Inequalities and social exclusion and rights

Madam/Mr Moderator,

I am delivering this intervention on behalf of the 14 Pacific Small Island Developing States covered Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Palau, Vanuatu, Tokelau including my country Solomon Islands.

I thank the panelist for their invaluable contributions.

Madam Moderator,

Due to our small size, remoteness and vulnerability to economic and natural shocks, the Pacific Island Developing States face unique challenges in relation to inequality. Women and girls in the Pacific continue to be subjected to violence, intimidation and face exclusionary and discriminatory practices and disadvantage in many aspects of life including social, cultural, economic and political. Furthermore, we heard this morning from Pacific Disabilities Forum (PDF) the need to genuinely include their voice and meet their needs, just like everyone else. We uphold the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which outlines our regional ambitions.

The increasing youth population in the Pacific is more likely to face unemployment compared to adults, with women and persons with disabilities continuing to face barriers to employment and decent work opportunities. Gender inequality continues to be an obstacle, majority of women having experienced violence at the hands of their partner’s across the region. A world bank paper finds that GDP in the Pacific would be higher if gender employment gaps were
to close and employment rates for women were to match men’s. Gender inequalities in decision-making including women representation in national parliaments is still an ongoing challenge across the region.

COVID-19 has exacerbated gender gaps in employment, and the plague of gender-based violence are an unparalleled challenge for the Pacific.

The Pacific is confident that tackling inequalities by strengthening social protection systems and revamping labour market policies will bring direct socioeconomic benefits for countries, and ultimately contribute to the success of the Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration and the 2030 Agenda. Advancing women’s economic empowerment in the Pacific stands not just to benefit women and girls, but their entire country and society.

The maternal mortality rate across the Pacific islands has almost halved and educational attainment has improved; with girls now even outperforming boys, just to name a few. The progress made is encouraging, however the Pacific needs bigger and faster strides to close remaining gender gaps. Across the Pacific, too many women are still unable to participate fully in economic, social, and political life.

Increasing efforts by women’s groups, NGOs, development partners in advocating for gender equality and drive reform across the Pacific have been immense. Development partners and agencies including the World Bank Group and UNFPA have been actively supporting Pacific countries on gender equality progress. With concerted effort, there is no doubt inequalities can be eliminated and an equal world can be achieved for all men and women alike.

The Pacific understands that creating supportive environments for healthy, educated and economically productive families especially women will generate demographic dividends that contribute to socio-economic growth and development. There is a need in the Pacific for investments in family planning, support for girl’s education, and by creating the foundations for women to become more active and financially secure in employment in the formal and informal sector.
During times of natural disaster crises and health pandemics such as the Covid-19 lockdowns, women and girls are always highly likely to be subjected to intimidation, violence, abuse, discrimination and other gender related pressures. Children including the elderly and persons living with disabilities are also subject to the same negative impacts.

Enhancing and improving social services in the Pacific is still work in progress and there is a need to broaden social protection schemes in the region to support greater numbers of vulnerable and marginalised communities and people. Improving these services will ensure that we leave no one behind in the Pacific.

I thank you