



Statement

by

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Governor**

**Eastern Highlands Province
Papua New Guinea**

to the

**“UN Women Stakeholders Forum on Challenges
and Achievements in the Implementation of the
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
for Women and Girls – The Road Ahead”**

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“Check against delivery”

**Mr Chairman;
Distinguished Colleague Panelists;
Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Thank you for giving me the floor to speak. I am honoured to participate in this session. On behalf of my Government and delegation and on my own behalf, I thank and commend UN Women for organising this event and for the invitation and hospitality.

I also acknowledge the rich discussions by fellow panelists, moderators and other participants on the seminal issue of strengthening and safeguarding gender equality and empowerment under the ambit of the internationally agreed development frameworks, including the Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Platform of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and in future within the context of the evolving post-2015 development agenda that is now taking centre stage at the United Nations and international community.

We welcome this timely interactive dialogue as a strategic platform and focus for our national and collective efforts in ensuring that the consolidation of gender equality and empowerment remains central. It will also serve as a useful building block for the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2014 and facilitate the ongoing global efforts towards constructing the post-2015 development agenda for a better “future we want”, where an inclusive society that better integrates our girls and women’s equality and empowerment is a norm rather than a exception.

Mr Chairman,

In the interest of time, I will be brief in my intervention but the full text of my Statement has been circulated. This will firstly, focus primarily on Papua New Guinea’s view on the achievements of the international efforts and challenges to foster gender equality and empowerment. Secondly, I will present experiences and lessons Papua New Guinea has learnt and the challenges we continue to face in this critical area. Finally, I will discuss our perspective on the measures that, in my view, are required now and in the years ahead address gender equality and empowerment gaps and weaknesses for a transformative national, regional and international gender equality and empowerment agenda.

What are the key lessons on gender equality and empowerment Papua New Guinea has learnt?

Firstly, the internationally agreed development frameworks, including the Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Platform of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have galvanised and continues to provide a solid foundation that champions the global, regional and national efforts in mainstreaming gender equality and empowerment. Renewed commitment and redoubled efforts to achieve them is critical.

We note that the global scorecard for gender empowerment and equality, thus far, is mixed. While some countries have fared well on the formulation of policies and legislation or put mechanisms to address gender injustices, there are weaknesses in allocating resources critical to implement gender issues or even facilitate the functioning of the mechanisms that exist.

In other countries, governments are lagging behind in upholding their international and national commitments to gender justice. Hence, gender equality and empowerment remains a mirage in many instances. However, there are equally other successes and stories of hope that dot across the continents.

Mr Chairman,

Papua New Guinea recognizes that much more focused, committed and inclusive efforts at all levels by all stakeholders', especially national ownership and political leadership at the highest level must underpin our efforts to bring real and lasting change for gender parity and emancipation.

We welcome the renewed commitment by global leaders last September at the MDGs High-level event here to scale-up MDGs implementation, and encourage greater focus especially on MDG 3 on gender equality and empowerment, and the MDGs on health and universal primary education.

Papua New Guinea also pledges to work together with the UN and the international community in 2015 through the CSW in reviewing and consolidating gains achieved by the Beijing Platform of Action and strengthen areas that require further support.

Mr Chairman,

Papua New Guinea is not a homogeneous society and we speak over 800 distinct languages and practice a diversity of unique traditional cultures and traditions, which shape our lives. Our economy's growth rate is on average 6 percent annually for the last decade but the benefits are unevenly shared by our people and especially women and girls.

Women and girls make up half the population of over 7 million in Papua New Guinea. Women and girls continue to have a shorter lifespan than men and boys and our human development indices remain low.

Like other developing nations, the road has not been easy in terms of political, economic and social challenges that have confronted us domestically and globally. In the past, our development efforts have been littered with missed opportunities.

This has impacted on Papua New Guinea's internationally agreed development goals attainment. We are unlikely to achieve most of the MDGs by 2015 and similarly for the Beijing Platform of Action and CEDAW obligations but are work in progress nonetheless.

Papua New Guinea recognizes that major and persistent gender challenges we are faced with includes:

- High rates of gender-based violence;
- Low proportion of women in all levels of decision-making. I am amongst only 3 women elected in 2012 to our National Parliament and the only female Governor leading over half a million people of my Province;
- Significant under-representation of women in the formal economy;
- Unaddressed gender dimensions of climate change, natural disasters, food security, renewable energy, and inequitable access to clean water and sanitation; high rates of teenage pregnancy, high maternal mortality and low rates of access to modern forms of contraception and sexual and reproductive health services; and
- Customary practices such as polygamy and bride price payment for women and girls, land and economic participation that often disadvantages women.

These have resulted in many human rights and human development reports on Papua New Guinea that are often over exaggerated and insensitive with scant attention paid to the positive efforts by my Government in promoting and protecting basic rights for all our citizens.

Mr Chairman,

My Government is however, determined to re-set the development agenda and direction for our nation and is committed to addressing also the unflattering international human development indices, including on gender equality and empowerment issues.

We are committed to implementing our international undertakings. We have tailored many of these requirements under our 2011 - 2015 Medium Term Development Plan, and also within the Vision 2050 policy framework that aspires to make Papua New Guinea fair, peaceful and prosperous.

We are strengthening our national efforts on gender equality and empowerment including making progress in the areas of parity in universal primary education enrolment, poverty reduction, reducing infant and maternal mortality rates, combating HIV/AIDS, TB and other health issues.

We also appreciate the support from the UN agencies and other development partners in complementing our efforts to accelerate the implementation of the gender equality and empowerment under the auspices of the MDGs, Beijing Platform of Action and CEDAW and other international instruments.

Mr Chairman,

The Government of Papua New Guinea acknowledges that gender equality and empowerment remains a serious concern and a cross-cutting development and human rights issue that must be accorded priority. We are therefore committed to enhancing gender equality and empowerment through measures including combating gender-based violence and providing environment conducive for our women and girls to thrive and reach their full potential as equal development partners of the country.

We also recognize that this is a long-term challenge that requires sustained commitment, resources and concerted and coordinated efforts from all sectors of our society and most importantly Government leadership.

We further recognize that it is not sufficient to sign onto international instruments and formalize domestic legislation promoting gender equality and empowerment, human rights and anti-gender-based violence. More importantly, all national stakeholders, including especially the National Government, must take ownership and leadership and be the primary drivers of combating, preventing and eliminating gender-based violence and fostering gender equality and empowerment for this to be successful and sustainable.

We acknowledge that many challenges remain for us to make our country a safer, secure and an equitable place for our women and girls to live with dignity and free from harassment and violence so that they can reach their full potential and enjoy a better life. But we are determined to do better by transforming attitudes, behaviour and institutions that sustain unequal power relations between men and women to bring about change.

The internationally agreed development goals have facilitated key strategic domestic policy and legislative development and achievements by my Government that fosters gender equality and empowerment as well as prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in my country. These include inter alia:

- National Medium Term Development Plan 2011 – 2015 that sets a target of achieving by 2030 zero-tolerance against gender-based violence;
- National Policy on Women and Gender Equality 2011 – 2015 that strategizes to increasing advocacy against violence against women and girls; service provision to affected victims; capacity building including research and legislation development to better address gender-based violence issues;

- National Health Strategy 2011 – 2020 and HIV/AIDS Strategy 2011 – 2014 which addresses gender-based violence and to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girl victims of sexual violence;
- Enactment of Sexual Offences Act, Crime Against Children Act, the Police Act and the Evidence Act which addresses deterrence measures, criminalizing gender-based violence and dispensing justice to affected victims;
- Enacted Child Protection Act (Lukautim Pikinini Act 2009) that has provisions protecting girls from discrimination;
- Enactment of a Women’s Council Act that advocates support for gender issues by the National Government, including provision of funding for women and girls development activities;
- Enacted in September 2013 the Family Protection Bill that now criminalize domestic violence, where women and girls suffer the most;
- To address torture and killings of women, girls and others accused of witchcraft or sorcery, my Government also recently repealed the Sorcery Act 1971 in its entirety, which makes all sorcery related killings a criminal offense;
- The Judicial system is also working to make its services more accessible to victims of domestic violence by providing training and advocacy programs as well as legal services support;
- Eleven Family and Sexual Violence (FSV) units have been set up around the country within the Police Force; and a Family and Sexual Offences (FASO) Unit established in the Public Prosecutors Office in the nation’s capital, as a Pilot Program, which will gradually be rolled-out to other centers countrywide, aimed at adequately prosecuting and lawfully punishing perpetrators of violence against women and girls;
- Gender-based violence education is now formalized in the national education curriculum and taught in secondary schools throughout the country;
- Introduction of fee-free-education for primary to secondary level that underlines the importance of increasing girls school enrolment and retention that will equip them with basic literacy, numeracy and life-skills;
- National articulation of the importance of increasing women’s participation at the highest political level through “Reserved Seats” in Parliament, which is still work in progress;

- Establishment of micro-credit schemes, financial and support services for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) dedicated to women entrepreneurs, which is also building the capacity and economic empowerment of our women to be equal development partners of the country. A separate women's bank is also under consideration to strengthen gender issues; and
- Papua New Guinea is also working closely with our bilateral and multilateral development partners, including the UN in synergizing efforts for capacity building, legislation development and advocacy that are strengthening gender equality and empowerment in the country.

Mr Chairman,

At the regional level in the Pacific, Papua New Guinea continues to play a key role in close partnership with our Pacific Islands Forum members in developing and commitment to strategies and frameworks that advance gender equality and empowerment. This complements our national initiatives and the internationally agreed development goals.

Examples of these include the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration that promotes services for survivors of violence and enactment of appropriate legislations to protect women and girls and prosecute perpetrators of gender-based violence; the 2005 – 2015 Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality; 2009 Cairns Leaders Communiqué that advocates elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

Mr Chairman,

Based on our national experience; to bridge the gaps and weaknesses on gender equality and empowerment frameworks and policies implementation domestically, we recommend the following considerations.

Firstly; there must be national political leadership, will and commitment supported by gender mainstreaming. This is fundamental to the success of the implementation of any gender-responsive Government policies, strategies and legislation and the internationally agreed development goals.

Secondly; national ownership on gender equality and empowerment issue is also a prerequisite. Many segments of society in Papua New Guinea remain uninformed of gender-based issues due to lack of appropriate and adequate information.

This must be inclusive of all stakeholder including women and girls, boys and men, civil society, schools, youth, marginalized groups, private sector and rural and urban populations. This needs to be supported by sustained advocacy programmes on gender issues, including policies, plans, and explanation of international and national commitments.

Mr Chairman,

Thirdly; there is pressing need for compilation and use of credible sex disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform government policies and programs and planning for national development.

Fourthly; in the context of increasing the share of national decision-making, appropriate measures need to be adopted such as enactment of legislation to provide for temporary special measures to increase women's full and equal participation in governance at all levels and women's leadership in decision-making both in the public and private sectors.

Fifthly; resource mobilization as a key means of implementation is vital to effectively promote and sustain gender issues. This also entails human capacity and institutional building especially related to national mechanism for advancement of women and girls empowerment and equality.

Sixthly; in the context of health and education, there is a need to ensure reproductive health education, including family planning, awareness and service programs.

We also recognise the need to translate international human rights and gender related instruments into domestic law and assistance is welcome in this area given the technical capacity constraints we face.

Mr Chairman,

We also recognise and welcome partnership for women's leadership and participation between all stakeholders and at all levels (national, regional and international) is a pivotal requirement for gender equality and empowerment to thrive. For instance, the UN Women Safe Cities project in my capital city – Port Moresby – supports the Papua New Guinea Government address safe public spaces for women and girls is also strengthening governance structures and systems and educating boys and men to combat gender-based violence. We are also pleased with the capacity building efforts of the UN in preparing women to participate effectively in seeking political offices. Civil society, women's groups, youth, faith-based organizations are also important partners that must be supported.

Combating gender-based violence also requires supportive essential services packages including protection, health, counseling and legal counsel for women and girls who are survivors of violence. This area remains weak and needs to be enhanced.

Mr Chairman,

It is sad to note that women and girls continue to remain far away from the economic heartbeat of their countries despite shouldering the heaviest burdens of their societies. This calls for urgent concerted actions at all levels for their economic empowerment. We therefore suggest the following measures to improve this key area:

1. Removing barriers to women's employment and participation in the formal and informal sectors, including in relation to legislation that directly and indirectly limits women's access to employment opportunities or contributes to discriminatory pay and conditions for women;
2. Implement equal employment opportunity and gender equality measures in both the public and private sectors, to increase the proportion of women employed including in senior positions;
3. Target support to women entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors, such as financial services, information and training, and review and change legislation that limits women's access to finance, assets, land and productive resources; and
4. Improve facilities and governance of local economy to enable women to participate safely, fairly and equally to improve their lives and livelihoods.

Mr Chairman,

Papua New Guinea also joins other countries and multilateral organizations including UN Women in urging the international community and especially the UN Member States to ensure that gender equality and empowerment be an integral part of the next set of global sustainable development goals.

Gender equality and women's empowerment means marginalising and ridding pervasive inequalities across the board. Investing in girls and women's holistic development underpinned by gender equality and empowerment is a strong enabler for ending violence and discrimination against half of the global population.

It is a catalyst for improving health outcomes, accelerates economic growth, reduces poverty and fosters peace, security and stability. This will be a springboard to unleash the full potential of our girls and women and ensure just, fair, peaceful, prosperous, strong and sustainable societies.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, Papua New Guinea invites and welcomes multilateral and bilateral development partners, the private sector, NGOs, faith-based organizations and civil society groups, who will add value to our national efforts to combat gender-based violence, empower women and girls and consolidate their equality by consolidating the gains we have made in transforming Papua New Guinea into a gender-friendly nation, where our women and girls can live in dignity, peace and freedom.

Areas that we require further support include strengthening and systematizing gender mainstreaming in all sectors; enhanced advocacy, education and training; analysis of gender-based threats and violence in the extractive industries to prevent exploitation of women and girls; technical assistance to translate international human rights instruments that support gender equality and empowerment in to domestic law; counseling and anger-management support services for men and women; and assistance to foster economic empowerment of our women entrepreneurs.

I thank you.