



PRESS RELEASE

Apia, Samoa (25 November 2020) – 3 UPOLU VILLAGES LAUNCH VILLAGE FAMILY SAFETY COMMITTEES WORKPLANS 2020-2023 TO COMMEMORATE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2020

Samoa joins countries around the world today in acknowledging the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign. As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an alarming increase in the already existing pandemic of violence against women and girls globally. Samoa continues to do its part to prevent violence within homes through various initiatives and efforts by Government and partners.

One of these initiatives includes the Family Safety Committee pilot project emanating from Recommendation 20 of the National Inquiry into Family Violence 2018 by the Ombudsman Office as the National Human Rights Institution.

The pilot project sees six villages in Samoa, with endorsement from their Village Fono (*Village Councils*), establish their Village Family Safety Committees to assist Village Fono and churches in their villages with ongoing family violence prevention initiatives. Lalovi - Mulifanua, Lotopue and Vaiee are amongst the six villages from Upolu committed to eliminating violence against women and girls through their three-year workplans launched today which consists of key activities they intend to carry out within their own villages.

The Ombudsman, Maiava Iulai Toma, in his remarks acknowledged the commitment of different organizations in Samoa doing their part, "Government cannot be solely responsible for this issue. There is not one best solution for this matter and today we acknowledge the efforts of our villages here who, through their established Committees, will contribute to a change of mindsets and behaviors that strengthen peace within homes".

He further stressed the aim of setting up the committees was to be the "eyes and ears" of the Fono, to report to the village council or police any family violence issues.

They are to be equipped to act as an informational network to ensure that key messages by service providers and Government Ministries relating to family safety and impacts of family violence are continuously being echoed and shared with every family in villages. They would also work alongside partners in conducting their own family violence prevention awareness and be an informal referral pathway that can provide the first assistance within their respective villages to individuals and families requiring family violence services.

Various activities in the village work plans include reviewing of their bylaws to strengthen family violence village laws and penalties, regular visits to families particularly vulnerable families, village cultural days to remind youths of principles and values of *fa'asamoa* [Samoan way of life] that empathize on the importance of women and relationships, etc.

NHRI acknowledges the continuous commitment and support of various partners who have contributed in one way or another throughout this project including the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership), funded primarily by the European Union, and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and UN Women, and is led by the Pacific Community (SPC), UN Women and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. It also acknowledges the Sisters for Change and the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative for its ongoing support.

Background information on Pacific Partnership

The Pacific region has some of the highest rates of violence against women recorded in the world – twice the global average with an estimated two in every three Pacific women impacted by gender-based violence. Along with high rates of violence – a grave human rights violation - women and girls in the Pacific region experience constant and continual inequalities including low levels of participation in decision-making, limited economic opportunities, and restricted access to critical services and rights.

The Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership) brings together governments, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG), and increase access to quality response services for survivors.

The EUR26.0 million programme is funded primarily by the European Union (EUR12.7m) with targeted support from the Governments of Australia (EUR9.5m) and New Zealand (EUR3.2m) and cost-sharing with UN Women (EUR0.6m), and is led by the Pacific Community (SPC), UN Women and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

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