

# Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance



## The Future We Want

We, young women of the Pacific, affirm our power as decision makers, implementers, change agents, partners, and leaders of today and the future.

Young people make up the majority of Pacific populations, and we are central to sustainable development and the realisation of human rights. There are approximately 10 million people living in the Pacific; 56%, or 5.6 million people, are between the ages of 0–24. Over 11%, or 1.152 million Pacific people, are young women between 15–24 years old.

Our daily realities, our histories and “herstories”, our experiences, and our commitment inform this statement. We call upon our leaders – in the spirit of partnership, transparency and accountability, sustainable development, and democracy – to respond to our needs and concerns.

We represent the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance – a network of young women leaders and local, regional, and international organisations working with and for young women across the Pacific region. The Alliance began with consultations across the Pacific and the development of a strategic framework. Over 100 Pacific young women and allies mobilised to engage in an online dialogue to express our opinions and strengthen our networks over several months. In culmination, 26 representatives gathered in Rarotonga, Cook Islands from 18–20 October 2013 for the **Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance Dialogue**. Together we have prioritised key strategic recommendations to inform discussions and decisions during the 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference of Pacific Women Leaders and other important forums.

We are from the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Our primary constituents are young women, and include those who face intersectional discriminations such as people with diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, ethnicities and economic status; sex workers; survivors of violence; persons with disabilities; those living in rural areas and outer islands; and others. The Alliance is inclusive and encourages everyone to champion gender equality and the rights of all young people. We reiterate that climate change, environmental degradation, violence and conflict pose immediate threats to our lives and livelihoods, and we call for urgent action on these issues.

We have over two decades of experience working with women and young people, building on the achievements of women's rights advocates before us. We, Pacific Young Women, are leaders of today and should be involved in decision making and be included as real partners in all development.

**Our five key strategic recommendations are: eliminating sexual and gender based violence; ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights; eliminating all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities; promoting full and decent employment and economic empowerment for young women; and ensuring full participation of young women at all levels of decision making.**

Our voices need to be heard and urgent actions taken.

**Pacific Young Women** reiterate that lifetime prevalence of physical and sexual violence by partner and non-partner among Pacific island women aged 15–49 years old is between 60–80% in those countries surveyed. All forms of violence have serious implications for young women, negatively impacting their physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health as well as their role in the public and private spheres. We recognise the efforts already in place but call for an acceleration of national and local efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Some harmful Pacific traditional practices – such as bride price, early and forced marriage, and marketised traditional

compensation – can perpetuate violence, particularly for young women. Pacific Young Women ask States to ensure first response service providers continue to undergo gender sensitisation training and provide accessible services to outer islands and rural areas. We urge States to immediately, substantively and effectively resource and enforce the implementation of legislation to address these issues, and allocate resources for support services to survivors of all forms of violence.

**Pacific Young Women** affirm that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) must be realised in the Pacific. We stress that bodily integrity and autonomy is at the core of all work on SRHR. Pacific young women ask our Governments to recognise that sexual rights are different to reproductive rights, and that sexual rights are human rights. Women are sexual beings and have a right to enjoy their sexuality and sound reproductive health. Understanding of these issues will translate to a reduction to the high rates of STIs, teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse prevalent in the Pacific region. We expect that States will play a much stronger role in providing funding and support for sexual and reproductive health services, commodities, and information. These are more widely available in most urban centres, but in rural or isolated areas access is difficult. SRHR awareness must include comprehensive sexual education, and be available to everyone including young LGBTQI women and persons with disabilities. Strong emphasis must be placed on legislative reform to eliminate laws and harmful practices that criminalise women who access SRHR care including abortion, emergency contraception, and HIV / AIDS services, and create a survivor centered approach for people with a history of sexual abuse.

**Pacific Young Women** recognise that persons with disabilities experience discrimination in their daily realities which prevents realisation of their full potential for an adequate standard of living. We recommend that States, in partnership with the Alliance, ensure that persons with disabilities are safe, respected, included, connected, and skilled. We propose mainstreaming educational and sexual and reproductive health services; creating employment opportunities; and eliminating all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities so that they may be included in society.

**Pacific Young Women** are living in a time of escalated social, economic, financial, and environmental crisis. We urgently seek full and decent employment and economic empowerment for all young Pacific women. In order to achieve this, we require meaningful participation of young women, women, and wider social movements in the design, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of development goals, policies, and indicators at all levels. We must work together to recognise the informal sector and reorient the employment sector in the region toward agriculture and sustainable livelihoods which include young women. Development partners and civil society organisations must urgently support Pacific governments to reform monetary, financial, and trade rules globally in line with human rights obligations. This will ensure policy space at the national and regional level to implement macro-economic policies and trade and investment agreements to achieve gender and social justice for all, especially young Pacific women.

**Pacific Young Women** convey to our States that young women are almost entirely absent from local, national, and regional decision making and leadership roles. Positions of power and decision-making are traditionally male-dominated, and restricted to older generations. The Pacific region has the lowest rate of women's representation in national parliament of any other region in the world. **Pacific Young Women** urge States to implement temporary special measures to increase women's representation and participation in national level decision making. This will enable our States to be compliant with CEDAW, while recognising the urgency of ratifying CEDAW and implementing it to its full potential. **Pacific Young Women** ask States to deliver true and genuine democracy by ensuring that women are included in decision making at all levels. This will enable us to have role models we can aspire to emulate, and also create a cultural shift of power transformation.

Pacific Young Women urge all our States to have the political will to honor existing commitments, and to put our recommendations on national and regional agendas and allocate adequate and immediate funding and resources to address these.

**Pacific Young Women want to be SAFE, RESPECTED, INCLUDED, CONNECTED, and SKILLED.**