



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women



United Nations  
Development Programme

## Press Release

For immediate release

### United Nations steps up its efforts in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide

**3 March 2011, Apia** — In the run-up to the 8 March International Women's Day, the new United Nations entity, UN Women, celebrated its creation on 24 February. In Samoa, the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) commemorated both the International Women's Day and the global launch of the UN Women. Honourable Fiame Naomi Mataafa, Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, delivered the keynote address for this event. She noted the commemoration of International Women's Day as an opportunity to reflect on the important contribution that women make towards development. This calls for appropriate institutional mechanisms, such as UN Women, to ensure that women are able to make this contribution.

The Honourable Prime Minister of Samoa Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Naiti Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi, and Cabinet Ministers were in attendance to show their support for the advancement of women. Members of the diplomatic corps, the High Commissioner for New Zealand, Charge d'affairs of the US Embassy, representative from the AusAID were also in attendance. Heads of government ministries, members of the NGO community and village women representatives from both Upolu and Savaii were also present to be part of this celebration.

For the first time, the UN has now an agency with both normative and operational functions solely dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. In her opening speech, Minister Fiame Naomi Mataafa of MWCSD, noted that "the establishment of the new UN entity was a strategic move that would support MWCSD's ground efforts and also provide a platform for the voice of women at the regional and international level".

Despite the significant progress made in advancing gender equality during the last centuries and despite the work of UNIFEM, UN Women's predecessor, around the world there are still far too many women and children who are trafficked; too many domestic workers who left their families to live in new places, unprotected by labor laws or policies; too many girls forced to leave school or married too early and too many women and girls who lack access to service. And, worldwide, there are too few women who are at decision-making tables when peace, trade or climate change agreements are being negotiated and who could address the needs of women and girls and protect them through these legal instruments.

In Samoa, women are doing well on a global scale in terms of the education of women and their participation in paid employment, including employment at executive levels. Samoa is doing less well in other areas, however: Samoa shares the problem of violence against women with many other countries. According to a 2005 WHO Multi-Country study, Samoa had one of the highest levels of physical and sexual violence by non partners on women after the age of 15, with a prevalence rate of 65 percent.

Samoa is among the lowest ranked in the world in terms of women in government; women currently hold four of 49 seats in parliament (12.2%), and three of ministerial posts in Cabinet (23.0%) Of 162 candidates standing for the 2011 elections, only nine are women. Although over the last decade, there has been a noticeable 10%

increase from 2001 to 2006 in the number of women bestowed with chiefly titles. There are however, a few villages who maintain a ban on female *matai* (chief) participating in local governance.

Speaking at the event, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Officer-in-Charge, Mr Sanaka Samarasingha, praised progresses made in gender equality in Samoa during the last ten years, but also recognized the need for greater women's involvement in government, highlighting both a continued gender imbalance in parliament, as well as the lack of female candidates (only eight) in the upcoming elections. He added, "Violence against women unfortunately continues to be an issue in this country and when a new government is in place I hope that we can recommit all of us towards eradicating gender-based violence once for all."

In addressing these issues, UN Women will focus on *five thematic priorities in its operational activities* in partnership with governments and different sectors of the society:

- 1) ***Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation*** to close the gaps in women's leadership and participation in different sectors and to demonstrate the benefits for society as a whole;
- 2) ***Ending violence against women*** by enabling states to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services;
- 3) ***Strengthening implementation of the women, peace and security agenda***, through women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes, gender-responsive early warning, protection from sexual violence and redress for its survivors in accordance with UN resolutions;
- 4) ***Enhancing women's economic empowerment*** including in the context of global economic and environmental crises through the full realization of women's economic security and rights; and
- 5) ***Making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting*** through supporting national capacities in evidence-based planning, budgeting and statistics.

While gender equality is a fundamental human right, and a necessary goal on that ground alone, it will also serve as the catalyst for immense socio-economic development and will help to advance the ideals of democracy and freedom around the world. The success of UN Women depends now on all of us, to continue the momentum and to ensure its integration into the organizations and governments working towards the global empowerment of Women.

The event also marked the establishment of UN Women office in Apia to enhance the delivery of UN Women's services to the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau.

UN Women is working closely with the UNDP Samoa - Multi-Country Office and will hold a series of consultations with the governments, the civil society and the donor community throughout the week of 7 - 12 March to align their priorities.

**For more information about UN Women, visit [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)**

**For further enquiries, please contact:** Jenny Iao Jorgensen, M&E and Knowledge Management Specialist, UNDP Samoa – Multi Country Office for Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau, ph: (685) 23670, mobile: (685) 7257402, email: [jenny.jorgensen@undp.org](mailto:jenny.jorgensen@undp.org)



Figure 1: Village women representatives from both Upolu and Savaii came to celebrate the International Women's Day and the launch of UN Women.



Figure 2: Village women in Samoa are getting increasingly involved in village development issues. More however can and needs to be done to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in various sectors of the society.