

Big networks for women parliamentarians from small island states

Niue [Leadership And Decision-Making](#)

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The Honourable Maureen Melekitama attended the second Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Australian Regional Conference hosted by the Victorian Parliament in Melbourne, Australia in August 2017. Ms Melekitama met with women parliamentarians from Australia and other Pacific Island countries and participated in professional development training for women parliamentarians.

Just three months earlier, Ms Melekitama had won her seat in the Niue Parliament. Her name was drawn by lot following a tie in the votes between her and another candidate in the village of Mutalau. Ms Melekitama’s election increased the percentage of women in Niue’s 20-seat Parliament to 25 per cent, the highest number ever in the country and among the 14 Pacific Island countries Pacific Women supports.

The conference program included sessions on: empowering women in leadership and political participation; violence against women parliamentarians; family friendly practices in parliaments; work/life balance; and life after politics. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University

facilitated two practical training workshops on public speech writing, media performance and using social media effectively.



The Honourable Maureen Melekitama. Photo credit: Australian High Commission, Wellington.

The conference provided an opportunity for Ms Melekitama to build relationships with other women parliamentarians outside Niue. With Niue's small population, these broader networks are significant for Pacific women parliamentarians who are often isolated as the minority in their parliaments.

'Many of the challenges we face are common ones, including how to balance work and family commitments and how to be a strong representative voice for women in our community,' Ms Melekitama said. 'I appreciated the practical advice on how to write and deliver an effective public speech including holding your audience's attention. I returned from the conference not only with new connections, but also an appreciation of the opportunities I already enjoy as a Niuean woman and Parliamentary representative.'

The Honourable Sonya Kilkenny, a Member of Parliament in the Victorian State Parliament, said there were many benefits to bringing women from Australia and Pacific Island countries together for the conference.

'One of the key messages is that we are not alone,' she said. 'We have a lot of women in a lot of jurisdictions now who are very focused, who are very committed to achieving that goal – that goal being increasing representation of women in parliaments to properly represent our constituents.'