

Local action, global movements: WUTMI commemorates the 16 Days of Activism 2018

Republic Of The Marshall Islands

SHARE

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In November and December 2018, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) joined government ministries, local civil society organisations and the global gender equality movement in the commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

‘Ending violence is not a one-man job,’ said Candida Kaious, Program Coordinator of WUTMI’s *Weto in Mour* support service for women and girls. ‘Commemorating the 16 Days of Activism is a very important thing for WUTMI because we get to work with partners to [take action and fight against] violence against women.’

The 16 Days of Activism commemorations began with an opening ceremony, held in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs. The event was attended by over 80 people and included a walk-a-thon and screening of videos that featured strong Marshallese women. The event garnered positive feedback from the community members attending as well as increased awareness of the work of WUTMI.



Attendees of the 16 Days of Activism Opening Ceremony. Photo credit: WUTMI.

During the opening, Hilda Heine, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, highlighted the work of WUTMI to support survivors of domestic violence:

‘The Weto in Mour program helps with access to police assistance, health services and emergency medical treatments, legal advice and getting protection orders and financial assistance,’ said President Heine. She added that the government was also working on two bills, the Labor (Minimum Conditions) Bill and Gender Equity Bill, to add to the effort to end violence against women and recognise ‘the valuable contribution of women as equal partners’ in the country’s development.

As the 16 Days of Activism continued, WUTMI joined other civil society organisations in commemorations.

For World AIDS Day, an event was organised by the Ministry of Health and Human Services with Youth to Youth in Health. It included HIV/STI screening and remarks from a guest speaker who highlighted reproductive health issues faced by young people.

In the Republic of the Marshall Islands, a week was dedicated to the commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disability. Students, Cristelle Keju from Marshall Island High School and Crysline Mathsula from Majuro Deaf Education Center, shared messages and reflections in line with the theme of ‘Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’.

A candlelight vigil was held to mark the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women on 6 December 2018. The day originated in Canada and is the anniversary of 1989 École Polytechnique massacre. Commemorations of this day are an opportunity for change and awareness about the power dynamics between men and women, including the need to end domestic and gender-based violence. During the vigil, Ramona Levy Strauss, president of WUTMI, called on men and women to uphold love and respect for one another.



WUTMI staff with Honourable Amenta Matthew, the Minister of Culture and Internal Affairs (second from left), and President Hilda Heine (fourth from right). Photo credit: WUTMI.

As the commemorations came to an end, a small ceremony has held at the College of the Marshall Islands. Wallace Peter, Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, underscored the goal of gender equality on behalf of the Honourable Minister Amenta Matthew:

‘One of the main goals for our national government is zero tolerance of any discrimination against both men and women in the community, home and in the workplace,’ he said.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign to challenge violence against women and girls. The campaign runs every year from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day.

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development supports WUTMI’s *Iden Mwekun* (Place of Life) Program. Funding support also enabled the establishment of *Weto in Mour*, the first domestic violence support centre in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.