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# GPPAC Pacific National Consultation – Tonga, August 2017 (</index.php/en/actions/archive/579-gppac-pacific-national-consultation-tonga-august-2017>)

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A two-day Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Tonga national consultation hosted by the Talitha Project took place on the 15th and 16th of August, 2017. The activity is part of the regional Gender Inclusive Conflict Prevention and Human Security programme of GPPAC Pacific coordinated by femLINKpacific and supported by the Pacific Islands Forum Non State Actors programme funded by the European Union.



## **FemTALK Pacific: Peace Education, Inclusive Dialogue Key to Preventing Conflict**

*by Alisia Evans*

“If your family is hungry, if there is no food in the kitchen, there will be a problem.”

These were the words Anitelu Toe’api, Public Relations and Communications officer for the Civil Society Forum of Tonga.

“If there is no money in the bank account for your family’s needs, there will be a problem,” he continued.

Toe’api was presenting human security analysis of the issues civil society groups are addressing through their work during the opening session of a two-day Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Tonga national consultation hosted by the Talitha Project.

The activity is part of the regional Gender Inclusive Conflict Prevention and Human Security programme of GPPAC Pacific coordinated by femLINKpacific and supported by the Pacific Islands Forum Non State Actors programme funded by the European Union.

Participants include representatives from Naunau ‘o e ‘Alamaite Tonga Association (NATA), Bahai Faith, Civil Society Forum of Tonga, Catholic Church, Assemblies of God International Christian Worship Centre, Ma’a Fafine Mo e Famili, Tonga Trust, Girl Guides, Tonga Family Health Association as well as local government officials.

The Tonga national consultation is a follow up from the annual GPPAC Regional CSO Forum, convened by femLINKpacific in Suva, Fiji in July this year, where members of the network reaffirmed their collective strategies as a network of pacific peace builders including Peace Education.

According to Vilai Ilolahia of Ma’a Fafine Mo e Famili - a Tongan non-governmental organisation working on women and family’s human rights - this is one way to tackle the root causes of conflicts, including the prevalence of domestic violence.

“The best way is to educate (people) about the issue,” he said. “More of the focus should be directed towards educating the people and the more we can mobilise them (the more we can) turn our energy towards practicality.”

Peace education programmes, he added, should include government officials, civil society and traditional and religious leaders.

This, according to Toe’api, is a way to address the power structures in particular the unequal distribution of power in homes and communities which is a root cause of conflict.

“Most of the domestic violence between wife and husband is (because there is) no food at home, no money and who has the power at home?” he outlined. “Most of the young people are feeling disconnected from their homes, doing crime, accessing drugs because they feel that home is not a home for them.”

In her introductory remarks, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific and the Chairperson of the International Board of GPPAC, highlighted how women leaders from Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga have been collaborating for more than 10 years dedicated to enhancing human security approach in order to contribute to the prevention of violence and conflict which each country had experienced.

“That’s why we decided to engage with GPPAC because it is about shifting from reaction to prevention,” she explained.

Since 2009, femLINKpacific has convened the GPPAC Pacific network and this year Vanessa Heleta, the Director of the Talitha Project in Tonga was elected Chairperson of the GPPAC Pacific Regional Steering Group.

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## **FemTALK Pacific: Tongan Young Women Define Peace, Human Security**

*Nukualofa, Tonga - by Alisia Evans with Sian Rolls*

“Peace is not just a statement, it’s not just a word but is an act that leaders and people in the community, at home, in our country need to act upon,” shared Vika Savieti, one of 15 young women who participated at a Human Security Peace Education consultation held yesterday (Monday 14th August) in Nukualofa.

The event was led by femLINKpacific in collaboration with the Talitha Project as part of the regional Gender Inclusive Conflict Prevention and Human Security programme of Global Partnership of the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific supported by the Pacific Islands Forum Non State Actors programme funded by the European Union.

“Peace Education is not about teaching young women Peacebuilding practice but investing in their time and space to define their Peace and Human Security,” said Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINKpacific and the Chairperson of the International Board of GPPAC. “This is critical as a feminist organisation because too often we are defining a future that looks conflict riddled rather than asking young women and girls what is the future they want and then working with them to realise these visions.”

According to Bhagwan Rolls, the messages will set the scene for the GPPAC Tonga network meeting (15 August) and provide insights as to how to progress Forum Leaders commitment to conflict prevention, human security and UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

“It is time that women and girls are put at the centre of defining the Peace for our region,” she added.

“This was a good opportunity for my group to see what Tonga really needs,” highlighted Emanita Vakaahi, 19 years old and also a volunteer at the Talitha Project. “Youth and girls have our own important needs and we need to speak up because men are not the only ones who need to speak and they do need to hear our voices.”

“When we go back to the community and work in the community what we notice is that not all the voices are being heard,” explained 24 year old Savieti who is studying for a certificate in youth development at Tupou Tertiary Institute in Nukualofa and a volunteer based at the Talitha Project – an NGO that empowers young women to reach their full potential by providing information through innovative media and communications. “Most of the women don’t talk during (the) town council meeting - even the youth when they talk the elders shut you down.”

### Silence is Not Golden

This silence is, unfortunately, a trend that is not unique to Tonga alone.

In a region where patriarchal societies are the norm, it is such decision making spaces - where the older men dominate - that discourage youth and women from speaking.

It is a key barrier that young Fijian women have also identified.

“For us young women, we are leaders of tomorrow, we need leaders of today to hear us and also share their knowledge with us,” recommended Finau Nalairuwai, 32 years old and a member of the Lomolomo Youth Club told femLINK from Lautoka earlier this month.

“You can't prevent conflict if half of the population is silent and unable to communicate trends and their human security analysis,” said Bhagwan Rolls. “And that is why the work with and by the Talitha Project is so vital in communities and also via the media especially radio.”

It is also a timely reminder for Pacific Forum Leaders to revisit their commitments to a peaceful, stable and inclusive Pacific.

“As our Pacific Island Leaders look at implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 16 (on Just, Peaceful and Inclusive societies) we cannot discount the voices of Pacific young women who play a significant role in preventing and reducing all forms of violence and finding lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity,” continued Bhagwan Rolls. “Spaces such as these are critical to be able to ensure that the spirit of Agenda 2030 is realised and that no-one including young women and girls are left behind.”

The GPPAC Tonga meeting will be held at the Tanoa Dateline International Hotel in Nukualofa on the 15th and 16th of August, 2017.

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