Salutations:

- Excellencies
- Honourable Ministers
- Distinguished Representatives of United Nations agencies
- Senior Government officials
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Talofa. I bring warm greetings from the Blue Pacific region. It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum. We would also like to acknowledge the Chair of this Conference and wish her well in leading the deliberations.

2. I wish to thank the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for convening this annual meeting in preparation for CSW next year as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action – to date, the most comprehensive policy agenda for the empowerment of women.

3. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, whilst the Pacific has come a long way in the 25 years since Beijing, there are still many challenges that women and girls face. Realizing the human rights of Pacific women and girls is a daily struggle for many.

4. Despite legislative reform, the lack of enforcement means that violence against women and girls remains a scourge afflicting the Pacific, with approximately two out of three women having faced some form of violence in their lifetime.

5. The Pacific region, outside of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the French Territories, has the lowest level of women’s political participation in the world due, in large part, to social barriers. There is limited funding for national women’s machineries, and a lack of women’s access to formal employment and equal pay for equal work, and limited or no availability of evidence-
based, accessible and stigma-free Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services.

6. These challenges are further intensified by global factors that have a very real impact on our communities. These include regional priorities identified by our Leaders that must be addressed in order to secure our future in the Pacific. We see first-hand the impacts and implications of the climate change crisis facing our Pacific island nations. Disaster strikes at the heart of every Pacific islander - climate change has been identified as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the Pacific people.

7. In our region, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the effects of disasters and climate change. Pacific women lack access to relevant information, decision-making authority and resources for disaster preparedness and response, further increasing gender inequalities. The Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific places a priority on integrating gender considerations in the planning and implementation of all activities.

8. Natural Disasters and associated humanitarian responses often intensify risks for women and girls, more so those living with disabilities. I cannot stress enough that mitigation and adaptation efforts must take the realities of women and girls into account to ensure their voices are heard and their needs met.

9. Regional security, oceans and maritime boundaries, and nuclear contaminants have also been identified by Pacific Leaders as regional priorities. These issues affect Pacific women and girls daily – in terms of human security and safety, economic livelihood and empowerment, and health and reproductive issues.

10. Despite the challenges, our will to address gender equality gaps remains undaunted. Within our own region, in 2012, our Leaders committed to the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights.
11. We continue to work towards strengthened policies and measures to address gender inequality, using CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and our regional frameworks.

12. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the last 25 years, the Blue Pacific has made significant progress towards gender equality including gender parity at primary school level and increased numbers of girls and women in secondary and tertiary levels in most Pacific countries, progressing legislative frameworks, reducing maternal mortality, and strengthening women’s and girls’ leadership and economic empowerment opportunities.

13. Our governments know that we cannot do this alone and are working in partnership with civil society and development partners. Working collaboratively as a region is testament to the Pacific’s determination to meet commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 5 by 2030.

   - We acknowledge the importance of our global counterparts and we urge you to support and work alongside us.

   - We call on the global community to support our efforts to address gender inequality, end violence against all women and girls, improve safety, leadership and economic empowerment for women and girls.

   - We urge the international community to take urgent action on the climate change crisis facing our Pacific island nations. Urgent action by the international community to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is critical to keep us on the 1.5°C pathway.

14. Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, as we reflect on regional and global efforts since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, we must strengthen and reinvigorate our efforts towards advancing gender equality. The road ahead will not be easy, but it, most certainly, will not be in vain.
I thank you.