

Meet PNG's Governor Julie Soso Akeke

Papua New Guinea

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~ Governor Julie Soso Akeke

At the third Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships forum, Pacific Women had the opportunity to meet with many of the Pacific women parliamentarians gathered for the three-day forum to discuss ways to address gender equality.

Governor Julie Soso Akeke shares her experience of advancing gender equality in Papua New Guinea by being the first woman to be elected into Parliament from the Highland region.

Tell us a little bit about yourself...

I am the Governor of Eastern Highland Province and am responsible for the wellbeing of almost 600,000 people. There are 22 Provinces that make up Papua New Guinea. The Eastern Highland Province has eight electorates and 24 local government councils.

What motivated you take part in the elections?

My father is the paramount chief of our tribe and a pioneer leader who brought about development in our province. I wanted to continue his legacy. I

also stood for elections because I wanted women to get up there and participate equally in national decision-making. If other women cannot make it, I must be the one to break the glass ceiling. I am proud that there are more of us in Parliament, especially more indigenous women. I also wanted to break the glass ceiling for women in not just PNG but also in my region. There are four regions in PNG and there had never been a woman from my region, the Highland region, to make it to Parliament before me. I am the first one to break the glass ceiling and I am expecting more women to come into Parliament in 2017.

The governorship is an elected position and it was the first time for me to run for Parliament. I am very proud to be the Governor of the second largest province in PNG. After the five year term is over, I am looking forward to coming back in the next term in 2017.

Tell us about your experience being part of the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnership forum...

I was part of the forums held in Australia and Tonga. The issue of family violence that we're discussing at this forum, is one that is affecting the whole of the Pacific region and the world. We need to seriously address it as legislators. At this forum, I am learning how to use legislation to eliminate violence against women within the family unit by listening to the experiences of others in the region. I acknowledge Australia's support in making this happen as well to the Fijian Government for hosting us. All nations have their own ways of eliminating violence against women but I really like the idea of going back and possibly establishing our own Parliamentary Committee that will look at family violence. We already have an Act in place which looks at family and domestic violence as a crime but we need to implement it better. We need to take it to the civil society, to the churches and implementing partners, such as the police. Everybody should take ownership and make it their business to eliminate family violence.

What's the situation in PNG like when it comes to family violence and violence against women?

In PNG, about eight out of 10 families are affected by family violence. It's a serious problem. Women are often victimized and sorcery-related violence against women is a big concern for us. Women are always being accused of practising witchcraft and some have been murdered. These murders also affect the families of the victims – seeing their mother or sister being burnt, being cut to pieces, being killed and thrown into the toilet. What happens is

that, often families of the victims take revenge against the family who committed the crime and the cycle continues. This happens in villages and tribes and many times, is the cause of tribal fights. We need to implement the Acts and legislations to stop this.