



Submission No 21

Inquiry into Australia's aid program and its impact on human rights and security in the Pacific

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INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF AUSTRALIAN AID TO THE PACIFIC IN PROMOTING AND ENHANCING HUMAN RIGHTS AND SECURITY IN THE REGION

1. This submission draws the Human Rights sub-committee's attention to the link between women's political representation and good political governance and the importance of supporting and promoting women's participation at all levels of government in the Pacific. The Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand) has the lowest level of women in Parliament in the world. Five countries in the Pacific region currently have no women in parliament at all.

General statement

2. The Office for Women is within the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and provides policy advice to the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, on issues that affect women in Australia and in our region. The Minister has indicated that she is keen to work with her Parliamentary colleagues to promote Pacific women's leadership.
3. This submission focuses on the "good governance measures" element of the Terms of Reference of the Human Rights sub-committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into the *Impact of Australian Aid to the Pacific in Promoting and Enhancing Human Rights and Security in the Region*.
4. The Office for Women wishes to highlight the link between women's political representation and good political governance. International instruments, the recent Australian Government white paper on Australian Aid and Pacific women themselves are calling for measures to improve women's political representation because of the beneficial impact it will have on good political governance in the region.
5. A practical step towards building stronger leaders in the region could be achieved by strengthening regional networks of female parliamentarians and using our rich resource of past and present female parliamentarians in Australia to mentor their Pacific Island counterparts.
6. Current endeavours by current and past female parliamentarians to promote women's leadership in Pacific parliaments would provide a foundation for further work in this area. Examples of female parliamentarians' work in the region include Senator Kay Patterson's involvement in training women candidates in Laos as part of a UNDP project to strengthen their National Assembly and former Senator Margaret Reid's work to strengthen parliamentary institutions in developing countries, particularly the Pacific.

Review of key international and domestic instruments and forums

7. International agreements and forums emphasise the importance of women's full participation in the political, economic and social activities of society. These are noted below.
8. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, reaffirmed that women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for justice or democracy. Without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, development goals cannot be achieved.¹
9. Other international undertakings that affirm the principle of equal participation of women and men in power and decision making include the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women², United Nations Security Council resolution 1325³ and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals⁴.
10. Forums within the Pacific have identified that improving women's representation in decision making is important to the development of the region. The Auckland 2004 Pacific Island Forum Leader's meeting called for measures to address the low levels of women in decision making within the framework of the Pacific Plan and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action⁵. The outcomes from a Pacific Regional Workshop on Advancing Women's representation held in April 2006 also noted that the representation of women in politics is critical to achieving democracy and the wellbeing of Pacific communities.
11. In the Australian Government white paper, *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Sustainability*, released on 26 April 2006, gender equality is identified as an overarching principle cutting across all aspects of the paper's strategic framework. It indicates that gender equality is integral to governance and stability and that gender equality should include, among other things, consideration of women's participation and leadership in decision making, the human rights of women and efforts to eliminate discrimination against women.⁶ The paper identified the need to build stronger leadership and stated that a particular focus will be given to strengthening the regional network of female parliamentarians and leaders.⁷
12. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP, released *Pacific 2020: challenges and opportunities for growth* on 10 May 2006. Pacific 2020

¹ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Outcome G: Women in power and decision making, p.109

² See Article 7 on Political and Public Life, United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

³ Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) holds that women's rights will be protected and that barriers to their equal participation and full involvement in the maintenance and promotion of sustainable peace will be removed.

⁴ The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) form a blueprint which all the 191 United Nations Member States have agreed to meet by 2015. The third Millennium Development Goal is to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and one of the indicators that this has been achieved will be the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

⁵ The Revised Pacific Platform for Action affirms as one its goals the "Full Participation of women in political and public decision-making".

⁶ *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability: A White Paper on the Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program*, p.22

⁷ *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability: A White Paper on the Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program*, p.43

identified governance as one of four themes integral to economic growth in Pacific island countries and East Timor. In preparing Pacific 2020, sectoral experts were asked to prepare background papers to stimulate dialogue and debate. The background paper on Political Governance identified promoting the role of women as important in achieving good political governance. It argues that government policies, strategies and budgets need to better reflect the important roles and contributions of women in society.⁸

The role of women's political representation in improving good governance

13. Definitions of good governance often include notions of democracy, participation, equity and inclusiveness. The absence of women's representation in decision making diminishes democratic development and weakens political leadership by depriving society of potentially strong reservoirs of talent. Women's representation enables women's voices to be heard and increases the likelihood that Governments' policies reflect the important roles, contributions and needs of women in that society.
14. Women's representation also taps into the potentially beneficial influences, perspectives and intellectual capacity of women. Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development in Papua New Guinea, highlighted this in a recent keynote speech given as part of an induction program for new Solomon Islands parliamentarians and argued that the dearth of women in politics and Parliament comes at a cost, she said, "To waste half of the intellectual capacity of Melanesia by excluding women from our highest decision making institutions is madness. Affirmative action to make Parliament a more inclusive democratic institution is needed and that requires a commitment from men as well as women".⁹

Women's political representation in the Pacific

15. Parliaments in the Pacific region (along with those of the Arab states) remain at the bottom of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) world ranking of women in national parliaments (see Table below). The absence of adequate measures to improve women's political representation in the Pacific has contributed to this. When Australia and New Zealand are excluded from the IPU's regional analysis, the Pacific is the region with the lowest representation of women in parliament and, where women are represented, they generally represent less than 5 percent of the legislature. In five countries in the Pacific, women are not represented at all.
16. The road is likely to be long in improving the political representation of women in the Pacific. Although it was just over one hundred years ago that Australia led the world in enabling women to vote and stand for election, it was forty years before Enid Lyons was the first woman to take her place in the House of Representatives in 1943¹⁰. In the Pacific, women have received the right to vote only relatively recently with Tonga leading the way in 1960. It took another 30 years for all women in the region to secure the same right¹¹.

⁸ Cedric Saldanha, Development Consultant, Pacific 2020 Background Paper: Political Governance, p. 18

⁹ Extract from keynote speech given by Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development, PNG, at a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare as part of the National Parliament/UNDP induction program for new Solomon Island MPs, May 2006.

¹⁰ In 1943, Enid Lyons was the first woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. In that same year, Senator Dorothy Tangney was the first woman elected to the Senate.

¹¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women's suffrage: A World Chronology of the Recognition of Women's Rights to Vote and Stand for Election, www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm, accessed 15 May 2006.

17. Even so, immediate attention must be given to measures to strengthen gender equality in our region not least of which because of the critical role it will play in improving good political governance.

Table: Women's political representation in Pacific Island countries

Country	Size of legislature	Number of women MPs	Percentage of women MPs
Fiji#	71	6	6
Kiribati	42	2	5
Samoa	49	2	4
Vanuatu	52	2	4
Marshall Islands	33	1	3
Tonga	29	1	3
Papua New Guinea	109	1	1
FS Micronesia	14	0	0
Nauru	18	0	0
Palau	16	0	0
Solomon Islands	50	0	0
Tuvalu	15	0	0
Regional Totals	498	15	3%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 30 April 2006, www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm, accessed 13 June 2006.

Note: # Figures represent the total seats in the two chambers of parliament.

18. The Office for Women also draws the sub-committee's attention to the fact that many Australian women's organisations are involved in projects and other practical initiatives in the region. They have indicated that they are concerned about a lack of female representation, lack of access to basic health services, the 'feminisation' of HIV-AIDS, and the need to further implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.
19. Organisations such as the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities' Pacific Women's Bureau play a very important role in promoting gender equality and bringing Pacific women together to develop practical recommendations to address inequality. The Office for Women is also working closely with these organisations in international forums, such as the United Nations and Commonwealth, to highlight the issues facing women in the Pacific Islands region.