

# No Longer About ‘Temporary’ – Women Need Special Measures says The Fiji Women’s Forum

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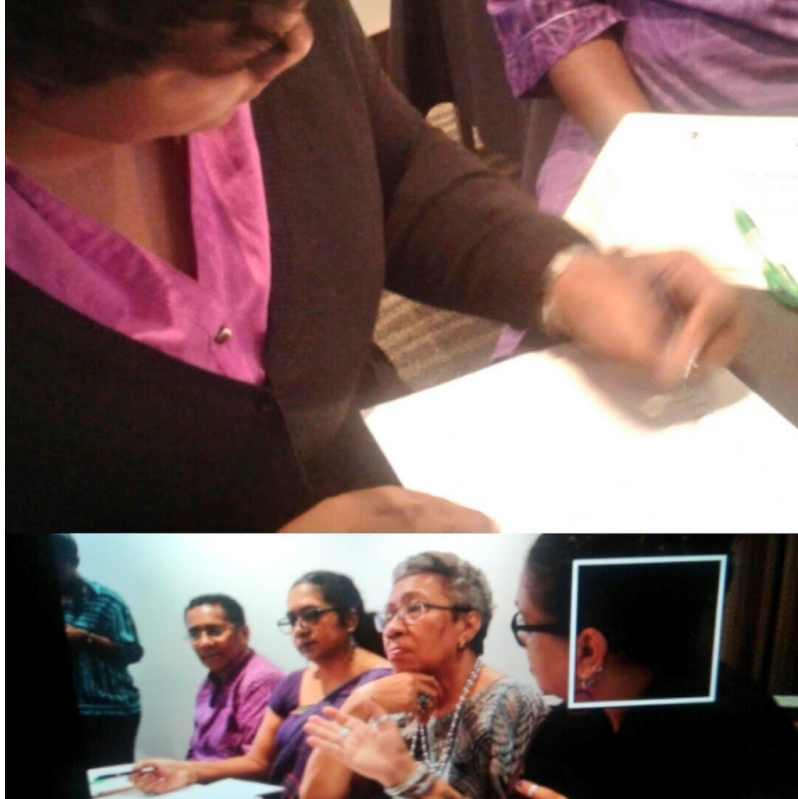
Suva, Fiji Islands



“Systems and laws need to liberate people to participate,” says the President of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama Taukei (SSVMT), Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, as the co-convenors of the The Fiji Women’s Forum (The FWF) today reaffirmed their commitment to advance women led participation in decision making structures with the signing of the latest Terms of Reference (TOR) today:

“Changes are needed to enable meaningful participation.”

The TOR signed today will carry the work of The FWF forward for the next two years.



“This marked a solidification of the commitment to work together as The Fiji Women’s Forum,” remarked Nalini Singh, Executive Director of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM). The organisation will continue as the Secretariat of The FWF.

Accountability to this commitment and more has been one of the focuses of The FWF.

“We have come a long way but there is so much left to be done,” added Fay Volatabu, the National Council of Women (NCWF), General Secretary. “Women should not just be a number but they must be meaningfully participating.”

“We need more women in parliament, in policy making bodies, in cabinet as well as women participating at the lowest level of decision making,” continued Tabakaucoro. “It is important to look at gender at the different levels – this includes the issues as well as their participation.”

The co-conveners, SSVMT, NCWF, FWRM and femLINKpacific (femLINK), also marked the occasion with the launch of The FWF logo.



“The co-convenors bring their collective knowledge and wisdom in work that they do together as well as individually for the shared goals we have... this is what the logo represents,” explained Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINK Executive Producer-Director, adding the image reflects of the women from across Fiji who have come together during The FWF’s activities since 2012.

The FWF’s co-convenors also reflected on the impact of their collective work for their individual organisations during today’s event.

“The (Fiji Women’s) Forum enabled us to create a new relevance for the SSV as it broadened our view as an organisation,” reflected Tabakaucoro. “Sadly, society continues to regard women within their traditional roles (despite) the commitment to 30% (women’s representation in decision making) being there for more than 40 years.”

Going forward, The FWF will be building a body of evidence through desk research as well as analysis of quantitative and qualitative evidence drawn from the constituency of the 4 co-convenors on the Sustainable Development Goal 5. This will be followed by a national consultation ahead of the 2018 elections.

The proceedings of the press event are available in audio from <https://soundcloud.com/femlinkpacific/femtalk89fm-suva-apr-17-the-fiji-womens-forum-press-event> with video footage from: <https://youtu.be/s2EQpPHdP5w>

#### *Background:*

*The Fiji Women’s Forum’s first national consultation on women’s participation in national democratic processes 12th April 2012 was a historical moment in Fiji bringing together women from rich and diverse*

*backgrounds – women living with disabilities and living with HIV, as well as different faiths, cultures, sexualities, gender identities, ages, demographics and opinions.*

*While The Fiji Women’s Forum was initially formed to bring together diverse women’s groups towards the shared aim of increasing women’s participation in leadership - in particular focusing on women’s participation in Fiji’s national elections - which was held in September 2014, the co-conveners have since convened four more forums with the purpose of:*

- *Securing and supporting the full participation of women in all levels of decision-making*
- *Engaging more women in the development and political processes of Fiji*
- *Bringing attention to the diverse needs and concerns of women by facilitating appropriate responses and communicating this to a wider audience.*

*The four national forums enabled a diversity of women to mobilize in large numbers and implement civic education in collaboration with other women. Women participated in the constitution making process at different levels and degrees allowing for their voices and experiences to be included in the democratization process and the 5th Women's Forum 5 held in April 2015 specifically focused on women in local governance.*

The Fiji Women’s Forum - A First Decade of Commitment

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“It’s an affirmation of our unity and solidarity,” said Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, Soqosoqo Vakamarama Taukei President.



Midway through its first decade of collaboration The Fiji Women's Forum continues to demonstrate a commitment to advancing women led participation in decision making structures and on 27 April, 2017, the co-conveners, the Soqosoqo Vakamarama Taukei (SSVMT), the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), the National Council of Women (NCWF) and femLINKpacific (femLINK) will renew this commitment with the signing of the latest Terms of Reference (TOR) on Thursday 27 April, 2017.

It is a commitment that has demonstrated the diversity and resilience of women since the first national convening was organised in April 2012, when immediately after devastating floods, women came together actively affirming their commitment to engaging in the Constitution making process.

"It shows that we have not wavered from our commitments - take for example our commitments to peace and security," continued Fay Volatabu, NCWF General Secretary. "Four years down the line, we are still fighting for the demilitarisation of public service appointments."

"We are still fighting for more women in leadership positions. We are still fighting for human rights and more (women's) participation in all spaces so the significance of this is that we haven't faltered, we haven't wavered from our initial commitment. We are just renewing it."

"The Fiji Women's Forum was revolutionary in that it brought together four (4) women's groups with different agendas and mandates for one common goal, to promote women in leadership," said Nalini Singh, Executive Director of FWRM. "It's a testimony of our commitment to movement-building and recognising the power of a collective voice in bringing about positive change."



"We work as autonomous organisations and so the word that stands out is resilience - that 5 years on, we represent the resilience of the women's movement," added Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Producer-Director of femLINK. "Now, more than ever, we need more resilient leadership which women have demonstrated after every cyclone and floods."

“But, women remain under-representation in local governance, which is really needed right now. We also need to strategise ahead of the 2018 elections.”

“Five years on, the forum enables us to mobilise and work collaboratively with all women across the country and we’re excited to see and address the challenges that lie ahead and what more we can do as a coalition,” added Singh.

The MOU will be signed during the second day of a two-day retreat to strategise and look ahead to the future together.

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