



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Apia, 8 July 2022 – *Children and Young People weigh in on human rights issues affecting them.***

On Thursday 7 July children and young people representing various colleges, and youth groups in Samoa gathered for the first-ever Children and Young People's Human Rights Forum hosted by the Office of the Ombudsman also Samoa's National Human Rights Institution in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Child Rights Connect and funding from the United States through the USAID.

The key objective of the forum was for children and young people to not only understand the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reporting process but most importantly to share their views on issues affecting their rights and freedom and make recommendations on ways in which the Government can help address these issues. The feedback will then go towards an alternative children's submission that will be submitted to the CRC Committee later in the year to assist with Samoa's upcoming review of its obligations under the CRC. Such feedback will greatly benefit the State in ensuring that recommendations that the CRC Committee will make are relevant to Samoa's national context.

Ms Joyce Matagiolo of Aana 1 College led the gathering with prayer and Afioga Luamanuvao Katalaina Sapolu delivered the opening remarks. *"Your contributions in today's discussions are important so you can express your views about your experiences, of any children's rights that have not been observed or not protected. It is also important for you to know, what happens to your views, how will they be used by CRC Committee, by our government, by other organisations in the country that work on these matters, and by our Office which monitors how human rights are protected and promoted in our country."* Luamanuvao said in her remarks.

U.S Embassy Deputy Mark Hitchcock delivered the donor remarks and acknowledged the forum as a platform to help empower the children of Samoa to participate in international human rights mechanisms and share their views on issues that are meaningful and deeply affecting them. *"Our hope is that through continued partnership like this Forum we can help support the voice of young people in Samoa to help empower them to participate in international human rights mechanisms and lead us into a future that is resilient, free and open."*

The Forum was attended by Justice Vui Clarence Nelson, Senior Justice of the Supreme Court and Committee Member to the CRC committee, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), Ms Natasha Lee Hang who participated in the 84<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary CRC Session in 2020, Mr Poka Tuifelasa'i who is the Samoa representative to the Child rights Connect Children's Committee and also

Aniva Clarke who presented via video link and a member of and Samoa's representative on the Teen Committee for the CRC on climate change.

One of the outcomes of the workshop included establishing a 13-member Children and Young People's Working Group that will be responsible for putting together the children and young people's alternative submission to the CRC Committee. A follow-up event for the Forum is planned for September to validate the alternative report which will be submitted once the State submits its national report.

The Office acknowledges the ongoing support of SPC through the USAID and Child Rights Connect, the Principals and teachers and especially the children and young people who took part.

**END**