

MEDIA RELEASE

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Local civil society groups sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) affirming solidarity in supporting government commitments to gender equality and participation and empowerment of women and girls in Tonga.

Launch of the new FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT) network to support and empower women

Friday 16 October 2020 (Nukua'lofa, Tonga): The Prime Minister of Tonga, Honourable Dr. Pohnuva Tu'i'onetoa has officiated the national launch of the new FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT) network to support and empower women and girls particularly during the COVID-19 and TC Harold response.

FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga, formerly known as the Women in Leadership Coalition, aims to promote women's full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, cultural, private and public life. This includes supporting commitments prioritised by the Government of Tonga through its National Policy on Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga (WEGET).

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, all members of the FFFT agree to work together with other relevant stakeholders' to honour, respect and support the government's international, regional and national commitments towards gender equality and empowering women and girls through WEGET and under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.

The Chair of FFFT, Mrs Betty Blake, highlighted that membership for FFFT is open.

"We invite women's groups and individual women who support the purpose, values and goals of FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga to join the network," Mrs Blake said.

"This is an important network which, under its former name of the Women in Leadership Coalition, has been instrumental in supporting and representing the voices of 574 women from the informal sector impacted by the COVID-19 response, who are now accessing government grants," she said.

Mrs Blake explained that the Women in Leadership Coalition has been renamed to reflect its solidarity in promoting the active participation of women and girls in all levels and areas of political, economic, cultural, private and public life. The signing of the MoU by the members endorses their unity on common principles, goals and values which will help manage competing priorities and ensure that they work collaboratively to progress and achieve the purpose of FFFT.

FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga comprises representatives of organisations and associations working in the gender and development sector. The FI-E-FI-A'a Fafine Tonga acknowledges the Balance of Power program, Tonga Country Office, in facilitating and supporting FFFT's work. Balance of Power is an initiative of the Australian Government-funded Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) program.

ENDS

About FI-E-FI-A 'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT): FI-E-FI-A 'a Fafine Tonga (FFFT) is a network of passionate women working under the umbrella of Civil Society Forum Tonga. The founding members of FFFT are mostly founders of their own non-government organisations whose passion to advocate for women's issues brought them together. FFFT is a platform for women and girls to promote and advocate for equal contributions and access to equal opportunities and results. FFFT also works with other

stakeholders to ensure women and girls are confident and free to make decisions about their life and future.

The organisations who originally formed FFFT under its former name as the Women's Coalition include the Ma'a Fafine moe Famili (MFF), Tonga National Centre for Women and Children (TNCWC), Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC), Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC), Public Service Association (PSA), Civil Society Forum Tonga (CSFT) and the Talitha Project with support from Regional Rights Resource Team and more recently, FFFT received individual members with Dr. Rev. 'Ungatea Fonua Kata joining the network.

Under their former name, the Women in Leadership Coalition, the FFFT network in the past ten years has achieved milestones such as the enactment of the Family Protection Act 2014, and the election of first woman District Officer and Town Officer in the local government election of 2016.

Balance of Power

The Balance of Power program is an innovative approach to supporting Pacific Island countries achieve their objectives of inclusive and effective leadership in line with national policy frameworks. Specially, Balance of Power aims to contribute to a 'better balance' in women's and men's leadership roles and opportunities.

Balance of Power is supported by the Australian Government through Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) with its first phase focusing on Vanuatu and Tonga.