

Agenda item 4 Discussion on the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum (economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights), with reference to the UNDRIP, the outcome document of the WCIP and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Hafa adai Honorable Chair and Distinguished Members and Indigenous Peoples Organizations. Congratulations, Mr. Chair, on your election.

Guahu si Alicia Limtiaco of the Guåhan Coalition for Peace and Justice. Si Yu'os ma'åse for the opportunity to testify on the Permanent Forum's mandated area of human rights.

According to global studies, the prevalence of violence against Pacific women and girls, including physical and sexual violence, and harmful practices such as accusations of sorcery, is alarmingly high, and in most countries, it is higher than the global average of 35%.

Guam has the second highest rate of rape in the nation - that is an estimated 64.2 rapes per 100,000 people. Studies for Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu reveal that over 60% of women in those countries have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both. These rates of violence against women are among the highest in the world.

Women and girls with disabilities experience much higher rates of violence, facing up to 10 times more gender-based violence than those without disabilities.

Violence against women and girls is a violation of their human rights and limits women's participation in social, economic and political life. Sexual and intimate partner violence cause serious short- and long-term mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health problems for women; and also affect their children's wellbeing.

Most countries have enacted legislation for the protection of women and children in violent households. However, despite these laws, harmful gender stereotypes continue to define what women should be and do, rather than recognize their individual rights as human beings.

The limited provision of coordinated, consistent, quality and resourced services remains a key barrier to the delivery and sustainability of ending violence against women programs.

Justice providers in many countries continue to focus on reconciliation, despite "no drop" policies whereby prosecution can proceed regardless of a victim's wishes. Police often lack resources, protocols and accountability, and have limited training in how to respond to and manage violence against women. Where formal legal processes are utilized, sentencing is observed to be inconsistent and low and there are often significant case delays.

Health and social service providers often lack the capacity and resources to manage gender-based violence cases, especially in advocacy, counselling and cases involving child and adolescent sexual abuse and violence. Many civil society organizations (CSO) lack or are without basic infrastructure, organizational processes, human resources, and accountability systems.

Further, women face challenges brought about by climate change and predatory exploration of natural resources leading to increased cases of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other forms of gender violence.

We must act and do more to address violence against Pacific indigenous women and girls, and to improve access to justice and to healthcare.

We recommend:

1. That the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) appoint a Special Rapporteur to conduct a comprehensive in-depth study and consultation with Pacific indigenous women with representation from Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia on their experiences of violence and other forms of human rights violations, including systems deficiencies at local, national and regional levels, and provide substantive and meaningful recommendations to all stakeholders. The study and consultation should include the collection of data disaggregated by ethnicity, sex, age, linguistic or religious background to better inform policy and the provision of services, and mapping of relevant laws and support services.
2. That ECOSOC and States support meaningful and effective collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders, including governments, CSOs, and the private sector to empower women in all of their diversity including young women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI, and women-led organizations, to prevent violence and all forms of discrimination. This includes the establishment of a multisectoral Pacific Region coalition comprised of representatives from Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia to address human rights violations.
3. That ECOSOC and States support the establishment of policies, programs, and other appropriate mechanisms and enactment of laws to address the physical, behavioral, sexual and reproductive, and environmental health of indigenous peoples by requiring professionals and service providers to develop cross-cultural knowledge about indigenous peoples' histories and traditional cultural values, and weave elements of them into their intervention plans as fundamental components of empowerment practice and a healing-centered approach.

Si Yu'os ma'åse to the Permanent Forum and to the UN Voluntary Fund for the opportunity to participate in this 21st Session.