



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
NUKU'ALOFA**

Friday 8th March 2013
MEDIA RELEASE

“Real Stories, Real Women: Breaking the Silence that Allows Violence”



Guest of Honour, Hon. Frederica Tuita, International Women's Day 2013

International Women's Day is marked on the 8th of March every year around the world. This year, International Women's Day was marked in Tonga at a special event at Davina House by the Guest of Honour, Honourable Frederica Fatafehi Lapaha Tuita, under the theme, 'Real Stories, Real Women: Breaking the Silence that Allows Violence.'

A media package, entitled 'Real Stories, Real Women,' was launched at the event, containing stories from victims of domestic violence in Tonga, and contacts details of government and non-government organisations (NGO) working in this area. A Media Workshop on Violence Against Women for journalists and human rights advocates will be also held in the next month, April 2013.

Hon. Frederica Tuita was pleased to participate in the event, and acknowledged the work of the government and NGOs working in this area.

“More importantly, it is time to celebrate, reflect and acknowledge the numerous responsibilities of women in our daily lives, in the home, in the workplace, and in the communities. It is an occasion for recognizing their struggles and to draw attention to them,” she emphasized.

Domestic violence in Tonga is rising and has become a major concern. The Ministry of Police and other Service Providers have reported that an average of 300 domestic violence cases are reported every year. The National Report on Violence Against Women launched in March 2012 reported that 77% of women and girls

have experienced physical and sexual violence in their lives by partners and non-partners. The majority of these victims were assaulted in the home.

Tonga has made progress in terms of addressing violence against women. A draft Family Protection Bill will be submitted to parliament when parliament sessions commence this calendar year. Should parliament endorse this bill, a parliamentary group will conduct community consultations.

The Australian Government provided financial support to the Tongan Government to mark this day, and has been very supportive of the national marking of International Women's Day over the years. This represents a shared recognition that violence against women is unacceptable.

The Australian High Commissioner to Tonga, HE Mr. Brett Aldam, said that the celebration of International Women's Day represents another milestone in empowering women and girls, but it is not the end of the journey.

"No country is immune from the devastating impacts of violence against women, including Australia. In marking International Women's Day, we recommit ourselves to ending the violence wherever it occurs and to delivering the opportunities that will improve the lives and livelihoods of women and benefit society as a whole," he added.

Both Governments have agreed to work together to progress the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative announced at the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum. Australia also has provided funds to the United Nations Eliminating Violence Against Women Project that enables both Tongan government and non-government organisations to apply for grants for programs that address eliminating violence against women. Other support provided by the Australian Government include funding the National Study on Domestic Violence and other research and training opportunities to promote gender equality across Tonga.



Australian High Commissioner to Tonga, HE Mr. Brett Aldam and CEO of Internal Affairs, Mr. Lopeti Senituli.

ENDS

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