

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: SĀMOA: VISIT BY AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) TUIA TANGATA

[UNCLASSIFIED]

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Rāpopoto – Summary – Aotelega

The Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific) Tuia Tangata, Louisa Wall, visited Samoa from 18-25 October 2022 to learn more about the challenges for gender equality in Samoan society and explore opportunities in the area of sports diplomacy.

Ambassador Wall had three main areas of interest relating to her portfolio: the provision of sexual and reproductive health, efforts to combat gender-based violence, and sports development.

She was able to meet formally or informally with a wide range of Samoan interlocutors including Prime Minister Fiame, ministers, attorney-general, ombudsman, judges, NGO leaders, and representatives of the public service, private sector and community organisations. This engendered a rich and often frank exchange of views that challenged and at times tested perceptions and positions on both sides.

Hohenga – Action - Gaiogiga

For information.

Pūrongo – Report - Lipoti

Tuiā Tangata, Louisa Wall paid an official visit to Samoa in late October. A comprehensive programme of calls and engagements was organised to provide the ambassador with as broad a spectrum of contacts and perspectives as possible over five working days (refer attached programme). The Ambassador had meetings with NGOs, organisations, and women leaders. She dined with Prime Minister Fiame, Justice Minister Matamua and Attorney-General Su'a. The Ambassador conducted site visits with Markets for Change, participated in a leadership seminar hosted by UN Women and attended the launch of the Women in Leadership Samoa initiative. She also had informal contact with other ministers, former Head of State and Masiofo and PM Fiame again at a Victoria University of Wellington alumni event.

This formal message summarises the outcome of key exchanges and themes of the visit.

Sexual and reproductive health

Policy Outcome 2 of the Samoa Gender Equality Policy Commits Samoa to "develop comprehensive sex education programmes to reduce teenage pregnancies and improve women's sexual and reproductive health (SARH)".

Sexual and family health services in Samoa are available at some private practices, and provided by the Samoa Family Health Association (SFHA) at clinics held periodically throughout the country. SFHA s9(2)(a) noted that while the NGO was able to provide basic health services including STI testing, comprehensive sexuality education and family planning, Samoa faced barriers including maintaining enough trained clinicians, misconceptions in the community about sexual health and a lack of access to abortion or alternatives.

Some communities require tailored support to access SARH services. Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA) s9(2)(a) spoke about the work SFA does to provide sexual health services to the fa'afafine community and to sex workers who may otherwise face barriers.

Gender-based violence

The first policy priority outcome of the National Policy for Gender Equality is "Safe Families and communities including ending violence against women and children". The Ambassador's programme highlighted the challenges faced by actors in different parts of the state and village system.

The Government including the Ministry for Women, Community, and Social Development; the Office of the Ombudsman; and the judiciary; have initiatives to support women's councils, village councils and individual families to take action to respond to gender-based violence. Interventions include support for women's councils to empower them to respond to issues, templates to enable village councils to adopt best practice rules, and toolkits to facilitate family discussions.

NGOs including Samoa Victims Support Group and Salvation Army have led the response to gender-based violence issues in Samoa with support from international and local partners. These groups provide both preventative outreach, and emergency support with a restorative justice approach that addresses the needs of both victims and perpetrators. In the 2022/23 budget, the government has for the first time, provided funding for NGOs in the social and community support space, acknowledging the value that these organisations provide to Samoa.

A meeting with men and women leaders from Poutasi village on the South Coast highlighted the challenges that communities face in addressing these issues. Village leaders acknowledged that issues exist and some are open to change, however some see "human rights based rhetoric" as conflicting with fa'a-Sāmoa.

Sports development

Meetings with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture; the Sports Association of Samoa and National Olympic Committee; and national sports organisations highlighted challenges the sector is facing including a largely volunteer driven workforce and a lack of funding for professional athletes. International competitions such as the Olympics, Commonwealth, Pacific Games and world competitions provide opportunities to help focus the sector; however, barriers such as an inability to compete in the regional and international competitions (largely due to insufficient funding) mean that it can be difficult for athletes to meet the requirements for the highest level of sporting competition.

Tākupu – Comment – Manatu

The visit provided Ambassador Wall with an excellent overview of the challenges facing Samoa in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and sports. The visit touched on sensitive issues and provided an opportunity to hear from stakeholders with a variety of viewpoints. Feedback from interlocutors to the visit has largely been positive. However, some hosts felt their views may not have fully registered or been adequately taken into account. Some proposals or suggestions were made that did not align with interlocutors priorities (e.g. law reform is not a priority for the fa'afafine community in Samoa) or because time was insufficient to address all aspects and perspectives of a particular issue. This feedback was not unexpected when dealing with sensitive subject matter, which is both complex and complicated, and often deeply personal and challenging. The overlay of an intricate culture steeped in long-standing traditions provided an added though important layer to the engagements that required careful navigation. Post would recommend structured agendas for future engagements to ensure hosts are provided sufficient time and context to fully convey their perspectives, whether positive, negative or indifferent.

This visit highlighted the importance of taking a considered approach to outreach. New Zealand is active in this area through its thematic and regional programmes, and this visit has highlighted opportunities for further engagement in areas including support for youth development and more support for sports development. It was evident that sporting bodies, sports administrators and policy makers are thirsty for partner funding and sponsorship, including setting up of a standalone sports ministry or core funding of sports bodies and organisations. Their expectations are well in excess of what Aotearoa New Zealand can realistically support, but there may be niche areas where our IDC and sports diplomacy spend can make a meaningful difference if this is a priority of the Samoan government and reflected as such in its aid coordination committee requests to us.

Mutu – End – I'uga

Postscript

For reference, Ambassador Wall's programme is attached. Timing and order of the meetings were adapted during the visit to accommodate availability of partner organisations. Post also supported Ambassador Wall to attend events organised by external organisations such as an alumni event for Victoria University of Wellington and the Women in Leadership Samoa research launch.

Mutu – End – I'uga

GEPTT PROGRAMME

Tuesday 18 October
6.30pm Welcome dinner with High Commissioner and staff
Wednesday 19 October
9.30am: Samoa Family Health Association
11.00am: Lunch with Women leaders supported by UN Women
2.00pm: Site visit to Women In Business Development Initiative project partners
5.00pm: Meeting with Poutasi village leaders.
Thursday 20 October
10.00am: Site visit to UN Women Markets for Change activity
12.00pm: Lunch hosted by Salvation Army
1.30pm: Meeting with Samoa Fa'afafine Association
2.30pm: Meeting with Brown Girl Woke
3.30pm: Meeting with Ministry for Women, Community and Social Development
Evening: Dinner with Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa and women leaders
Friday 21 October
10.00 am: Women in Leadership in Samoa: Research project launch
1.00pm: Meeting with SASNOC leadership
2.00pm: Meeting with PacificAus Sports Hub
3.30pm: Site Visit to Samoa Victims Support Group
Monday 24 October
8.00am: Breakfast with Senior District Court Judge Talasa Saaga-Atoa
9.00am: Meeting with Ministry for Education, Sport and Community Acting CEO
10.00am: Breakfast with Floris Niu, Ms Sunshine Organic Farms
1.00pm: Roundtable with SASNOC Member organisations

3.00pm: Seminar with Netball, Rugby, and Cricket sports organisations
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Tuesday 25 October

8.00pm: Meeting with UNDP/UNWomen
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9.00am: Meeting with Ombudsman

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