Statement by Hon Vatau Mefi Hui

Minister for Internal Affairs

Head of Delegation

On the Occasion of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review

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Madam Chair

Allow me to convey our congratulations on your assumption as Chair of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference, on the Review of the Beijing+25 Declaration and Platform for Action. We look forward to a successful review in the coming 3 days, and I pledge my delegation’s full support to you.

Madam Chair

We congratulate the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, for convening this meeting in preparation for the 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, and in bringing together Governments and Civil Society Organisations from across the Asia-Pacific region, to review our progress with key actions, share good practices, and to address key challenges encountered on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the advancement of women and girls in the Region.

Madam Chair
Tonga aligns itself with the statement delivered by Samoa, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group.

Madam Chair

The Government’s Voluntary National Reporting, highlighted improved coordination amongst stakeholders, and will be instrumental for the effective implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda. It will therefore provide information on key issues, and on selected priority programs, as contained in the Tonga Strategic Development Framework II.

Madam Chair

Tonga’s National Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy 2019-2025, envisions a gender equality society with 5 outcome objectives for;

- an enabling environment, for mainstreaming gender across Government policies, programs and services including;
- Equitable access to economic assets and employment;
- Increased women’s leadership and equitable political representation;
- Create equal conditions to respond to natural disasters and environmental and climate change; and
- Increased focus on addressing the additional vulnerability experienced by female headed households, women with disabilities, and women in rural areas and in the outer islands.

Madam Chair

The 2016: National Stakeholders Forum on Gender, which resulted in the production of a matrix capturing women’s empowerment and gender equality initiatives in Tonga, and a Gender Audit of the Public Service Commission, identified avenues for promoting gender equality in the Tonga’s Strategic Development Framework II 2015-2025, and Government’s commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Madam Chair

The development of a Sexual Harassment Policy in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Public Service Commission, is planned for early next year, and will make the workplace a safer place for women.

Madam Chair

Tonga has prioritized social protection and human rights with a focus on vulnerable groups. To address the additional vulnerability experienced by female headed households, women with disabilities and women in rural and in the outer islands, Government approved the National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2014-2018, and designated the Social, Protection and Disability Division in 2015, as well as approved the National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development 2014-2018.

Madam Chair

Tonga promotes decent work including those in the informal sector and public private partnerships for improved service delivery.

Madam Chair

We have become the 187th Member State of the ILO in 2016, and we are currently developing the first decent work country program, and plan to include Tripartite partners and representative organizations in the informal sector, including the participation of women, youth and disabled persons.

Madam Chair

Government enforced the Family Protection Act 2013 (FPA) which provided greater protection to victims and survivors against family violence. A 24 hour 7 days counselling free helpline under for victims and survivors of family violence was established in 2017.
Madam Chair
Climate Change continues to pose serious threats to the environment and livelihood of the people of Tonga. A National Climate Change Policy and Joint National Action Plan 2018-2028 provide strategies for climate actions. A Climate Change Trust Fund has been established to strengthen coping capacities of all vulnerable communities in 2017, with Gender components in policies, major plans and projects involving climate change, disaster risk reduction and resilience building including the Outer Islands Renewable Energy Project (OIREP); Nuku’alofa Urban Development Sector Plan (UNDSP).

Madam Chair
We remain committed to support the implementation of the 2030 development agenda through genuine and durable partnerships with development partners.

Madam Chair
Tonga has progressed in the 25 years since the Beijing Declaration, however there are still many challenges and barriers that our women and girls faced. In spite of legislative reform, policy development and accessible funding to support service providers, the impact of culture and religion in the community, is the largest influence on the enforcement of legislation and policies, to eliminate violence against women and girls, and should be mainstreamed across all programming. Response and Prevention Frameworks including Service Delivery Protocol for survivors of domestic violence is Tonga’s strategy to address this.

Madam Chair
CEDAW continues to be a contentious issue in Tonga’s parliament and community however, 8 petitions against ratification from the public cannot be ignored. Government is consulting from a top down process to ensure national consensus in progressing with this Convention.

Madam Chair
Tonga commits to the achievements of gender equality commitments by engaging in Pacific Leaders Declarations on Gender Equality, the Boe Declaration and Kainaki II, and with donors
and local stakeholders, in recognizing national priorities and systems, and in the areas of finance, technological upgrade, technical support, capacity building and statistics

Madam Chair
The challenges of limited funding for national women’s machineries continues to be a barrier to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and we appreciate the partnership with UN Agencies, DFAT and the ADB, to enable the acceleration of the progress for women’s empowerment, gender equality in Agenda 2030, and Beijing Platform for Action.

Madam Chair
The Kingdom of Tonga looks forward to engaging closely with regional and international organizations, civil society on women’s empowerment, and to achieve these goals for the betterment of all women, men, boys and girls.

Madam Chair
We recognize regional collaboration and partnerships for the acceleration of the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment in our country. We call on the continual support of development partners on the implementation of the Agenda 2030, and to realize gender equality and the elimination of violence against women and on the Climate Change Crisis.

I thank you Madam Chair.
Malo ‘Aupito