

**Subject:** FORMAL MESSAGE: INAUGURAL VISIT TO FIJI BY NEW ZEALAND'S AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) / TUIA TANGATA

**Security Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED

[UNCLASSIFIED]

### RĀPOPOTO – SUMMARY

Aotearoa New Zealand's Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific) / Tuia Tāngata, Ms Louisa Wall, undertook an extensive travel programme in Fiji from 16 to 24 August 2022. This was Ambassador Wall's first official visit to the Pacific in her new capacity. Ambassador Wall met with key stakeholders and partners across her three portfolio designations: gender equality, LGBT/SOGIESC equality, and sports diplomacy.

On 17 and 24 August Ambassador Wall attended two important regional events centred on the topic of ending violence against women and girls. Ms Wall was invited to launch a UN Women 'How to Handbook', outlining ways to better support survivors of domestic violence, and present on Aotearoa New Zealand's domestic violence legislation and National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence (Te Aorerekura). Both the launch and the presentation were well received by attendees.

The visit was also an opportunity for Ambassador Wall to attend introductory meetings with key partners from across the region, including her Australian counterpart, Christine Clarke. Themes of the meetings included combating violence against women and girls; supporting women in leadership; the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; addressing the challenges vulnerable communities face, particularly in times of crises; increasing visibility of, and support for women in sport and; ways in which Ambassador Wall can support efforts to improve outcomes in these areas in her Ambassadorial role.

### HOHENGA – ACTION

For information

### PŪRONGO – REPORT

2 Ms Louisa Wall undertook her first official visit to the Pacific as New Zealand's Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific) / Tuia Tangata in Fiji from 16 to 24 August. The programme centred around Louisa's engagement in the Regional Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Services Symposium on 17 August, and participation in the Regional Working Group for the Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation hosted by SPC from 22 to 24 August.

3 The programme included meetings and events attended by a significant number of important stakeholders from across the region. We report here on the meetings and key themes that emerged.

*Events:* Regional Ending Violence against Women and Girls Services Symposium, *Regional Working Group (RWG), Nadi*

Regional Ending Violence against Women and Girls Services Symposium

4 The symposium was a chance to strengthen connections, discuss challenges and opportunities, and share lessons learnt to end violence against women and girls. As this was the first time an in person meeting was possible since the start of the pandemic, a large presence of both CSOs and government representatives from across the region were in attendance. Organising Partners of the symposium were UN Women and SPC through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls. The symposium was chaired by Molei Vaai Chair of the Regional Working Group on the Implementation of Family Protection and Domestic Violence Legislation; and Chief Executive Officer of the Samoa Ministry of Justice and Court Administration.

5 Key themes included; a greater need for regional coordination and knowledge sharing; the impacts of COVID-19 on violence against women; the challenge of ensuring legislation is translated into tangible outcomes for women and girls; the need for sustained funding; and the importance of learning lessons from the COVID-19 community response as it relates to how well people worked together. Silos and persistent cultural norms were mentioned as a significant barrier to making meaningful progress.

6 As part of a series of knowledge products under the Pacific Partnership programme, Ambassador Wall launched a 'How to Handbook' developed by UN Women with government partners Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The Handbook provides guidance on how to strengthen essential service delivery and coordination for survivors of gender based violence. The speech also provided an opportunity to highlight the work of the Joint Venture and Aotearoa New Zealand's National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence; Te Aorerekura. There was significant interest in the Joint Venture approach to tackling violence, particularly as cooperation between ministries and agencies is considered to be a key aspect of ensuring legislation is translated in to tangible outcomes in policy development.

7 In the margins of the symposium, Ambassador Wall met with Sonia Rastogi (UN Women); Shamima Ali (coordinator Fiji Women's Crisis Centre); Jennifer Poole (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation); Nalini Singh (CEO Fiji Women's Rights Movement); Mele Mauaia (UN Women Country Coordinator, Samoa); and Noelene Nabulivou (Political Adviser for DIVA for Equality). Discussions centred on continued challenges and possible opportunities for cooperation, particularly as it relates to innovative approaches to ending violence against women and girls. Discussions also covered increased visibility of women in sport, their experiences of violence, and exploring the option of seeking gifted broadcasting rights from Fifa and Rugby New Zealand ahead of the women's football and rugby world cups respectively.

#### Regional Working Group for the Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation

8 The Regional working group was a closed door meeting for SPC and government representatives from across the Pacific to discuss implementation of domestic violence legislation. Ambassador Wall attended the meeting alongside Ambassador Clarke. Ambassador Wall contributed to the deliberations by discussing New Zealand's domestic violence legislation and the Te Aorerekura strategy, both of which garnered significant interest from participants in the room and online.

#### *Meetings with key stakeholders on gender related issues, Suva*

9 On gender-related issues, Ambassador Wall met with; Hon. Rosy Akbar Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; Pacific Community Teams (SPC); the CROP Women of the Wave Network; the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Executive; the Pacific Feminist Fund; a Markets for Change Project (UN Women); Sharon Bhagwan Rolls (Balancing the Power Coalition), Mereseini Vuniwaqa (Strategic Lead, Pacific Women Lead, SPC); and; Mere Moto and Tavaita Rowati (Fiji Rugby Game Changers). She also visited Get in to Rugby and Rise beyond the Reef as a guest of the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Christine Clarke. The meetings were an opportunity to provide an overview of the various organisations, their partnerships with Aotearoa New Zealand, their priorities as they relate to Ambassador Wall's remit as well as shared challenges and opportunities.

10 Key themes highlighted during the meetings included ongoing challenges regarding women in leadership; violence against women and girls; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; a lack of childcare facilities; and ongoing resource constraints. The importance of acknowledging the difficulty in addressing violence against women and girls, who often reside in villages or small towns which may lack appropriate resources to adequately protect privacy

and in return, safety, was raised by a number of stakeholders. SPC noted the importance of utilising a strengths based, culturally appropriate methodology to support ending violence against women and girls. SPC has begun utilising pre-colonial cultural settings to support this method, including through developing educational material for schools, which use stories to promote human rights values and gender equality.

11. During the meeting with Minister Akbar, Ambassador Wall was able to discuss the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTAGA) <sup>s6(a)</sup>

12. The refresh of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) report was discussed in some detail with PIF representatives. PIF officials noted that they plan to link the new PLGED to the 12 outcomes of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, with the addition of disability rights and climate change. This approach will support streamlined reporting. It is proposed that the PIF women leaders meetings become one of the key mechanisms through which reporting will be done. PIF will also work closely with SPC to ensure PLGED reporting is fed in to the Quadrennial report on Pacific Sustainable Development. The need for language that is inclusive of SOGIESC communities was also acknowledged as an area to explore with partners. PIF officials noted that they are keen to consult with Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the drafting process. They indicated that they would value feedback from Aotearoa New Zealand based CSOs, in particular those working to progress indigenous rights, and rights of the disabled community.

13. Ambassador Wall attended a number of meetings and events with her Australian counterpart, Ambassador Christine Clarke, during which they were able to discuss opportunities for shared cooperation. These meetings were very collegial, resulting in Ambassador Clarke inviting Ambassador Wall to attend two events with her. Ambassadors Wall and Clarke also met with Mereseini Vuniwaqa (Strategic Lead, Pacific Women Lead, SPC) to further discuss ways to progress gender equality across the region.

#### *Meetings with key stakeholders on LGBTQI+ related issues, Suva*

14. In keeping with her responsibility for LGBTQI+ rights, Ambassador Wall met with Rev James Bhagwan of the Pacific Council of Churches and the Pacific Sexual and Gender Network (PSGDN), with whom Aotearoa New Zealand recently signed a partnership.

15. Key themes emerging from the meetings were the continued and acute need for sustained support for SOGIESC communities; the ongoing tension between long held religious beliefs and gender expression; as well as the need for safe spaces for SOGIESC communities to come together and or receive support.

16. Rev James Bhagwan has been a staunch and effective supporter of women's rights over a number of years and has worked with church leaders from across the Pacific to progress gender equality. Rev Bhagwan and Ambassador Wall discussed ways in which a similar approach might be taken to improving rights for the Pacific SOGIESC community. Rev Bhagwan noted that meaningful progress will require small steps. Including the topic of SOGIESC rights into wider conversations with a small number of church leaders who might be interested in starting the discussion on SOGIESC rights, and utilising the Pacific Theological College could be first steps in starting the conversation.

17. The meeting with PSGDN was also attended by a number of other groups working to progress SOGIESC rights, including the Rainbow Pride Foundation, Haus of Khameleon, Survival Advocacy Network Fiji and the Pacific Rainbow Advocacy Network. Meeting participants shared stories of the journeys SOGIESC communities across the Pacific have been on, including their fight for legislative changes, and the ongoing difficulties they continue to face as they seek to be accepted for who they are by societies which are often times still deeply conservative. Ambassador Wall was able to share New Zealand's own journey, first for decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1986, then expungement of offences, civil unions in 2007 and finally marriage equality 27 years later in 2013.

#### *Sports Portfolio, Suva*

18. Given the Ambassador's sports portfolio, the delegation attended the Coca Cola Games, the largest high school sporting event in the world. Fiji Sports kindly facilitated the Ambassador's attendance in their corporate box. Ambassador Wall met with members of the Fiji Sports Council in the margins of this event, and discussed challenges and opportunities for women and girls in sports, especially in relation to the upcoming football and rugby world cups, Commonwealth and Olympic Games. The Ambassador also met with women sports leaders, who raised the need for more opportunities to attend coaching workshops for up and coming women leaders.

#### **TĀKUPU – COMMENT**

21. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to engage in dialogue with agencies, community groups and CSOs working towards the advancement of women, gender equality, sports and LGBTQI+ issues. Ambassador Wall was focused on listening to the local concerns of women and the SOGIESC community, both to enhance our understanding of the issues, and to seek opportunities to tautoko their call for change. Ambassador Wall's visit was an opportunity to discuss what the current challenges to equality are, including to inform any future renewed targets for change.

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