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**Statement
by
Hon. Tuilaepa Lufesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi
Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa
Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's
Empowerment:
A Commitment to Action
Sunday, 27 September 2015 at 3.00p.m.**

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished colleagues,

2015 is a landmark year for gender equality and women's rights. Significantly, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the time of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which very appropriately, includes the specific Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In Samoa, my Government is very conscious of gender equality and women's empowerment at the level of 'individual dignity', that is the entitlement of every person. We are also acutely aware that we must make every effort to develop and release the full potential of our women who make up at least fifty percent of Samoa's population. It is economically sensible!

We have already made important strides in the empowerment of our women with equal access to education as well as to employment opportunities. Indeed in Government, many of the ministries are led by women, including in many cases, their participation at the next management level in numbers that rivals the number of men holding managerial posts. Women are also active in the private sector and already

make a special mark in agriculture-based women in business enterprises that support village and rural community development.

Still, much remains to be done. I wish to briefly outline initiatives we are undertaking to embed the achievements so far made as well as to assure into the future gender equality and the advancement of women empowerment to reach its logical conclusion of releasing into our community the full potential of our women to contribute to the development and prosperity of our country.

Mr. Chair,

Samoa is committed to mainstreaming policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women across all sectors of Government – hence why my Government has issued a policy mandate through the development of Sector Planning Guidelines for the mainstreaming of gender, disability and young people across all sector plans.

Given that climate change affects men and women differently, we have now integrated fully the needs of women and girls into our national climate resilience, disaster prevention and response policies and operations.

In the legislative arena, the enactment of the “Family Safety Act 2013” was driven by recommendations from a prevalence study on violence against women. The Act provides protection orders for victims of violence and mandates for a collaborative approach between the Ministry of Police, Ministry of Justice and Courts and the Samoa Victim Support Group on handling domestic violence cases.

Our Government relies on the role of village women representatives who act as intermediaries between the Government and women at the grassroots level. In May 2015, salaries for women village representatives were raised to address the gender pay gap between men and women who are at the forefront of mobilizing their villages for community development.

Mr. Chair,

The call for increased representation of women in leadership roles led my Government to pass the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013, which

guarantees a minimum of 10 percent of seats for women in our National Parliament. With the General Elections in March next year, women representatives will now be an integral and permanent feature of our Parliament.

Mr. Chair,

The SAMOA Pathway, the outcome document of the SIDS Conference last September recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment and the full realization of human rights for women and girls have a transformative and multiplier effect on sustainable development. It is a driver of economic growth in SIDS and recognizes that Women can be powerful agents of change. In this regard, Samoa is committed as a SIDS to progress the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action within the new development agenda.

I thank you.