

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International welcomes Pacific Leaders commitment to gender equality

Amnesty International welcomes the strong commitment to improving women's rights by Pacific Leaders demonstrated in the Gender Equality Declaration released on 30 August 2012.

The Declaration was adopted by Pacific Island leaders who met in Rarotonga, Cook Islands on 28 - 30 August 2012 for their 42nd Pacific Islands Forum. The leaders' Forum communiqué acknowledged that prevailing gender inequality in the islands "is imposing a high personal, social and economic cost on Pacific people and nations."

Amnesty International now calls on Pacific Island Leaders to implement the commitments they have made by adopting laws, policies and practices to end violence against women and to eliminate all other forms of discriminating against them. They must also take active measures to promote women's economic and social status and to address gender stereotypes.

The increased financial assistance announced by the Australian government will provide some of the resources needed to meet these commitments. A new initiative by the Australian Government launched on 29 August 2012 will provide funding of AU \$320 million over the next 10 years to improve the social, political and economic status of women in the region.

In spite of high rates of violence against women throughout the islands, only Vanuatu and Fiji have specific legislation to address sexual and gender based violence. Tonga is the only country in the Pacific that has not signed or ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The government cites cultural reasons. Amnesty International calls on the government of Tonga to rescind its previous objections and ratify CEDAW as a matter of priority.

Violence against women has reached pandemic proportions and urgent special measures are now required to address it. Amnesty International believes that promoting women's leadership at all levels, encouraging economic development and implementing legislation to protect women from violence will play a key role in making progress towards gender equality. Pacific heads of government at the Forum rightly recognised that gender equality 'is essential to creating a prosperous, stable and secure Pacific for this and all future generations'.

Amnesty International also welcomes the commitment by Pacific Island leaders to monitor and report at each Forum Leaders Meeting on the economic and social status of women, as well as the extent to which they can and do participate in political life.

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