

Presentation – H.E Honourable Speaker RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU

145th IPU Assembly, Kigali, Rwanda, 11 – 15 October 2022

General Debate: Gender equality and gender-sensitive Parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world

HONOURABLE CHAIR

HONOURABLE SPEAKERS AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE AND THANK THE PARLIAMENT OF RWANDA FOR THE EXCELLENT AND SUCCESSFUL HOSTING OF THE 145TH IPU ASSEMBLY.

ALLOW ME TO SHARE WITH YOU THE FIJIAN PARLIAMENT'S INITIATIVES FOR ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.

I WANT TO EMPHASISE THAT GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ARE CRUCIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH. IT IS A SAD FACT THAT IN THE ARENA OF POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP, WOMEN ARE STILL WAY BEHIND THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS. GLOBALLY WOMEN REPRESENT APPROXIMATELY ABOUT ONLY 25% OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. IN FIJI, AT THE LAST ELECTION OF 2018, 10 WOMEN OUT OF 51 MEMBERS WERE ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT. IN 2020, THIS INCREASED TO 11 FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION AND REPLACEMENT OF A MALE MP BY A FEMALE MP WHO WAS NEXT ON THE PARTY LIST.

FIJI IS RANKED 4TH AMONGST THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES (EXCLUDING AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND), IN A REGION WHERE APPROXIMATELY ONLY 9% OF MPS ARE WOMEN. OF COURSE, IN THE PACIFIC BECAUSE TRADITIONAL CULTURES HAVE A STRONG INFLUENCE, GENDER ROLES ARE OFTEN DICTATED BY CULTURE AND

TRADITIONAL SOCIAL SYSTEMS. THIS IS GRADUALLY UNRAVELLING BUT ONLY SLOWLY.

THERE IS ALSO AN UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AS ELECTION CANDIDATES IN FIJI ACCOUNTING FOR ONLY 24% OF CANDIDATES IN 2018. INTERESTINGLY, IN THAT ELECTION THERE WAS A 35% SUCCESS RATE WITH 20 OUT OF THE 56 WOMEN CANDIDATES MAKING IT TO THE PARTY LISTINGS, WITH 10 EVENTUALLY ENTERING PARLIAMENT.

THESE TRENDS OFTEN REFLECT THE BROADER GENDER INEQUALITY IN SOCIETY. AND THE QUESTION THAT MUST BE ASKED IS – WHAT INITIATIVES COULD BE TAKEN BY PARLIAMENT TO SUPPORT GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS AND TO ADVANCE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ALL ASPECTS OF PARLIAMENTARY WORK?

IN OUR NEXT ELECTION WHICH TAKES PLACE SOMETIMES THIS YEAR, CANDIDATES WILL BE VYING FOR 55 SEATS, AN INCREASE OF 4 FROM THE CURRENT 51. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT ON THIS OCCASION, THE NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES WOULD BE MUCH MORE THAN ON THE PREVIOUS OCCASIONS.

WE, AS SPEAKERS AND MEMBERS, CAN MAKE PARLIAMENT A MORE WELCOMING AND SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE SPACE IF WE MAKE IT MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE AND IF WE PROVIDE THE FACILITATING MECHANISMS THAT ATTRACTS ASPIRING WOMEN LEADERS.

THE FIJIAN PARLIAMENT HAS ALREADY TAKEN SOME STEPS TOWARDS MAKING THIS A REALITY.

WE HAVE A SYSTEMATIC MECHANISM THAT IS AIMED AT ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH THE PARLIAMENT'S STANDING ORDER WHICH MAKES IT MANDATORY FOR STANDING COMMITTEES TO UNDERTAKE GENDER ANALYSES. WHEN COMMITTEES ARE

UNDERTAKING REVIEWS OF LEGISLATION OR OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND SO FORTH, THEY MUST ENSURE FULL CONSIDERATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF GENDER EQUALITY SO THAT ALL MATTERS ARE CONSIDERED REGARDING THE IMPACTS AND BENEFITS ON BOTH MEN AND WOMEN EQUALLY.

THERE IS A GENDER TOOLKIT AVAILABLE THAT COMMITTEES AND MPS MUST USE TO ASSIST THEM IN SCRUTINISING LEGISLATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT PARLIAMENTS NOT ONLY ADOPT PROGRESSIVE STANDING ORDERS BUT ALSO PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO MEMBERS SO THAT THEY CAN EFFECTIVELY PUT THESE INTO THEIR PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES. ONE OF THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF THIS INITIATIVE IS THAT GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND STATUTORY BODIES NOW INCLUDE DATA ON GENDER IN THEIR SUBMISSIONS TO STANDING COMMITTEES AND ANNUAL REPORTS THAT ARE TABLED IN PARLIAMENT.

BY INCLUDING GENDER ANALYSIS IN THE WORK OF STANDING COMMITTEES, WE CAN HELP STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND CRUCIALLY ENSURE THAT THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE ALWAYS INCLUDED IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

IN ADDITION TO THE STANDING ORDERS, WE HAVE THE COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS FIJI GROUP (CWP FIJI GROUP) WHICH IS PART OF THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION'S WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS' NETWORK. THE CWP FIJI GROUP IS FOCUSED ON BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF WOMEN MPS TO FULFILL THEIR ROLES MORE EFFECTIVELY IN PARLIAMENT AND AS LEADERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. FURTHERMORE, THE GROUP UNDERTAKES SOCIAL WORK AND ONGOING ADVOCACY ON WOMEN'S ISSUES SUCH AS BREAST CANCER, POST-DISASTER RELIEF FOR WOMEN, HIV/AIDS AND

ENCOURAGING FIJIAN WOMEN TO ASPIRE TO LEADERSHIP AND POLITICS.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE ACTIONS THAT WE ARE PROGRESSING WITH TO MAKE PARLIAMENT A GENDER-FRIENDLY PLACE AND THEREBY ATTRACTING MORE WOMEN INTO POLITICS AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP – AND AS SPEAKERS AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, WE MUST TAKE PRAGMATIC ACTIONS TO MAKE THIS A REALITY AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE WORKS IN PROGRESS.

THANK YOU.
