this to happen? (e.g. policy or legal changes, funding, change in perceptions, support to affected groups - specific examples please)

**Adi Vasulevu:** I have seen that there has been some positive developments in our community. Nowadays, some women and girls are seeking to extend their education, looking at some extensions in tertiary. Even some of the women in our network now are taking courses at USP (the University of the South Pacific), even though they are selling at the market. So, women and girls, even though they are married or at whatever level, they know now that they can go forth and apply to continue their education.

**Losana:** We still have lots of dropouts (so the gaps creating this) needs to be identified so that it can help women and girls accessing education.

**Fane:** The children are still studying under tents now. I think that contributes to how they access education in school - the environment. That is one of the reasons they are not positively developing in their education and, currently, they are undergo-



ing examinations here in the Western division - the primary and the secondary. I think this needs to be improved, the way children access education.

**Frances:** Many organisations, so many development partners have been conducting awareness on different issues, on different particular areas. When I was growing up, I've never experienced so much of informal education. But now, I have seen my family in Lami – (civil society has) been conducting trainings on child protection and some other issues.

**Alisia:** In Fiji, there is the whole thing about you've got the "free school" ... you have free bus fare and those kinds of things but hearing from the women in the communities across Fiji, there are still the hidden costs involved with parents being able to afford the school uniforms, even food as well. So, while there are some positive small steps that government have initiated to ensure that there is universal access to education for all children, young girls and stuff in particular, there are still some barriers that communities are still having to face.

Luisa: I believe that positive steps that the special education department is already taking ahead is this inclusive education program that they've taken on board, with the help of DFAT, from Australia, and they've made this inclusive education programmes for persons and children with disabilities to be enrolled in mainstream schools and they've helped the mainstream schools make their schools more accessible to students with disabilities that are enrolled there and this is one of the progressive things that's happening in Fiji. At the same time, in my work and experience, I've seen that it is a double burden for women and young women with disabilities. For women with disabilities, it really depends because some acquire their disabilities and some are born with it. When you are born with it, you go through the special schools and it is very difficult to get into mainstream education or tertiary because they don't have the same curriculum. Even if young women can make it to tertiary, there is the challenge where you might be from a restrictive household, the environment may not be disability friendly, your financial assistance may not be enough to meet your needs or you might be a single mother living with a disability. There are some scholarships that women and young women living with disabilities have been able to get, but like the issues I mentioned, it doesn't always cover everything that she needs to access education properly. There are many challenges and this is what needs to be looked at and addressed.

**Anne:** Nationally, Vanuatu has not recently reviewed its national gender policy which captures the right for girls and women to access good quality education that is free and affordable. The Ministry of Education and Training has reviewed its Gender Education Policy which has excellent targets and indicators to allow free movement of women and girls accessing education or learning without boundaries even when they are pregnant, they can have their babies and return to school after 1 year. The Inclusive Education Policy has a component which states the importance of women and girls living with disability to access schooling and to access education until they reach their highest potentials. The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu has recognized the gap of women participating in politics, especially in Vanuatu's national parliament, so the Department of Women's Affairs under the Ministry of Justice is lobbying with the Council of Ministers to consider passing a legislation for reserved seats for women. The Ministry of Education and Training has several policies in place which supports women and girls access to a good quality education. One of these policies is the Minimum Quality Standard which in section 13-14 outlines the importance of girls' participation in school and communities mandates to protect and promote participation of women and girls in schools. TVET and other training centers are providing

training courses which are of quality and affordable for women and girls to pursue further skills to find employment. A draft TVET policy and Senior Secondary policy is in place as a guide and enforcement tool. A provincial level, the local government councils or provincials has strategies that also highlights the importance of women's participation in all education sectors. The provincial government and municipal councils have passed laws to for reserved seats which is flying high currently with our Municipal Women Counsellors for both Port Vila and Luganville towns. UN Women in collaboration with the provincial councils are promoting rural women's economic status by initiating and funding rural markets for change which is providing good and productive avenues for women to generate income to support themselves and their families especially to send their children to school. At the local level, parents, chiefs and other community leaders are more aware of women and girls' right to education so they are playing active roles to support local initiatives.

**Vanessa:** There needs to be more than just the focus on academic performance. Girls are performing a lot better than some of their male counterparts, but they are still leaving school as geniuses in mathematics but with no life skills. They are also not aware that they also have a role to play in influencing their community and supporting their family – these are things that teachers need to be able to give to students. It's not just learning from blackboards and textbooks, but learning how they can change the world, how they can leave a lasting impact and find their destiny.

4. What can civil society groups do to help ensure that the universal right to education is upheld?

**Adi Vasulevu:** I think motivation would be one of the biggest influential tools, beginning from home and from communities.

Losana: Civil society can create opportunities to provide informal education like seminars in the villages and involving the drop outs in research, so that they can learn more even though they may not be able to go to school. It will also educate the parents so that they know the value of education for their children.

**Fane:** I think we need to recognise the opportunities (to) promote gender equality programmes, basic education and also promote gender equality in the classrooms by providing overall gender sensitive environments that is for all – to learn it at all levels. Not only are we educating the women, but we need to promote this at the classroom level.

**Frances:** There needs to be better implementation of policies like the National Gender Policy as well as the Women's Plan of Action. The implementation needs to be enhanced to ensure that women and girls have access to quality education – that's something civil society needs to push for.

**Alisia:** Civil society is that bridge between the community and the government and the policy makers so that's what civil society can still continue to do.

Luisa: **Civil society could influence the policy makers, especially those who are setting these policies and criteria for accessing scholarships and keep lobbying with them, keep talking with them and saying how crucial it is for these changes to be made.**

**Anne:** The Civil Society Groups can: Track government progress on commitment made to ensure good accessible quality education for women and girls and to produce reports to both government and UN agencies when the government fails via UPR or the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), CRC or CRPD shadow reports; Raise awareness through national media outlets and social media to get the government's and the general public's attention when gaps are identified especially policy gaps that should promote girls access to good quality education; Con-

## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

duct advocacy activities in the local communities to promote the knowledge of parents and community leaders especially the chiefs as to why women and girls must be allowed to go to school and remain in school until they reach their highest potential; Support communities to promote local school-based management which should be a good tip for quality building; Conduct short training courses for women and girls especially life skills training, conduct counselling services for women and girls who wish to return to school after pregnancy or other situations and also for counselling services for school girls and help communities fund raise to support local schools finances.

**Vanessa:** We do trainings, life skills and other training with other organisations so that they can have those skills. We also need to do these things and ask that change happens so that teachers can play that role in the school to cultivate young people's leadership potential, to find the root causes of why they may not be performing well in the classroom.

5. What factors have you observed in your community that prevent women and girls (and other minority groups) from accessing a full and adequate education? (specific examples please)

**Adi Vasulevu:** I have seen in communities or from families where when they are challenged with finances (so the girls) - they leave school and help their parents to educate the other (children). We also had a young woman, Waqanitoga Masivue, come and share at our district consultations that they still have to travel closer to town for higher education and there aren't enough safe places for them to stay - the lucky ones will have relatives nearer to town.

**Losana:** I had a niece, she went up to USP and she dropped out because she was pregnant and, right now, I'm just trying to encourage her that after she gives birth, she can go back to continue from where she left off. Parents also have a vital role to play in a child's schooling and I think they should make parents understand how they can support their children better. Because the dropouts in the rural community, it's really a lot.

**Fane:** From Salome Raqiyawa from the Nalalawa village from our last month's consultation, she shared the issue with children studying under tents. I can't remember the name of the settlement or the school (but) there's a heavy rain or heavy downpour here in the West, so the children studying under tents are badly affected - they get wet, their school stationary gets wet, their bags and their school uniforms. With no yet development happening in the classrooms that were badly affected during TC Winston, students are still struggling, studying under these tents. This is something that Artika Kumar and Sainiana were sharing with femLINKpacific after TC Winston - the young women worry about the impact of their school performance this year on the rest of their lives.

**Frances:** One barrier is infrastructure. When women can't travel, they can't access education - they have to travel hours, on horseback, cross many streams and so on. Another barrier is the taboos that's there in the community. Some of the families, they believe young men should be educated because women

will get married, go somewhere else so their education won't benefit the family. So, those are some of the things that we need to be changed.

**Alisia:** The cost of tertiary education... it's not cheap. Even if you do get a scholarship you still have your accommodation fees, you still have transport fees, you still have food as well. So, those are the kinds of hidden costs and unemployment for youth as well is a very big issue so they're having to try and find work to cover the costs of education with balancing the school work so it's not very easy to get into education and then stay in education. So, I think that's a particular barrier that young people are facing right now.

**Luisa:** I know 4 women living with disabilities, between the ages of 18 and late 40s - they were given scholarships and they have tried accessing tertiary education to get quality education but then they were still limited, unable to participate or to engage. They were not given appropriate support mechanisms to help them get and attend their classes. For persons with disabilities, it's the little pieces and bits of things that we start worrying about. Is it accessible, is it this, is it that, because if these things are made easy for us to access, it means we are included. If these things are not easily made for us not to access, we do know that it's like a sign just to turn back, go back from where you came from, you not welcome here.

**Anne:** Factors preventing women and girls from accessing their full right to a good and quality education are: Lack of school fees or lack of commitment by parents and guardians to pay for school fees; Lack of motivation and lack of confidence by the student in a learning environment; Lack of teachers support; Schools being placed too far from communities - distance to school is too far and unsafe for a girl or woman to reach safely; Toilets built too far from school buildings and girls tend to feel unsafe to use these toilet facilities - also, toilets does not have menstruation pads or toilet paper; Girls being forced to marry at a very early age even at the age of 13; Sexual violence and other violence against the girl child and a woman who wish to continue learning; Discrimination at school and in the community; High cost of school fees; Lack of food; Teenage pregnancy - pregnant women feel they are not capable to continue learning; Women think they are too old or, in general, they underestimate their ability to continue learning; Village and community gossiping; Marijuana, kava or other social substance abuse; Lack of space in schools and learning centers.

**Vanessa:** We have a big issue of teenage pregnancy. Last year there were 162. We don't have the data for this year yet from the Ministry of Health, but we know that the biggest problem is the shame. As soon as parents find out their daughter is pregnant or having a sexual relationship, she is shamed - they shave off their head and say 'you're done now'. That stops them from going to school. We are trying to talk about these things (as the Talitha Project), with other women sharing how they overcame the challenge and went back to school so that the girls don't feel hopeless. We're also working with parents too so they are supportive back at home.





## POSTCARDS FROM CSW 61



The sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York between the 13th and 24th of March, 2017.

The CSW61 theme was 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work', the Review theme is 'Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls' (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session).

## FEMTALK CSW61: WOMEN'S RIGHTS ENSURE SUSTAINABLE PEACE

UNHQ, NY - 13th March, 2017

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

It is a premier global gathering dedicated to the empowerment of women and girls which gives impetus to galvanising action and to ensure that leaders are held accountable to commitments made. While the 20 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) offered 6 implementation strategies, including a gender responsive strategy to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CSW61 is a further reminder that progressing gender equality and human rights is a universal task and requires the involvement of all stakeholders including civil society, NGOs, trade unions, national human rights institutions and activists of all diversities.

The 61st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) got underway this morning, ahead of the scheduled blizzard tomorrow, which is bound to disrupt proceedings.

"The BPA recognised the full diversity of women and addresses the intersectionalisation of issues," said H.E. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil), the Chair of CSW61.

CSW61 theme is 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work', the Review theme is 'Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls' (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session).

"This a timely and forward looking theme and requires forward looking strategies to rapid changes in the labour work," said de Aguiar Patriota. "The future of work should not perpetuate existing inequalities."

"When women participate in peace processes, the chance of sustainable peace goes up by 35% over 15 years," said the UN Secretary General (UNSG) Antonio Gueterres. "I will invest in more women to foster peace and security in the world."

"Women's rights are human rights and the attacks on women

are an attack on all of us."

The UNSG also called on participants to hold member states accountable to commitments and the UN accountable to progressing gender equality.

"Every day you are on the frontline for a more just and decent world and as champions of equality you make the globe a better world," he said, adding that investing in women's empowerment is a way to breakdown structural and social barriers. "Male chauvinism blocks everyone and we need to address historical injustices and transforming institutions including the UN to be more gender responsive at work."

Responding to the theme of CSW61, the UNSG stressed that women's equality in the economy means better returns on investment as well as investing in protection and prevention measure of violence.

The deliberations of the CSW61 have the potential to inform the implementation of the SDGs particularly as women and poverty was one of the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPA and remains a subject of longstanding concern of the Economic and Social Council of the UN.

"Women must be able to freely access technology, shape its development and benefit from its use," said Ambassador Peter Thomson in his role as the current President of the General Assembly who noted that despite the adoption of the BPA, the world has not achieved gender equality and stressed that the achievement of sustainable development requires a systematic mainstreaming of gender equality.

Access to technology, he noted has the potential to enable access to education in rural and remote communities as well as enable access to economic empowerment and justice.



Full text of speech: Page 15



## RECOGNISE PACIFIC WOMEN'S REALITIES

UNHQ, NY - 15th March, 2017

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

The Pacific Islands Forum statement delivered today amplified the need for the outcomes of CSW61 and Agenda 2030 implementation to respond to Pacific women's changing world of work which are significantly impacted by climate change and intensifying natural disasters.

Delivered by Minister Charmaine Scotty of Nauru, the statement highlighted that Pacific Leaders are committed to the theme of the CSW61 and the priority issues receive high level attention including via the Finance and Economic Ministers Meeting.

She also informed the meeting that the adoption of the Pacific Resilience Framework by Pacific Forum Leaders in 2016 recognises the critical role of gender inclusion and also provides an avenue to address the changing world of work and Pacific women's economic empowerment linked to the environmental changes.

Pacific Leaders also believe that the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's report 'Women's Economic Empowerment in the changing world of work' requires the removal of structural barriers and transformation of social norms to ensure

the economic rights of women of girls of all diversities.

Partnerships, said Minister Scotty, are also required to ensure the financing to progress the Agenda 2030 address the gender equality goals. Partnerships, she also said, must include civil society.

The Pacific Forum statement also addressed the particular barriers to gender equality and economic empowerment across the fisheries, agriculture, education and employment sectors.

Minister Scotty noted women's roles in sustainable fisheries management for food security and nutrition as well as sustainable commercial operations.

There is also a need to overcome limited access to financial security by rural women and girls by being assured access to decent work in the agricultural sector, by overcoming infrastructure barriers.

The 61st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) got underway on 13 March and continues until March 24.

## TURN WORDS INTO ACTION: MARSHALL ISLANDS

UNHQ, NY – 16 March 2017

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

As the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) prepares to roll out a new 3 year Gender Mainstreaming Policy with a key focus on domestic violence, their country statement this morning called for greater attention to gender equality in climate change in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, as well as stronger partnerships to support Pacific governments to transform commitments into well-resourced actions and stronger political will which recognize and builds on matrilineal cultures.

"The "Weto in Mour" initiative aims to enable more women and girls to live free of violence and to be protected by law, through the provision of prevention, intervention and institutional strengthening," said Kathryn Relang of WUTMI who presented the statement.

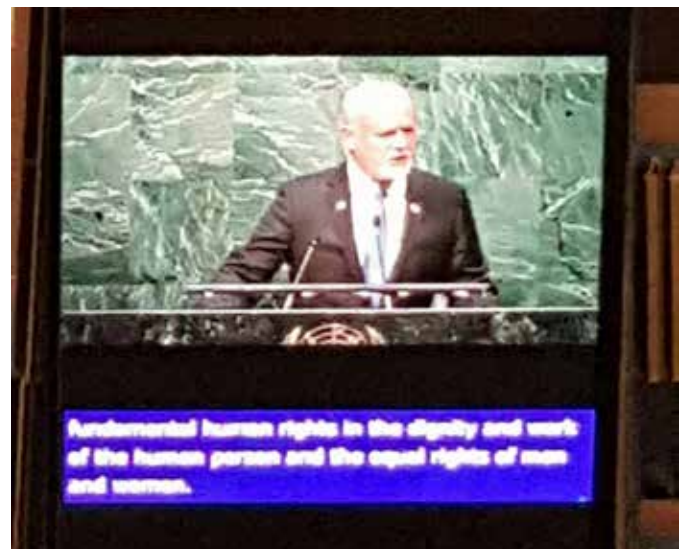
This is a way in which persistent challenges to women's empowerment and gender equality can be achieved and in RMI the focus is on addressing the root causes of domestic violence as well as enhancing women's access to justice as well as legislative reform such as the 2012 Domestic Violence Act.

"One recent study shows that 48% of women in the Marshall Islands have experienced physical violence by a partner and nearly 70% experience physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse," she added.

Institutional strengthening can make a difference especially by enhancing women's access to justice and protection to respond to the serious challenges of domestic violence according to Relang, adding it is an important step in enhancing women's access to justice.

"The Marshall Islands judicial system recently streamlined the process for women to directly obtain temporary protection from abusive partners, reducing complex procedures and often resulting in same-day delivery," she continued.

Relang was recently appointed to UNWomen's Global Civil Society Advisory Group also highlighted plans for a proposed amendment at the upcoming Constitutional Convention which would mandate minimum seats for elected women to parliament.





# “WE ARE NOT JUST COUNTING WOMEN BUT MAKING WOMEN COUNT”

UNHQ, NY – 16th March, 2017

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

The UN Commission on the Status of Women today heard from the Permanent representatives of the Governments of Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga responding to the theme ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work’.

“We stand by the theme as we stand by SDGs and there is an urgent need for targeted financial measures to progress gender equality including SDG 5,” said Ambassador Robert Sisilo, of the Solomon Islands (SI), “We need to break barriers in classrooms and board rooms through the promotion of gender equality and women’s rights.”

And while the Beijing Platform for Action has become the global benchmark for the measurement of the advancement of gender equality, there is a need to focus on local indicators said Ambassador Aliioaiga Feturi Elisaia of Samoa.

The availability of gender statistics and data were highlighted as progress with Ambassador Sisilo noting that the availability of data is a way to ensure there are specific policies and programmes to respond to gender based violence.

“Because no amount of equality can be realised if we do not address violence,” he added.

“The inclusion of gender statistics in the latest census for Tonga is currently in progress, and is committed on evidence-based advocacy for gender equality and the localization of SDGs,” said Ambassador Mahe Tupouniua of Tonga, “(The) equitable participation of women and men has the potential to transform the world of work for our women.”

Like in the Solomon Islands, legislative reform in Samoa is targeting the importance of ensuring women and children are safe in their homes.

Ambassador Elisaia highlighted a range of initiatives targeting vulnerable groups through small business incubators and start-up funds with a focus on rural women and persons with

disabilities as well as coordinated approach on improving the status of children through the development of family centred business development.

The Samoa Government EAW strategy and the National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) are also focusing on addressing the root causes of violence.

But with this progress and interventions come the need to also address the gaps in women’s political participation as well as new and emerging challenges to gender equality, according to Sisilo.

This, said Ambassador Tupouniua, includes the impact of climate change.

“Tonga is also committed to a gender and social inclusion consideration, for climate change and disaster risk management policies, projects, and planning processes to protect different genders and social groups, through the Climate Finance and Risk Governance Assessment,” he said. “Tonga recognises the challenges of work for women in the Pacific due to climate change, disasters, and the ongoing threats to our oceans, seas, coasts and marine and land resources, which women depend on for their employment, livelihoods, and wellbeing.”

“As such, Tonga signed the Climate Trust Fund last month and has already conducted community trainings to raise awareness of the fund and to give guidance on how to submit applications. The fund is designed to specifically assist local communities alleviate themselves from the adverse effects of climate change.”

Meanwhile, Ambassador Tupouniua highlighted that targeted and strategic consultations to progress the issue of the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are planned for this year in Tonga and the Government of Tonga is looking forward to progress the ongoing work in this regard.

## CSW61: STATEMENT DELIVERED BY SHARON BHAGWAN ROLLS

61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women - Statement by Ms. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, 16th March, 2017. statement on video:

Mr. Chairman and Excellencies

I speak as the Chair of the International Steering Group of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, which works in collaboration with the World Federalist Movement and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect to build the capacity of civil society actors to influence the international community and relevant stakeholders to create and implement conflict prevention mechanisms and norms, in ways that are locally-grounded and inclusive.

Our Prevention Up Front Alliance reaffirms key recommendations from the Global Study of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that a strategy of prevention, including in economic development, will also ensure the non-recurrence of future conflict.

The results of risks to peace and security are felt throughout populations, particularly as genocide and other atrocity crimes disproportionately affect women and girls however, women are not just victims of conflict and atrocities; they have a vital role to play in the implementation and advancement of peace, conflict prevention and resolution processes.

Empowering women is essential in recognizing early warning signs, especially for indigenous women in remote areas of the world, where governments or traditional civil society representatives may not have access.

We know that unless one deals with the structural issues along with individual projects that empower individuals, society and women will not really emerge from repeated cycles of

conflict.

We believe it is vital to ensure that women’s definitions of economic security are taken into account and amplified through appropriate and accessible information and communication systems well aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals - to women’s human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UNSCR 1325 - to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, including by ensuring public access to information through accessible and appropriate communication systems.

We therefore call for: governance systems which ensure a free and independent media to analyze the progress or the lack of progress on the SDGs and balance the scale between those with political power and the communities that they represent; enabling the participation of women in decision-making; and eliminating the stereotypes when portraying women in media.

Finally, from my own Pacific Island region, I amplify the call of feminist sisters, in particular the We Rise Coalition, that progressing the gender equality and women’s human rights agenda requires building and sustaining women’s collective power through movements because it has been and will continue to be women’s movements that turn individual efforts into a political force for change that cannot be ignored.

I thank you.

# STRUCTURAL CHANGES NEEDED FOR GENDER INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC SECURITY

NY - 19th March, 2017

by Sharon Bhagwan Rolls

The 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) resumes on Monday 20 March (NY time) with the focus on the week being the negotiations on the agreed conclusions, or the outcomes of CSW61.

The UN Secretary General's (SG) report for CSW61 has addressed the vital interlinkages between women's economic empowerment and their rights to decent work and full and productive employment. It focuses on the obstacles women face in exercising their rights to and at work and suggests how these may be rectified as well as analyses the opportunities and challenges for women's economic empowerment posed by the increasing informality and mobility of labour and the technological and digital developments that are transforming the world of work.

In the past week, Pacific statements from the Pacific Islands Forum, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga have all responded to the theme of 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work' and making key linkages with the status of Pacific Island women.

"We stand by the theme as we stand by SDGs and there is an urgent need for targeted financial measures to progress gender equality including SDG 5," said Ambassador Robert Sisilo, of the Solomon Islands. "We need to break barriers in classrooms and board rooms through the promotion of gender equality and women's rights."

While the Beijing Platform for Action has become the global benchmark for the measurement of the advancement of gender equality, Ambassador Aliioaiga Feturi Elisaia of Samoa also highlighted the need to focus on local indicators.

The SG's report addresses the 'Changing World of Work' by highlighting emerging areas, such as the green economy and climate change mitigation and adaptation, as new opportunities for decent work for women and that technological change can be disruptive or productive for women's economic empowerment. The report also notes that despite shifts in the service and manufacturing sectors and the decline in the contribution of the agricultural sector to economies, agriculture work remains significant for rural women.

This will also require governments to support women's labour force participation and discourage occupational segregation by increasing investment in public services to create decent jobs in health, education, child and elderly care, infrastructure development, public administration and agricultural extension.

## The Changing Climate of Employment

Pacific women know the reality of adapting to the impact of climate change and intensifying and extreme weather patterns which are increasing the burden of unpaid work particularly for rural women who rely on the agricultural and aquaculture economies. Each hurricane and storm affects food gardens, coconut supplies and encroaching sea levels affect the pandanus plants which are needed for traditional handicrafts production.

"Our people are facing major challenges including coastal erosion, more severe drought and storms," said David Collins, Kiribati's Minister for Women, Youth and Social Affairs, who added that labour mobility is a climate change adaptation strategy for his small Pacific Island country that requires an approach with dignity as it also results in negative impacts on the community. "Kiribati's National Migration Policy has been adopted."

"It is envisaged that the training that women are accessing,

such as the 129 APTC programmes is enabling women to secure employment abroad."

Tonga's Ambassador to the UN, Mahe Tupouniua, informed CSW61 that the Government of Tonga is also committed to a gender and social inclusion consideration, for climate change and disaster risk management policies, projects, and planning processes to protect different genders and social groups.

"Through the Climate Finance and Risk Governance Assessment, Tonga recognises the challenges of work for women in the Pacific due to climate change, disasters, and the ongoing threats to our oceans, seas, coasts and marine and land resources, which women depend on for their employment, livelihoods, and wellbeing," he said. "As such, Tonga signed the Climate Trust Fund last month and has already conducted community trainings to raise awareness of the fund and to give guidance on how to submit applications."

"The fund is designed to specifically assist local communities alleviate themselves from the adverse effects of climate change."

The changing world of work for Pacific women also needs to address the persistent levels of violence and lessons could be learnt from initiatives that target vulnerable populations.

The availability of gender statistics and data were highlighted as progress with Ambassador Sisilo of the Solomon Islands particularly to ensure government programmes can target barriers to progress gender equality and to ensure there are specific policies and programmes to respond to gender based violence.

"Because no amount of equality can be realized if we do not address violence," Sisilo underscored.

"(In Samoa, a) Small Business Incubator model has been designed to support families who vend in public spaces, persons with disabilities and women in rural areas," continued Ambassador Elisaia. "Additionally, through the national Disability Program, Samoa has completed the CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) Legislative Compliance Review together with a costed Implementation Plan."

"The 'Weto in Mour' initiative in the Marshall Islands aims to enable more women and girls to live free of violence and to be protected by law, through the provision of prevention, intervention and institutional strengthening," added Kathryn Relang of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI).

This is a way in which persistent challenges to women's empowerment and gender equality can be achieved and in RMI the focus is on addressing the root causes of domestic violence as well as enhancing women's access to justice as well as legislative reform such as the 2012 Domestic Violence Act.

"One recent study shows that 48% of women in the Marshall Islands have experienced physical violence by a partner and nearly 70% experience physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse," outlined Relang.

Ambassador Elisaia also informed CSW61 the Government of Samoa is addressing the economic causes of family violence has resulted in a national program called Supporting Samoa's Children Initiative (SSCI).

This is a coordinated approach involving all key stakeholders like government ministries, National Council of Churches, village representatives and the Private Sector to ensure the safety and security of children by supporting their parents to run and operate small businesses which will ensure that children are both safe and realising their right to an education and that social





challenges are supported.

In addition to the ongoing community advocacy programme 'End Violence against Women', a follow-up prevalence study on Family Violence in Samoa is expected to be launched mid-year.

Additionally, Samoa's National Human Rights Institute has launched a 12 months National Inquiry with a focus on 'Violence in the Samoan home' be it in the extended communal setting or in the nuclear family unit.

"The primary focus will be on women and girls with attention also on the role and impact of violence on children as they grow up. The aim is to foster a national dialogue in identifying the root causes of violence, the impacts on those involved, human rights which are violated, and make suitable recommendations to address the problem," said Elisaia.

#### Make the Changes in National Budgets

Going forward, the SG's report highlights the need to focus must be on women-inclusive green economy sectors such as sustainable energy and climate-resilient agriculture as well as women-owned enterprises but this requires the removal of discriminatory social norms and family responsibilities that can prevent women from even starting a business.

As Minister Collins noted, while there has been progress in women's leadership in the public sector, there were persistent barriers to economic opportunities which i-Kiribati women need to overcome including the lack of land resources, as well as social and economic barriers including violence.

This is one of the reason why the SG's report recommends that legislation and policies are needed to address discriminatory property and inheritance laws to support women's entre-

preneurship, as well as to facilitate women's access to markets, credit, financial services and products, infrastructure, procurement opportunities and social protection.

And then there is the burden of unpaid work in the care economy including domestic work which must be recognised for the way in which it supports the economy and often makes up for lack of public expenditure on social services and infrastructure.

The UN SG's report makes a series of recommendations to bring about the transformative and structural changes to realise women's economic empowerment in labour institutions and programmes at local, national and global levels.

It means ensuring women workers have social protection and income security; and recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, so that women may enjoy economic opportunities and outcomes on an equal footing with men.

It also means that government policies must reduce and redistribute women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work by providing social protection — child and elder care services, universal health care, parental leave — and infrastructure — such as universal access to potable water and clean, modern energy — can create employment, improve women's labour force participation and increase retention of girls in school.

This will mean increased financing from all sources is required for the full and accelerated implementation of new and existing commitments to empower women economically and provide decent work and full and productive employment for women.

These strategies need to be integrated in national development plans and budgets.



# “DOCUMENTATION STRATEGIES - WORKING TO ENHANCE VISIBILITY OF WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP”

by Alisia Evans



When it comes to promoting women’s political participation, the stigma associated with women’s role and status in society is a global reality that women’s rights organisations must continually address.

Following the elections in Fiji in 2014, women’s representation in parliament is now 14%. This is up from 11% in 2006, but Fiji remains well behind the global average of 21.8%. To bring women’s participation rates up, the Fiji Women’s Forum published a Public Perceptions of Women in Leadership (2015) which gives insight into public attitudes towards women in leadership in the lead-up to Fiji’s 2014 general elections. It draws on responses from more than 1400 participants, solicited through survey questionnaires, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.

I mentioned the issue is a global reality - and this was the basis of a series of interviews conducted during the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York which highlights that the experiences and challenges are not limited to our region.

“Women should be seen and not heard – that’s the broader perception,” stated Urvashi Gandhi, Deputy Director for Advocacy, Quality and Knowledge Management at Breakthrough, an international human rights organization based in India that works on violence against women, sexual reproductive health and rights as well as gender equality.

“We trained women to be prepared to be effective parliamentarians and to see that it is not too large a step from where they were and the work that they are doing and their communities and their organisations from being in the ‘Big House’ of Parliament,” outlined Hazel Brown, Executive Director of Network of NGOs Trinidad & Tobago for the Advancement of Women.

Brown’s experience of advocating for women’s political participation and leadership in the Caribbean stretches back to 1984 – a year prior to the UN’s Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi.

“We started with 32 member organisations and I tell people it is significant that, before 1984, women’s organisations in Trinidad and Tobago wouldn’t speak to each other,” explained Brown. “So, this was an opportunity for us to maximise the resources and help and support each other in a really functional way.”

Reaffirming women as leaders in and through public dialogue is a particular challenge in society.

“(The) public space is a very male (dominated) space,” explained Gandhi. “You will not find women there easily.”

“Quite a few times in the public space, even if women are standing, you will not see them come forward, contribute or

even to participate there is a hesitancy. There is a lot of stigma around how women...talk, walk (and) dress so there is a whole lot of restrictions on them.”

This stigma is reflected and also reinforced through media.

Since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has found that mainstream media is largely gender-blind with women making up less than 25% of media new stories. In 2015, as the longest running research and advocacy initiative for gender equality in and through the news media, the GMMP found that the rate of progress towards media gender parity has almost ground to a halt over the past five years.

“Even to go back through the newspaper archives to see what at that time and how at that time the media portrayed those women because their success or lack of it might have been how it was portrayed in the newspaper,” elaborated Brown. “How do women in power behave or not behave?”

Although Trinidad and Tobago elected a woman prime minister in 2010, according to Brown, the deliberate portrayal of women leaders in the media can be misogynistic.

“The way the pictures that the newspapers took of her in compromising pictures where she’d sit down in a short skirt and they would take the picture of the short skirt so now she knows if I’m going out there I have to dress in a certain way otherwise some person will take a picture that is totally inappropriate and it’s not by accident,” she added.

Nevertheless, media can be a powerful ally in the journey towards gender equality and improving the status of women across all sectors of society including politics.

Indeed, media and information and communication can be effective tools in addressing the misperception that women’s rightful place is in the kitchen and build on the her’story of women’s political participation.

The Network of NGOs successfully used information and communication to raising the visibility of women’s political leadership in the form of a booklet – ‘Women in Local Government Elections in Trinidad and Tobago 1946-2013’. The booklet profiles the experiences of over 300 women candidates who contested local government elections.

“Now, we have an opportunity to recognize... the contribution that those women made!” concluded Brown.

According to Sharon Bhagwan Rolls of femLINKpacific, a GMMP Global Ambassador and GMMP Pacific coordinator since 2003, the issue is not simply that the media does not want to cover women but there is a need to deconstruct notions of leadership and power.

“Feminist networks and practice are essential to support women leaders at the grassroots level to embrace and articulate their leadership and power because social constructs continue to tell us otherwise,” she explained. “Feminist media networks are publishing stories of community mobilization and leadership by women because otherwise we only hear from government officials and political leaders who remain men.”

“So, there is a need to take a multi-pronged approach. It is not just supporting women’s progress into elected office but also development committees. It is not just monitoring the news to show women are not in the news but to create content. We need the support of a range of strategies which when linked together can bring about the desired change and impact. A good example is the We Rise Coalition.”



# GMMP - A REMINDER OF WHO DOES AND DOESN'T MAKE THE NEWS

New York - 11th March, 2017

by Sian Rolls



“In the Pacific, while there was no significant change in the numbers, we can see the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) institutionalised within the Fiji National Gender policy as well as engagement with media allies and intergovernmental organisations,” highlighted Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific and GMMP Global Ambassador, this past weekend.

Speaking at the close of a symposium organised by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) on ‘Gender and Media: Challenges and Opportunities in the post-2015 Era’, she encouraged participants to continue to use the GMMP to reflect the lack of progressing gender equality, including through the media, in society and by the state.

“Since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project has been an important quantitative reminder and has provided the evidence via a global snapshot of who or who does not make the news,” Bhagwan Rolls continued, adding that not only did gender inequality exist in commercial media, but state machinery and state run media as well. “While it is important to assess our success and impact, we need to also remember that we are challenging media ownership and power.”

“The evidence of persistent inequalities that prevail as we work to progress women’s access to the media – ensuring

women of all diversities are reflected in content – but with a significant focus (on) generating content and addressing the power imbalances which result in the prevalence of sexism in the media. The power of organising as members of the human rights, peace and justice movement means we have the opportunity to link our priorities to progress the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action – and make the global commitments local.”

She also outlined the ongoing developments with the media landscape, including the need to reflect on the role of citizen’s journalism as well as ensure safety of women and girls through online platforms as well.

“Thank you for your contributions and efforts in progressing our collective goals of equality, development and peace,” she concluded. “As a global network of media activists, it is critical that we remain connected and aware of social, economic and political trends as they all influence the status of women and in doing so invest in inter-generational learning as well as strengthening and infusing feminist values into the communication systems of faith and social movements.”

The side-event on ‘Gender and Media: Challenges and Opportunities in the post-2015 Era’ took place from the 9th to the 11th of March in New York, ahead of the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61).

# ICAN'S REPORT ON THE MARCH NEGOTIATIONS TO 'BAN THE BOMB' VIA ICAN -INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

April 19, 2017, via ICAN

In the final week of March, representatives from more than 130 governments began work on a United Nations treaty to prohibit the most inhumane and destructive devices ever created: nuclear weapons. The historic talks, which will continue in June and July, bring an end to more than two decades of paralysis in multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts – and mark a decisive turning point for the international community.

A large and diverse team of ICAN campaigners participated actively in the March session at the UN headquarters in New York, presenting our ideas on how to establish the most robust and effective treaty possible. In addition, many hundreds of campaigners around the world organized local actions to draw attention to this major diplomatic initiative and to build public and political support for the treaty.

The chair of the conference, Costa Rican ambassador Elayne Whyte, has conveyed her confidence that the treaty can be concluded by 7 July – the final day of the second round of negotiations – describing this as “an achievable goal”. In light of today’s dire international security environment, which places us within a hair’s breadth of nuclear catastrophe, our task is all the more crucial and urgent.

## A COORDINATED EFFORT

On the weekend before the negotiations, ICAN campaigners gathered for a two-day meeting to exchange ideas and coordinate our efforts. We set up teams that would focus on advocacy, monitoring the debates, holding actions, generating media attention, sharing our message through social media, and documenting the process. In partnership with Religions for Peace, we launched a handbook for the negotiations.

Addressing the conference

ICAN and our partner organizations delivered several statements during the plenary meetings, outlining our views on what elements the treaty should include. We presented ideas for the preamble, for the core set of prohibitions, for positive obliga-

tions such as stockpile destruction, environmental remediation and victim assistance, and for institutional arrangements to ensure the treaty’s full implementation.

Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, delivered ICAN’s opening statement – an impassioned plea to delegates to bear in mind the victims of these horrific weapons and to work for a comprehensive, unambiguous ban. Sue Coleman-Haseldine, an Aboriginal nuclear test survivor from Australia, echoed her call, urging governments to include in the treaty a provision on victim assistance.

During a unique interactive panel debate, ICAN representatives and others offered expert advice on the elements for the treaty, answering questions and responding to comments by diplomats. Many nations praised the contributions of civil society organizations, noting that these negotiations would never have been possible without our dedicated efforts over the past few years to put this issue on the global agenda.

“Your task this week, and again over three weeks in June and July, is to establish a clear, new, international standard – to declare, in no uncertain terms, that nuclear weapons are illegitimate, immoral and illegal.” – Setsuko Thurlow

## CAMPAIGN ACTIONS

Throughout the week, campaigners organized vigils and other actions near or at the United Nations. We distributed hand-folded paper cranes – a Japanese symbol for nuclear disarmament – to government delegates and left them on the empty desks of nations boycotting the talks. As the conference began, several hundred activists protested outside military bases in Europe where nuclear weapons are currently deployed.

## REACHING OUT TO DELEGATES

In between the negotiating meetings, campaigners met with members of most of the government delegations present. We coordinated our advocacy in regional teams, outlining our ex-







expectations for the content of the treaty and the negotiating process. We handed diplomats briefing materials and encouraged them to speak in support of certain proposals. We also met with officials from several of the nations boycotting the process.

“The case for prohibiting nuclear weapons is clear: they are by nature inhumane and indiscriminate. Weapons that cause unacceptable harm to civilians cannot remain legal or be considered legitimate options for states in warfare.” – ICAN paper

### MONITORING THE DEBATES

ICAN closely monitored the debates throughout the week. We published live updates on our blog and wrote reports for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Our partner organization Reaching Critical Will published Nuclear Ban Daily – a detailed account of who said what, combined with analysis and side event reports. Several other ICAN partner organizations also published blog posts and articles.

ICAN’s social media team helped spread our message far and wide. Tens of thousands of people viewed our daily videos of the negotiations. We were active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, among other platforms. In several countries, #nuclearban was a trending hashtag on social media. We provided opportunities for people all around the world to contribute to the success of the conference.

### GLOBAL PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY

In the lead-up to and during the March session, parliamentar-

ians in many countries – including countries armed with nuclear weapons or under a so-called nuclear umbrella – voiced their strong support for a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. Some publicly quizzed their foreign ministers on why they had chosen to boycott this historic UN process, which aims to enhance the security of all nations.

Lawmakers in Australia, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy and elsewhere tabled motions urging their governments to participate in the conference. There was significant parliamentary activity also in Canada, Norway and Japan in relation to the negotiations. More than 800 elected representatives from 42 nations had helped ICAN build support for this UN process by signing our parliamentary appeal.

“The Senate urges the Australian government to participate constructively in the conference [to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination].” – Australian parliamentary motion

### SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS MADE

On the final day of the March session, representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Mexican and Irish delegations spoke at an ICAN event assessing the progress made during the talks so far. Speakers noted the positive atmosphere and strong convergence of ideas among governments. They agreed that the week’s debates had set the stage well for the negotiations in June and July.



