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**Statement
by**

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

**High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

**Annual Consultation of Commonwealth National Women’s
Machineries**

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Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

friends

I am so happy to share this important moment with you in my current role, but also as an Islander who in a previous life, supported the work on gender equality in the Pacific. Thank you to the Commonwealth Secretariat for giving me the opportunity to be with you, and thank you to the National Women's Machinery for your work.

We are experiencing great momentum for women's rights.

Women around the world loudly demand equality and dignity.

Yes, women's rights are human rights!

From the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the Mexico Conference, the Beijing Conference, the adoption of Agenda 2030 by the global community; the Samoa Pathway for the Small Islands Developing States and dare I say finally the creation of UN Women in 2010, there is one consistent message requiring urgent ACTION:

everyone has the right to live their life without the threat of violence and in dignity.

You, I, we - everybody has that right regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, caste, sexual orientation or citizenship. How can we accept femicide, the most extreme form of violence? Sadly- in 2018 for too many women we are not there at all in having equal rights for all ! Just go see a telling movie which was awarded an Oscar - A Fantastic Woman. Just look at the pictures of abused, battered women and children news bring to us every day. We look at it from the safe distance of our screens but this is a reality for far too many women and their children!

Ending violence against women and girls is possible. It is a moral imperative and also SMART policy as the studies on the cost of violence against women show all too clearly!

We have signed off on international agreements, and national laws and policies do exist, so is this a question of actually walking the talk contained in agreements and more leadership?

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says it clearly when adopted in December of 1948 - so 70 years ago!

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.

70 years later, all around the world every day women struggle to be given the space to exercise their full human rights.

We can be bystanders and continue to lament this situation at more meetings or we all, women and men, governments and international organizations, civil society organizations and individual citizens can do something to prevent violence against women.

Physical, sexual and emotional violence against women causes, and I do not have to tell this to you, serious short and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems BUT this also affects terribly their children and leads to high social and economic costs for ALL.

What if your little girl or little boy only see a pattern where their mother systematically gets abused?

What does it mean for them growing up and how they later will behave?

The cost of inaction is enormous and long lasting!

Let me share just some facts which will provide some benchmarks and comparisons on the economic cost of violence, since for many SIDs countries is a fairly new concept, and the financial and human resources costs of undertaking these studies in SIDs are prohibitive:

For Australia, it is estimated that violence against women and children costs an estimated 11.38 billion per year.

Annual costs of intimate partner violence were calculated at 5.8 billion dollars in the United States. That includes an estimated 4.1 billion dollars in the direct costs of medical and mental health care and 1.8 billion dollars in loss of productivity based on data from 1995. If we adjust these figures for inflation, this would represent 9.32 billion dollars in 2017.

Another study by Oxford University estimates the annual cost of domestic violence internationally at an astonishing 4.3 trillion dollars.

Now, this represents 15 times the amount that the world spends in official development assistance every year!!!

I can give you these few figures but let us not be fooled.

We still have a highly incomplete picture of the extent of violence against women. This lack of reliable data is a serious hindrance to formulate and implement effective strategy and policies.

So, after my first message for the need of **strong and sustained leadership** at global, regional, national and local levels to make the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a REALITY, my second message is:

It is with urgency that we must **scale up efforts to improve the availability and use of gender statistics**. Gender disaggregated data compilation and analysis is crucial to moving forward and design strategy, policies and programmes responsive to needs of women and girls. We must scale up everywhere what UN Women and the Gates Foundation initiated with their “Making Every Woman and Girl Count “programme. Right now, 80 per cent of the indicators for gender equality across the SDGs are lacking data! Only 41 per cent of countries regularly produce violence against women data, 15 per cent of countries have legislation that mandates specialised gender-

based surveys, and only 13 per cent of countries have a dedicated gender statistics budget. I am sure we can do better than this!

Efforts remain relatively recent but among the SIDS, several countries have conducted research to assess the cost of violence against women. As part of the efforts to strengthen the evidence base on violence against women, the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Marshall Islands and Palau have undertaken studies to understand the impact that this violence have on their societies.

These are critical efforts we must support. There will be no one size fits all solutions- we must invest much, much more in getting the facts, understanding what triggers violence in each society, and locality.

So, on the one hand we can be encourage to hear the voices of women loud and clear, and on the other we can be encouraged to see higher levels of commitment made by governments to promote gender equality and empowerment.

My third message though is:

we need to work harder and we need all to work **TOGETHER** to make sure that this level of **commitment is concretized into sustained action to support women and girls in our countries.**

We need much greater participation of women in national policy making, enhancing the legal protections and reforming discriminatory laws; ensuring prompt response and prosecution of perpetrators; address economic inequality and access to property rights and improve access to finance and technology and ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are in place to support the victims of violence.

So my final message is:

This **needs appropriate domestic and multi-lateral funding** owned by and properly anchored in the national public institutional systems.

Let us all work as partners to secure increased funding for women living with the immediate and long-term terrible impacts of domestic violence.

The EU-UN spotlight initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls is one step in the right direction. For the Pacific, the recent announcement is welcomed of the 18.9 million euros, for the EU and new Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls bringing together governments, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

We, the women who are here are the privileged women - so let us join our voices to make sure that the provision of public services to address violence against women is sustainable and constitutes an integral part of efforts to offer justice to those affected. Let us work together to scale up sensitization efforts to police, members of the judiciary, first responders and strengthen our legal system to end impunity.

Let us push for increased investment in education - education is a game changer as it can change attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.

Let us encourage and work together with civil society and advocacy groups and let us ensure that public institutions play their fundamental role in preventing violence against women happening in the first place.

Let us remind everybody that they signed off on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

So, today lets decide not to be by-standers but ACT - each and everyone one of us within our community, with every person we meet and especially in our work role and functions.

Thank you.