

## **Press Release**

### **Pacific MPs urged to champion addressing violence against women**

16 December 2009, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Suva - 'I urge you to champion the cause of violence against women without any fear of a backlash from your constituents,' said Hon. Robert Oakeshott.

Speaking at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team (SPC/RRRT) Consultation for Regional Members of Parliament on Advancing Legislative Change on Violence Against Women and Other Human Rights Issues currently held in Brisbane, Australia, the New South Wales MP challenged male parliamentarians in the Pacific to play a crucial role and be involved in advocacy activities to fight violence against women.

He cleared any doubts amongst the MPs that championing the cause will affect their chances of being re-elected to Parliament at the next election.

'I am a living testimony of an MP who has been championing this cause and I have still come out as one who collected the highest number of votes at the polls', said Hon. Oakeshott.

He suggested that Pacific Island MPs needed to test the waters more in championing women's causes and to appeal to their voters.

Pacific Parliamentary Champion on Gender and former Speaker of the Nauru Parliament, Hon. Aloysius Amwano, said whilst presenting on the Nauru experience that while there has been great lip service paid to this issue, very few results have been achieved. As traditional leaders, parliamentarians have to leave their comfort zones to be able to accept that discrimination against women is happening in their own cultures, their own countries and their own homes.

He emphasised that women are not seeking pity or sympathy, they are asking only for recognition of their abilities to do any task they know they can achieve and to know that they have the confidence of their peers, their families, their countries and the world that they can do these tasks just as any man can.

He told fellow Pacific parliamentarians that they must act now as beacons of democracy to restore the dignity and safety to their families by adopting an attitude of zero tolerance towards violence against women and children.

'We must legislate for gender equality and protection as we in the Pacific pride ourselves in valuing the concept of family', said Hon. Amwano.

When introducing the speakers, SPC's Alifereti Bulivou said that 'MPs have the authority to promote and endorse human rights-based and gender sensitive legislation, and command and influence resource mobilisation for improving people's lives, securing and monitoring progress'.

The five-day consultation organised by SPC/RRRT will end this Friday.

For further details, please contact Alifereti Bulivou, email: [aliferetib@spc.int](mailto:aliferetib@spc.int) or Lionel Aingimea, email: [lionela@spc.int](mailto:lionela@spc.int).

RRRT is a programme within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and provides training, technical support, policy and advocacy advice in human rights to promote social justice and good governance throughout the Pacific.