

Pacific Feminists and Activists: Re-framing, Re-articulating and Re-energizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights!

14 February 2013

We are Pacific feminist, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights advocates working for gender, erotic, economic, ecological justice and political transformation, from Chuuk Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Our diversity is our strength and we strongly call for the full recognition of lesbians, bisexual women, trans* people, intersex people, Fa'afafine, Fakaleiti (or Leiti) and other non-heteronormative Pacific identities, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, rural and remote women, young women, the girl child, older women and heterosexual women, at all stages of their lives¹, as rights holders with specific attention to our SRHR. Thus, any programs involving our communities must be initiated and implemented by our communities and our chosen allies, working from a human rights and gender equality framework. Nothing about us without us.

An inaugural gathering of a broad and diverse coalition of women and trans* people from key civil society organisations (CSOs), networks and alliances was held in Nadi, Fiji from the 12-15 February 2013, to take stock of the progress in SRHR made over the past 20 years by State and non-State actors. We critically analyzed, mapped and strategised towards more effective advancement of SRHR in the Pacific region.

We stress that bodily integrity and autonomy is at the core of all work on SRHR, and gender equality advancement in the Pacific region. Women and girls are sexual beings and have a right to enjoy their sexuality. Therefore, we call for the international adoption of sexual rights as human rights and reaffirm the protection and promotion of reproductive rights as human rights.

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From herein when we mention 'women and girls' we refer to specific identities and needs of lesbians, bisexual women, trans* people, intersex people, Fa'afafine, Fakaleiti (or Leiti) and other non-heteronormative Pacific identities, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, rural and remote women, young women, the girl child, older women and heterosexual women throughout their lives.

Pacific women and their communities are today confronted by an onslaught of complex and interlinked challenges that affect our ability to access our sexual and reproductive health and rights. We are motivated by the realities of extremely high levels of sexual and gender based violence; exceptionally high rates of STIs including Chlamydia² and the low and stagnant level of women parliamentary representatives across the Pacific, to urgently call for a reframing of analysis; re-articulation of SRHR strategies and re-energizing of the Pacific SRHR movement.

These affronting realities are a direct result of the refusal of States, development partners, UN Agencies and wider social movements to recognise the critical role and contributions of women and girls in the society and the State.

The State must therefore recognise, protect and promote the rights of women and girls to control their own bodies and sexualities, as agreed to in various regional and international human rights obligations. The rights of women and girls should not be bargained away by governments when they negotiate financial, trade, environmental and climate change agreements. All State policy must therefore, include recognition of women's critical roles within social reproduction and the care economy, and include attention to bodies and sexualities as core principles in our political analysis and action. The extractive nature of current production and consumption models, cause severe impacts on women's SRHR, mental wellbeing, food security, sea level intrusion, water quality and supply, which compounds the negative impacts on women's bodies, social relationships and Pacific societies.

We remind Pacific governments of their commitments and accountability to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and the declarations adopted by the Commission on the occasion of the tenth and fifteenth anniversaries of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Also reaffirming the international commitments made in the Programme of Action at the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation. We also reaffirm the Yogyakarta Principles³.

² For example, the prevalence of Chlamydia among under 25 pregnant women is 21% in Samoa and 40% in Fiji. In themselves these statistics are of grave concern, but further this is reason for grave concern for rates of HIV and AIDS in the region, which have differing and serious consequences for Pacific women and girls.

³ The Yogyakarta Principles, are principles on the application of International Human Rights Law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. www.yogyakartaprinciples.org

Reiterating that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1960, and the relevant conventions of the International Labour Organization, obligate our States to adopt legal and policy frameworks for the elimination and prevention of all forms of sexual and gender based violence.

Recalling the existing Pacific State commitments to gender equality; including the Pacific Leaders Declaration on Gender Equality (2012); the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012); the Final Communique of the 40th Pacific Islands Forum, including the Pacific Leaders Declaration on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (2010).

We remind the Pacific States of their obligations and accountability to translate gender equality and human rights commitments into legislation, policy and budget allocations, and to make these norms and standards the guiding principles of contemporary Pacific societies, and to be fully reflected in the National Development Strategies, Pacific Plan Review and the Post 2015 Development Agenda process and decisions. Failure to maintain progress in the implementation of these obligations would erode the gains of the last 20 years.

Urgent Calls to Action!

We immediately call for the following:

- Papua New Guinea State to repeal the Sorcery Act and investigate and prosecute all criminal cases to prevent further torture and extrajudicial killing of women and girls under the guise of eliminating witchcraft and sorcery. There must also be concerted efforts by States and regional and global institutions to ensure that the seriousness and frequency of these crimes are acknowledged and that these responses are immediate, strong and effective;
 - Rights to legal and safe abortion for all Pacific women and girls;
 - Address the alarming levels of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) amongst Pacific women and girls;
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- Recognition that lesbian, bisexual and trans* rights are women's rights and human rights, and to fulfill those rights;
- Repeal of all laws and policies in Pacific island states that criminalise same-sex relationships, and recognise all people with non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity as full and equal rights-holders;
- Decriminalisation of sex work and elimination of the unjust application of non-criminal laws and regulations against sex workers;
- The immediate ratification of CEDAW by Palau, and Tonga;
- Regional leaders to prioritise an immediate end to small arms trade and trafficking and the militarization of states that serve to perpetuate and reinforce patriarchal forms of power and control.

We further call for:

International adoption of **sexual rights** as human rights and the protection and promotion of **reproductive rights** as human rights. Full recognition and implementation of existing and emerging legal standards are urgently needed through policies, enabling legislation that complies to international human rights standards and universal, comprehensive, integrated and quality SRHR programs. For too long in the Pacific attention has been focused on reproductive health to the exclusion of sexuality, gender and human rights. We affirm the inextricable links between **bodily integrity and autonomy, SRHR and social justice** for Pacific women and girls.

We reaffirm the importance of full and equal participation of **women with disabilities** in all stages of the economic process including decision-making. We commit to strengthen focus on all forms of disability, HIV prevention and response and mental health as cross-cutting themes across all SRHR areas including the collection and gender analysis of accurate, and comprehensive data, prevention and redress of the effects of discrimination and exclusion and criminal sexual violence and exploitation, and access to services for effective participation in economic and social transformation.

We condemn **armed conflicts and political instability** for their devastating effect on the SRHR of women and girls in the Pacific. Armed conflicts escalate and intensify sexual and gender based violence; rape and sexual assault are used systematically as deliberate tactics to terrorize and intimidate women and destroy communities. The conditions of conflict also undermine access to sexual and reproductive health and mental health services for women and girls. We support women's full and equal participation in negotiating, monitoring and building lasting peace, and ending impunity for crimes of sexual violence committed during conflicts.⁴

We remind that CEDAW Article 14, paragraph 2 (a) obliges State Parties to ensure that **rural women** participate in the decentralisation of health education including SRHR services, and acknowledge that rural women's organisations and community based organisations must be adequately resourced in order to sustain this work. This has enormous potential to alleviate prohibitive economic and social costs, and would improve basic levels of response to crisis, maternal, mental health and other SRHR services, that are only available in urban centres. States are obligated to take measures to ensure universal access to multi-sectoral SRHR services and responses for all Pacific women and girls living in rural and remote communities, including establishing benchmarks and timelines.

The Pacific region is confronted by the onslaught of **globalised market forces through processes of trade, financial and services liberalization; land and ocean based extractive industries; climate and environmental changes; land grabs; biodiversity loss and pollution**. This further commodifies and compounds the burden on women's bodies, social relationships, communities and societies at large, increasing the labour required to meet basic needs such as adequate land and housing and sustainable livelihoods. State responses and accountability mechanisms, including in times of crisis, must be gender sensitive and inclusive, for example in disaster management, and Environmental and Social Impact Assessments.

We recognise **young women and girls as leaders** and urge all stakeholders to include and strengthen young women's full and equal participation at all levels and

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Examples include the ethnic tensions in the Solomon Islands, tribal fighting in PNG, political instability in Fiji, fragile peace in the autonomous region of Bougainville, and the ongoing political independence struggle of the people of Papua.

types of decision-making on SRHR. For too long young women's inclusion has been tokenistic. Young women's full and equal participation in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluating of sexual and reproductive health and sustainable development programs is critical.

It is the responsibility of States to prohibit and take action to eliminate **harmful practices**, including customary practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of any sex or gender identity; and change attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate and foster discrimination and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). This includes, traditional practices and psychological, physical and sexual violence, that includes; bullying in the home, school, workplace and community; sexual coercion; witch and sorcery related killings; polygamy; bride price; early and forced marriage, emotional, physical and sexual and gender based violence against people with non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity. Existing legislation to address SGBV must be strengthened. Support must be provided for survivors including free counseling services and legal redress with respect for their human rights, and with an emphasis on equity and respect for diversity.

We urge States, development partners, UN Agencies and wider social movements, to strengthen health systems and ensure that they prioritise **universal, comprehensive, integrated, confidential and quality sexual and reproductive health services, counseling, and information for women and girls**, with respect for their human rights with an emphasis on equity and respect for diversity. Comprehensive services include: gynecological care; all forms of safe and effective contraception; legal and safe abortion and post abortion care that is informed, affordable, accessible and free from coercion, discrimination and stigma, providing support and protection mechanisms that promote the right to choose; informed maternity care, and prevention; timely diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, breast and reproductive cancers, and infertility. Ideally, these should be integrated, one-stop services tailored to women's needs throughout our life cycles, with effective referral.

We call for the implementation of programs that educate and empower women and girls, to provide rights-based, non-discriminatory, non-judgmental, age appropriate, gender-sensitive health education including women-friendly, evidence based **comprehensive sexuality education** that is context specific in formal and informal settings, through reducing barriers and allocating adequate budgets. All CSE

programs and activities must be provided in a manner that is human rights based and upholds global human rights standards and with reference to the WHO working definition of sexual rights, the Yogyakarta Principles and that meets the needs of diverse Pacific women and girls.

The Pacific needs improved **collection, documentation, dissemination and a gender based analysis of reliable data** on SRHR on a regular basis, at the regional, national and local levels. Research must be initiated and implemented by communities and their chosen allies, with attention to community privacy, safety and security. We assert that effective, evidence based advocacy and participatory research cannot be accomplished without adequate and quality resources and financial support. We call on States, development partners and wider social movements to invest in building the capacity of women and girls, to collect and validate data, ensuring women-led and women-friendly monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the design, planning and implementation of regional national and local policies and programmes.

We appeal to States to institutionalise mandatory and ongoing **capacity building for public officials and service providers** working in the areas of education, health, social welfare, justice and immigration, as well as the judiciary, police and military. In addition we call for ongoing capacity building for the media, CBOs, community leaders and faith-based institutions to effectively address SRHR in accordance with the principles of human rights, non-discrimination, respect, equality and inclusivity, with a gendered, multicultural and secular approach; and put in place accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance of public officials with laws and regulations.

As a coalition of Pacific feminist SRHR advocates working for gender, erotic, economic and ecological justice and political transformation, we strongly affirm that our **local, national, regional and global networks** are critical. We acknowledge our work in partnership with other feminist, human rights, and wider social justice and sustainable development organisations and networks, especially *Our Rights, Our Lives - Women's Call to Action Toward Cairo+20*. States must live up to agreed commitments, and civil society advocacy initiatives towards full and substantive gender equality, for all.

We call on all States, development partners, bilateral and multilateral organisations, regional and international inter-governmental agencies and wider social movements to work with us as partners, and **effectively resource, recognise, promote and support** this transformative approach to addressing SRHR for women and girls in the Pacific.

Finally, we demand that all sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes in our region are informed, developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated by Pacific women and girls.

This statement was developed and endorsed by the following Pacific organisations and individuals, at Nadi, Fiji on 14 February 2013:

1. **Virisila Buadromo**, Executive Director, Fiji Women's Rights Movement
2. **Noelene Nabulivou**, Executive Committee Member, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)/ Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
3. **Tarusila Bradburgh**, Pacific Youth Council
4. **Shirley Tagi**, Coordinator, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
5. **Kairangi Samuela**, Punanga Tauturu Inc, Cook Islands Womens Counselling Centre
6. **Sulivenusi Waqa**, Creative Director, Haus of Khameleon, Fiji
7. **Maraia Tabunakawai**, Girls Officer, Fiji Women's Rights Movement
8. **Tahere Siisiialafia**, Samoa; Pacific Youth Council Board Member
9. **Ladonna Daniel**, Pacific Youth Council /Vanuatu National Youth Council
10. **Miki Wali**, Youth & Transgender Activist, Drodrolagi Movement
11. **Nukutau Pokura**, Pacific Youth Council/Cook Islands National Youth Council
12. **Makerita Vuli**, Fiji Association of the Deaf
13. **Milikini Failautusi**, Pacific Youth Council/Tuvalu National Youth Council
14. **Katrina Ma'u**, Tonga
15. **Vani Dulaki**, Executive Director, Fiji Network Plus
16. **Vilisi Gadolo**, Youth and SRHR, Mental health advocate
17. **Viva Tatawaqa** , Management Collective Member, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)

18. **Laisani Rakula**, Youth Worker, SRH & Mental health advocate, Youth Champs 4 Mental Health.
19. **Sereima Damuni**, Community Mobiliser. Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
20. **Elizabeth Cox**, PNG
21. **Etta Tuitoga**, Programs Coordinator, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
22. **Jenta Tau** , General Secretary, Young Women's Christian Association of Solomon Islands (YWCA SI)
23. **Doris Dakei**, Coordinator, Sista Savve Project SIPPA/YWCASI/FPI NZ
24. **Angelyn Singh**, Fiji
25. **Audrey Seru**, Management Collective Member, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
26. **Bronwyn Tilbury**, Young Women's Coordinator, Fiji Women's Rights Movement
27. **Lucille Sain**, Chuuk National Youth Council, Pacific Youth Council
28. **Mamta Chand**, Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA)
29. **Rani Ravudi**, Co-Coordinator, Survivors Advocacy Network (SAN)
30. **Filomena Tuivanualevu**, Young Women's Officer, Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)
31. **Jasmine Kaur**, Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance/Oceania Pride
32. **Paulini Turagabeci**, Fiji

WE WELCOME FURTHER INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL ENDORSEMENTS: Please send your name, organisation/affiliations (if applicable) and your community group/state/territory to: shirleytagi@gmail.com by **Thursday 28 February 2013.**