

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: FIRST VISIT BY AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY - TUIA TANGATA

[IN CONFIDENCE]

FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: FIRST VISIT BY AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY - TUIA TANGATA

Rāpopoto – Akakoukou – Summary

- Last week, Aotearoa New Zealand’s new Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific)/Tuia Tangata, Louisa Wall, undertook a first visit to Rarotonga in her new capacity. On gender-related issues, she met with the Cook Islands Family Welfare Association, Internal Affairs and women working in the justice and social welfare systems. s6(a)
- In keeping with her responsibility for LGBTQI+ rights, Ambassador Wall met with the PRIDE community (Cook Islands PRIDE and Te Tiare Association). As well as learning about the Cook Islands’ journey towards decriminalisation of homosexuality, she shared New Zealand’s own experiences. s6(a)

- Given the Ambassador’s sports portfolio, and former Silver Fern status, meetings were also held with the Cook Islands Netball Association and the National Netball Squad. These were highlights of the visit, and identified opportunities for New Zealand to support the Cook Islands to access international competitions.

Hohenga – Rave’anga – Action

For information

Pūrongo – Akakite’anga – Report

Ambassador Wall undertook official calls in Rarotonga last week, 27 – 29 June, her first offshore engagements in her role as Ambassador for Gender Equality/Tuia Tangata.

2 The programme included meetings with members of the Cook Islands Family Welfare Association, Department of Internal Affairs (INTAFF), Cook Islands Police, mental health services, as well as a HOM-hosted luncheon with the Ombudsperson, Deputy Solicitor General, academics and New Zealand’s Pacific Islands Police Prevention Adviser. Ambassador Wall also met with the Cook Islands Netball Association and recently announced national netball team. We report here on the key themes that emerged.

Sexual and reproductive health s6(a)

3 s6(a)

The executive team at the Cook Islands Family Welfare Association (CIFWA) has been working to educate the community on sexual health through campaigns such as “Smear Your Mea” - promoting cervical smears, and by running Comprehensive Sexuality Education in high schools.

4 s6(a)

CIFWA intends to revitalise its cervical smear campaign this year and enquired whether New Zealand might assist with the provision of self-test cervical smear kits, noting New Zealand’s recent successful use of self-testing methods in Northland. DEVPP: we will follow-up with you separately.

5 Access in the Cook Islands to reproductive health services s6(a) Abortion in any form is illegal on the island, and women requiring one must travel to New Zealand. s6(a)

6 s6(a)

7 s6(a)

Decriminalisation of homosexuality s6(a)

8 In a meeting with Cook Islands PRIDE and Te Tiare Association, Ambassador Wall heard about the journey the Cook Islands' LGBTQI+ community had been on since the introduction of the HIV Aids Bill 12 years ago in 2010. s6(a)

Ambassador

Wall was able to share New Zealand's own journey s6(a)

9 The PRIDE movement's support base has grown significantly over recent years, visibly demonstrated by the rainbow and progressive flags flown by households and businesses around the island. s6(a)

10 s6(a)

Domestic and sexual violence s6(a)

11 s6(a)

At a lunch hosted by the HOM for women working in the justice sector, Dr Futter-Puati shared the findings from her 2017 PhD, which surveyed 20% of the Cook Islands population aged 15-24 and found 18% of boys and 24% of girls had been sexually violated. An earlier study on sex between Cook Islands men in 2009 found that 46% of the respondents had been sexually violated within the previous six months. s6(a)

12 In a separate meeting with the social policy and services team at INTAFF, and their colleagues from Cook Islands Police and mental health services, it was apparent these issues remain a serious concern, particularly for children and youth in the Pa Enea. s6(a)

13 s6(a)

We note that New Zealand's Pacific Preventive Policing Programme appears to have been key to supporting this change.

14 s6(a)

s6(a)

The soon to be commenced cooperation between VSA, INTAFF and New Zealand NGO He Waka Tapu was seen as a welcome and much needed way to support the rehabilitation of offenders.

Netball – have to be 'in to win' s6(a)

15 Ambassador Wall also met with the newly announced National Women's Netball Team, and the President and Executive Committee of the Cook Islands Netball Association. The Cook Islands, despite being ranked first in the Pacific Islands, will not be attending the Commonwealth Games this year for netball, as the competition is only open to the top 12 Commonwealth teams and the Cook Islands is ranked 14th overall. s6(a)

16 Likewise the Cook Islands had been unable to participate in the Australian organised Pacific Islands rankings tournament held in March, and again later this year, but this time due to funding constraints. Ambassador Wall undertook to raise these issues, and investigate what opportunities might exist for further support to the Cook Islands and Pacific netball to participate in these and future events.

s6(a)

Mutu – Akaoti – End