



Inquiry into the Human Rights of Women and Girls in the Pacific

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and
Trade - Human Rights Sub-Committee to inquire into the Human Rights of Women
and Girls in the Pacific.

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The **Pasifika Women's Alliance Inc. (PWA)** is an incorporated community civil society organisation with a culturally diverse network consisting of women who have migrated to Brisbane, Australia from 22 Pacific Island countries and territories. Established in 2013, PWA's mission is to identify the key women's issues in our Queensland and wider Pacific Islander communities and furthermore, represent the voice on women's challenges and strengths to all levels of government and stakeholders. Our objectives are to:

- Identify the key Pacific Islander issues in the wider QLD community;
- Support Pacific Islander women living in QLD to address the issues and escalate to appropriate services or networks;
- Develop women and youth to be better leaders in the wider community;
- Promote healthier and stronger families;
- Encouraging diverse cultural heritage for future generations;
- Empower women in Pacific Island communities by sharing appropriate opportunities for networking, education and social enterprise

As a voice for our communities, through a management board of volunteers, PWA is pleased to welcome the call to contribute to Australia's Inquiry into the Human Rights of Women and Girls in the Pacific. PWA would like to make a submission in relation to addressing the sentiments felt by Pacific women towards the Australian Government's 'approach' in developing programs for the advancement of Pacific women in the region and provide suggestions to improve its approach as follows:

Developing Government Programs for the Pacific

1. The civil society organisations in the Pacific are performing the bulk of the services for Pacific women and many of these services are led and performed by women both formally and informally. Women's role leading change deserves to be treated with importance and meaningfully recognised and Pacific women want to be included in the conversations that affect them. In short, Pacific women must lead program development and be part and partial of co-designing programs to achieve context and relevance before it is implemented. For example, there is criticism towards leadership programs that are not 'challenging' and grossly underestimate the level of skills of Pacific women. Pacific women want to be challenged at the global competitive level taking into context their skills that they already possess, when context is applied. This is so that a program to develop leaders/entrepreneurs will not just be about networking and listening to speakers in the Australian context but a program that seeks a balance of successful Pacific women and men as mentors who will teach practical strategies to overcome challenges within their communities. Furthermore, to create a dialogue about financial literacy for banking in the Pacific context, to seek grants, finance and investors as well as teach Pacific women how to



invest, save and build wealth. Pacific women are becoming self-taught through YouTube and access to the internet and perhaps programs that will help women access training easier using technology. Another example would be to ensure that a 'sewing program' will teach a woman how to design patterns, create, explore materials and exhibit competitively rather than just teaching women basic sewing for marketing at the market or on Facebook. The programs need to be competitive and realistic. Furthermore, it is preferred that Pacific women are included in the delivery and evaluation of programs to provide context, relatability, and a stronger impact in their communities.

2. Australian Government needs to design programs that have a mandatory component in all its programs that train Pacific women and men to be trainers - 'Train the Trainer' programs. Program delivery should have a meaningful succession plan so that programs have legacies and long-term impact to ensure that there isn't an overreliance on Australian consultants to hand-hold an entire project until the expiry or end of a project. A proper system must be put in place to educate Pacific women and men as leaders in programs but to make it incumbent upon them to also continue training other Pacific women and men as potential Pacific leaders. This is to teach our Pacific women and men to understand the importance of succession planning in all areas of leadership. Australian Government should play a role in overseeing the legacy of a project and still ensure that these programs are accountable to funding, delivery of expected outputs and is free from any form of corruption through independent audits.
3. In the Pacific, there is a lack of infrastructure to cater to the educational and employment demands of the people, which has caused a massive 'brain-drain' as more of the advantaged Pacific people leave their countries to live in Australia and New Zealand mainly. Recently, the waves of migration have increased due to women seeking asylum in Australia because of women's safety becoming a growing problem. Pacific people are not severed from their identity when they migrate. On the contrary, Pacific people living in Australia desperately seek opportunities to not just 'give back' through supporting their families in the Pacific, community service, sports, social clubs and causes but also to stay connected to their indigenous land, culture and identity. This is part of Pacific people living empowered lives in Australia and Pacific people living in their home countries being empowered through stronger links to their communities in Australia. Specifically, there is a real lack of vision in seeing how Pacific migrants living in Australia is a huge opportunity to build stronger links to Australia for the enhancement of Pacific people and especially women. The approach of the Australian Government should be to take efforts to tap into the intellectual resources of Pacific women living in Australia to be part of co-developing programs, consulting, training, mentoring, providing leadership and creating opportunities for Pacific women in Australia for Pacific women in the Pacific. It should also be further noted that Pacific communities work as a collective in



Australia and support each other's communities, which serves as a great strategic advantage to strengthen the links of the region. There is already existing capacity and resources within the Australian Pacific communities through organisations such as PWA and other Maori & Pacific Islander organisations work in partnership with mainstream services to provide culturally specific support to Pacific women in Australia. Some of the examples include the domestic violence, entrepreneurial leadership, healthy initiatives, and women's wellbeing

Violence against women in the Pacific needs to be addressed by Pacific people

4. Widespread violence against women is deeply rooted in a widespread disillusion that violence against women is culturally accepted in many Pacific communities. Women facing domestic violence are unable to voice the threats they face within their own homes and communities because of cultural taboos and hierarchical family structures in many communities across the Pacific. Pacific women tend to have less voice within their family compared to men. Partnering with local Pacific programs targeting perpetrators in Australia that cater to all Pacific countries should be in the form of an immersion program that trains trainers to then train other perpetrators in their home countries to also become trainers (partnering with the right organisations in the home country). A training mentorship program supporting Pacific leaders and people (men and women) to become trainers and mentors in local organisations that addresses issues around cultural perceptions on domestic violence behaviours and masculinity. This approach can be transferable across different communities and language groups by working in partnership with community organisations and NGO's supporting domestic violence awareness as well as the communities. These programs should be delivered in all aspects of life such as workplaces, government departments, universities, schools, and political heads of government. This can be broken up into different groups based on languages and train hundreds of trainers to mentor others in their communities and in different walks of life.
5. Violence against women in the Pacific has become an emergency and there is a significant number of women living in Australia that have survived violence, escaped violence or are experiencing violence in Australia by their Pacific-based partners and travelling in and out of Australia being abused. Pacific women are more empowered in Australia by their safety in their everyday lives. Accordingly, Pacific women living in Australian need to be given a seat at the table on the Australian platform to tell their stories, provide context and for Pacific women to participate in the challenge of violence against women in the Pacific. The conversation of violence does not require one-off consultations but ongoing dialogue essential to create a meaningful agenda that addresses violence against Pacific women. This also goes



back to Paragraph 3 of this submission in tapping into the intellectual resources of Pacific women living in Australia.

6. In addition, one of the significant factors that magnifies the disillusion of a culturally based right or religious based right to violate the rights of a woman, is the marginalisation of women's economic and political participation in all levels. Pacific women are the highest performing individuals but struggle with their advancement in positions of leadership and meaningful economic empowerment. The inclusion of Pacific women in employment opportunities, consulting, advisory, board positions, mentorship and training positions endorses Pacific women as leaders, to be financially independent and capable of doing hard work. Australian Government must be the first subscriber of this view by ensuring that Pacific women are provided equal opportunities especially in the field of addressing issues that affect them. Secondly, women's leadership programs should not only include women as a target audience but also men because Pacific men have to be included in the conversation about the importance of femininity in leadership and the roles that women actually play in society that renders them as natural leaders. For instance, agricultural industry, retail industry, fashion industry, market businesses, hospital industry and many other industries that serve the majority of the community, women are the majority but are significantly underpaid or have dynamics in the home that do not serve their financial welfare. Thirdly, the agenda of economic empowerment requires urgent priority i.e. women in business, women in workplaces, women as board directors, women as mentors, women as trainers, women as educators and women as leaders. In addition, women who have achieved social status and respect of the community when they have strong social standing should be identified and selected to seek help with strategies for entering into politics.

Pacific Asylum seekers in Australia

7. It is not known to what extent Pacific women from the Pacific region seeking asylum in Australia due to their safety and fleeing violence from their partners or communities. We recommend that this issue should be brought to light with the availability of data so that Pacific organisations in Australia can build capacity to respond to these issues and to support, help and protect the women in these communities. In particular to encourage the women to assimilate, seek jobs and assist with temporary living arrangements as they integrate into Australian society.

Working with civil society organisations on the ground

8. We recommend that the Australian Government assists in creating mechanisms to establish more visibility of local Pacific civil society organisations (formal and informal) identifying their functions, skills, capacities in a registry or database and



for these organisations to report their activities to remain current. This will also allow for the possibility for the Australian Government to work in partnership with existing bodies more effectively and to create more harmony amongst organisations working with each other. Additionally, to develop pathways for Pacific women to register their organisations with the Australian Government as a form of a recognised body of organisations and to encourage members of the community to register to relevant organisations for increased visibility.

9. We recommend that Australian Government assist with creating a mechanism to increase visibility of Pacific organisations within Australia in a similar fashion to Paragraph 8 so that there is increased visibility of Australian Pacific civil society organisations and are sought to participate in programs concerning Pacific people and especially Pacific women. This will also increase the visibility of our region's links and how we can cooperate and work together to achieve important agendas for women.
10. PWA is committed to developing women and girls of Pacific Island heritage of all ages to participate fully in Australian life, to provide leadership in their ethnic communities and to maintain networks and connections to their ancestral homelands and their relatives and friends in the Pacific. This may also include the auspicing of women's organisations for community events, support for the development of employment skills, development of business support for start-ups; business partnerships between women; and support in Australia of women seeking assistance due to domestic violence. PWA does not have access to long term funding outside of the ad hoc funding grants received for women's and multicultural events and seeks adequate funding to provide a viable service of support, information sharing, networking and a visible conduit between NGO and government services for women in diaspora. PWA recommends the funding for and strengthening of engagement between the Australian federal and state Offices of Women, civil society organisations and grass roots organisations led by and working for women from migrant and culturally linguistically diverse backgrounds.