

Helen Hakena

APFSD Opening Speech

Dear Delegates and friends

It is with a heavy heart that I address you today.

Two days ago, during the civil society preparatory meeting I received the tragic news that my 6 month old grandson passed away.

Born prematurely, his short life was a struggle. Without adequate hospitals on our Island of Bougainville, PNG life is often a struggle.

Infant and maternal mortality is not new to me.

Bougainville suffered a 20 year war when one of the world's largest open pit mines, Paguna, destroyed our rivers, our lands and environment but also destroyed our communities.

This unfair, unsustainable environment lead to a war. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army burnt my home. I was seven months pregnant and suffering from Malaria. I was petrified and gave birth to my fourth son prematurely on a bare floor with no medical help.

In that abandoned bank I witnessed another mother die in childbirth and another baby die.

Women were raped as a weapon of war. This conflict led to militarized communities, a whole generation of children missed out on going to school – they were 'left behind' with no education and no chance to learn community knowledge or skills.

And what do you think it leads to? It leads to the world's highest rates of violence against women. Two years ago a UN study found that 62% of men admitted to raping women in Bougainville.

Even though the mines and logging on our Island produced hundreds of millions of dollars in profit, our Island did not become prosperous. Less than 1% of the profits of the mine went to the local communities.

Now we face another enormous threat – climate change.

The people of the Islands surrounding Bougainville are already being relocated – they are the world's first climate refugees. People who have lived without electricity, without contributing climate emissions are now suffering the consequences of the world's greed and consumption.

In a world where:

- 6 men own more wealth than half the world's population,
- where 30 trillion dollars sits in tax havens,
- where 10 companies have more revenue than 180 countries combined

We must ask ourselves whether we need more prosperity or just fairer prosperity?

If we want a region where children are no longer likely to die in the first year of life, where they can enjoy quality healthcare, clean drinking water, education and nutrition and renewable and sustainable energies, we must focus on redistribution of our existing wealth.

This planet and our resources are our common wealth, they belong to all of us and to our future generations.

I know it would take brave governments and a different UN to resist the weight of corporate power and wealthy people. I know how hard it would be to cooperate to collect more taxes, to put a moratorium on new coal mines, to protect all our rivers, to agree to a regional living wage, to guarantee all people free healthcare and lifelong social protection. To deliver Development Justice.

But it is possible. We have the wealth. We just need the political will.

And if we don't, more children will be denied a future they would have wanted.

