



## STATEMENT FOR THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

### AT THE GLOBAL LEADERS MEETING ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A COMMITMENT TO ACTION

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9:00am Sunday 27 September, 2015  
UN HQ, New York

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**The Co-Chairs**

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Mr President, I am honoured to take a stand alongside fellow global Leaders, pledging the political will and support of my Government to addressing the gaps in achieving true gender equality in my country.

I affirm the Political statement from the fifty ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women that governments need to take further, concrete actions to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Fiji boasts a gender-responsive, socially inclusive Constitution by which unfair discrimination on the basis of *“actual or supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including race, culture, ethnic or social origin, colour, place of origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, birth, primary language, economic or social or health status, disability, age, religion, conscience, marital status or pregnancy; or opinions or beliefs, except to the extent that those opinions or beliefs involve harm to others”* is unconstitutional.

I am pleased to state that Fiji is currently leading in the Pacific in the representation of women. For the first time, Fiji has a female Speaker of Parliament and a Secretary to Cabinet. In addition, the Secretary General to Parliament is also a women..

In my government, four women possess significant ministerial portfolios.

In our Public Service, all appointments are on a transparent and merit based system which has resulted in the recruitment of more women.

Over the last 7 years, my government has increased funding to the National Women's Machinery, by some 320%. The National Women's Machinery will continue to be supported with adequate funding and human resources to strengthen their capacity to have a strong gender database that can better influence policy.

This strong economic growth means more jobs and opportunities for Fijians including our women.

For the second time this year, my government is funding the National Women's Expo to celebrate International Rural Women's Day with the theme: *"Connecting Women to Markets- Making it Happen."*

We have amended our criminal laws to make it modern and gender inclusive. We removed the archaic rules of

corroboration of rape which stereotyped women and made it extremely difficult to secure convictions.

Our family laws have also been amended to recognise the rights of women in de-facto relationships and to provide legal protection in terms of spousal maintenance and property rights.

My government also introduced the first Domestic Violence law which amongst other things, allows any person to apply for a domestic violence restraining order and such applications are dealt with as a matter of urgency at any time of the day. The police are legally obligated to enforce measures to promote the safety and well-being of victims of domestic violence, particularly women and children.

Laws that once offered women almost no protection are now a vestige of the past.

We have strengthened our monitoring of the implementation of the Domestic Violence Decree through

a renewed Memorandum of Understanding between the National Women's Machinery and the Fiji Police Force.

In partnership with development and donor partners and women's NGOs, a series of activities is planned for the 16-days campaign. One of these will include a workshop on gender-based violence for members of parliament. These activities will also serve as building blocks for work we will roll out into the New Year.

Our Whole of Government focus is an attempt to break down the silos that separate ministries and diffuse efforts and encourage an inclusive and participatory approach. This will ensure that all Government agencies and departments and their staffs are sensitised to the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment and able to act.

We cooperate closely with and value our NGO women's services and their workers on the ground, and we rely on them to give us real-time information so we can effectively and efficiently apply resources where they are needed.

We are also strengthening partnerships with faith-based organisations to help us combat the scourge of violence against women and children.

We are leaving no stone unturned to ensure the success of our national gender policy and ensure that gender equality is a strong thread woven through all our work.

My Government is also committed to the agenda of building a cadre of male champions for gender mainstreaming within the public service, and we have committed funding resources by development and donor partners.

We are committed to building our expertise and the technical capacity in our men and women to make gender equality part of our culture, our identity and our national reputation.

I commit to ensuring that women's rights are fully protected and that women are safe and secure in their

persons and in their homes, through diligent enforcement of the laws that protect women, well-designed policies to improve the status of women, and a better resourced National Women's Machinery.

I thank you Mr Chair.