

Minister Scotty: It's important to invest in women

Nauru

SHARE

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~ Minister Charmaine Scotty

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

Minister Charmaine Scotty shares her experience of advancing gender equality in Nauru and the importance of gender budgeting.

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

I am Nauru's Minister for Home Affairs, Education and Land Management. This is the first time I've attended the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnership forum. I was unable to attend the last two forums because Nauru only has six Ministers and three must always be on the island if others are travelling. I wasn't able to travel out as three of my colleagues were away.

I am very pleased to be part of this forum because it is an opportunity to connect with other women Members of Parliament in the region, including our colleagues from Australia and New Zealand. It was important for me to meet and network with others to fill in the gaps for what I am trying to achieve for the women of Nauru.

How is violence against women being addressed in Nauru?

Today's discussions on violence against women and protection of children, are two very important discussions for all our countries who are at different stages of addressing some of the challenges associated with this. Nauru ratified CEDAW[1] in 2011 but we haven't done anything after that. We are now working on our report to the Committee and also working on our second UPR[2] report.

Right now we're organising national awareness workshops for women in Nauru to see what sort of issues they are facing in their daily lives. We are trying to get them to fully understand what CEDAW is, how it can be of use to them and how it can protect their rights. In my session here at the forum, I had shared about women in Nauru not really understanding their rights. It's something you don't think about. You know the police is there, the court is there but you don't really connect it as access to justice to safeguard your rights. So right now, we're focusing on legal and financial literacy. We want our women to be economically empowered as well so they are financially independent and don't need to depend on others, especially abusive partners.

We're also working with our new Gender Based Violence Specialist to assist us in identifying our needs regarding a safe house, counselling services and so on. We may soon be running a SHED program, short for Self Help Ending Violence, in partnership with a university in Melbourne. This program is aimed at our menfolk in trying to get them to understand why they are being abusive. It's pretty new and they have just done a presentation and I am pleased to say that Cabinet is supportive of getting the SHED program up and running for our men in Nauru.

One of our biggest priorities is to get a separate legislation for family violence. The plans of the former Government and the Justice Department was to update the Criminal Code which is very old. It's the old Queensland Criminal Code and that's been with the Attorney General's Office in Canberra for more than 6-7 years. The idea back then was to revise it with new provisions on rape, etc. But we no longer want that and we're now working with the Justice Department and the Gender Based Violence Specialist to draft a separate legislation. Along with pushing for a separate legislation, we're also keeping in mind the budget needed to implement it. That's why in my session today, I focused on the importance of strengthening our gender budgeting skills. I am hoping Nauru will receive support from aid agencies and regional bodies on this because once we get proper training, we'll be able to properly align all the different Ministries' budgets better. This will help reduce duplication of programs.

Is it challenging being the lone voice in Parliament for gender equality?

Considering the size of the population, which is around 10,000 with women outnumbering men, it's less challenging than other countries. Aside from schooling in Auckland, I have always been in Nauru, so I know the communities well and it's made my work as the lone woman parliamentarian and the lone woman in Cabinet, easier.

But the Cabinet is very supportive. All my male colleagues are very supportive and they understand the importance of human rights and importance of development for everyone. They know what the women of Nauru are capable of and that it is important to invest in them.

In all our countries we have really big budgets for education, so what is the point of educating our women if we are not going to utilise them? If they are better at being in Parliament than being cooks in the house then why not utilise their potential? Women are best placed in areas of work which depict their strengths, utilises their full potential and enables their full participation as equal citizens in their societies.

That's what I believe in and I also believe in Government providing good services to its people equally – where people's money is used wisely by Governments and leaders, where equity and equality is enabled for all. We must provide services that are needed, not just the Band-Aid type of services. That's the point of having a good budget – one that addresses the needs of your people and where you use the peoples' money wisely.

[1] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

[2] Universal Periodic Review