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# Here Are The Women – Pacific (2017): Agnes Titus (/index.php/en/actions/here-are-the-women/538-here-are-the-women-pacific-2017-agnes-titus)



by Frances Tawake



“We seek to provide protection with dignity by offering these safe places that women can come to,” shared 63 year old Agnes Titus, the programme coordinator from Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCR) based in Bougainville. “(It is a place that it safe as they come) with their children with only clothes on their back.”

NCR is a small Catholic NGO, set up in 2001 with the purpose of helping women and children survivors of violence.

As a founding member and the President of the North Solomons’ Provincial Women’s Council in 1978, Titus is a mother of the Bougainville Women’s Movement.

Heavily involved in the preparatory work of the council since 1975, when Bougainville wanted to secede from Papua New Guinea, after serving two terms she never looked back - knowing her trail of hard work has changed the lives of so many people, especially women.

Titus strongly feels that women’s lives are robust, but formal systems mainly rule a line between men and women.

These, according to her, are based on attitudes that suppress women's participation in decision making, personally, community or nationally and which clearly creates a barrier from sustainable peace.

"Peace has to be maintained at all costs and peace starts from personal peace," she underscored. "(From personal to) community peace, community peace (to) national peace to global peace - that is why preventative work is very important."

"Local knowledge and traditional governance structures need to be recognised because they have a role to play. Peace building actors (also) need to be gender sensitive."

Titus reflected on her own her'story during last week's 'Women, Peace and Security and the Humanitarian Agenda: Participation, Preparedness and Protection' Interactive Dialogue, outlining the progress made by peace women and the journey that lies ahead.

"We started hearing about (UNSCR) 1325 through another NGO, Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency because of their linkage with femLINKpacific," she recalled. "We just started to hear about it from them, not really understanding but because Bougainville, I think, was looking at the different spaces – the political space, the humanitarian space – all those things together."

"I think that is how our ball got faster because being a woman, she will understand the needs of women and the situation we were going through. That is how we got our (Women, Peace and Security) Action Plan going. However, that Action Plan could have sat under the peace and security framework alone... we did not have a policy."

Titus happened to be at UNWomen at the time this gap was identified with the Bougainville government seeking technical assistance to address the issue.

"And so... we came up with the Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Peace and Security Policy... down hangs out action plan," she continued. "That document actually has helped our government and civil society to work hand in hand."

"We recognise our different roles and now we need to come back together and review."

Currently, NRC's programme 'from gender based violence to gender justice' has been connecting with women leaders all over Bougainville, building their capacity in knowing and exercising their rights as well as raising awareness of the laws that has been put in place to protect them in times of violence.

Part of this has been the successful hosting of a Women Human Rights Defender's annual forum with a focus on partnership parenting, gender and human rights and family sexual violence.

"For the women, it's new information but it's something that they have been going through," Titus explained. "Just listening to one another, sharing their experience is powerful."

Apart from working with established and active human rights defenders, the NRC has also developed a focus on school based peer education programmes for young girls, working closely with Department of Education Secretary.

"We felt that having the school-based education programme can help," outlined Titus who explained that the focus is on young girls currently facing challenges in their lives as the NRC.

Titus strongly feels that networking with a stronger women's movement networks is very important in amplifying local organisation work and activities and having that connection to the local and regional organisation is really important in influencing change.

"You've got to have women in the right spaces," she stressed.

