



## OMBUDSMAN SPEECH

### Apia, 4 September 2018 – ***OMBUDSMAN'S OPENING ADDRESS - APF Pacific Roundtable on the rights of women and girls***

Talofa ladies and gentlemen!

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2018 APF PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS here in Apia, Samoa. My Office is grateful for the opportunity to be hosting this Roundtable and therefore thank APF for putting together an engaging programme.

As we are all aware, women and girls are one of the most vulnerable groups in society who continue to be subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence. Pacific region experience is nothing to be proud of with serious cases of violence against women occurring with saddening frequency. Pacific countries have put in place laws and policies that protect women and girls from such discrimination and promote gender equality. However, the implementation and enforcement of these laws and policies is either not happening or not prioritized.

Deep-rooted attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices also contribute to women and girls being discriminated against in areas of education, health and the justice system. Furthermore, there have been serious cases of gender based violence which has resulted in a serious violation human rights and dignity of women and girls. The inadequate representation of women in both national and local governance further exacerbates the issue.

While measures have been put in place in many Pacific countries (relevant to their context) that work towards the elimination of discrimination against women, there is still room for improvement. Therefore, discussions from today and tomorrow is crucial to ensure that NHRI's across the region and its partners are equipped with the knowledge and understanding to not only better promote and advance the rights of women and girls, but also to lobby Government as well as national institutions to consciously continue directing its policy towards progressively removing discriminatory legislation and practices against women and girls.

The Roundtable aims to:

1. Identify, and prioritise, the issues that impact on women and girls in the Pacific Region.

2. Share gender specialisation and gender mainstreaming experiences including strategies, tools, resources and challenges.
3. Strengthen strategic partnerships between NHRIs, governments and civil society and development organisations working in the region toward gender equality and the promotion and protection of women's and girl's rights.

From the Samoa's NHRI, this Roundtable could not be timelier as we prepare to launch our National Public Inquiry into Family Violence Report next week on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2018. Our Inquiry set out to focus on violence faced by women and girls. In the process it became clear that violence involved in disciplining and upbringing of children in Samoan homes is a factor that in a crucial way plays into violence that women and girls face later in life and into violence in general in society.

I sincerely hope you will enjoy these two days of discussions and networking. Thank you for your participation.

Soifua!