

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



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Distinguished Chair,

Traditionally, our Marshall Islands society has been matriarchal with general custody over land and related responsibilities passing through the mother, while it was both men and women who tended the land, it was the women who nurtured the clan and thus decided the survival of its legacy.

In our contemporary and rapidly globalizing world, women need to own their own land and the benefits it can provide. New opportunities have emerged – and with them new challenges for Marshallese women, who face hurdles in addressing a high incidence of domestic violence, a low number of women in leadership positions to boost women in decision-making posts. The resiliency of our legacy is the cornerstone.

The Marshall Islands, since ratifying CEDAW in 2006, needs to fully implement relevant provisions including through the adoption of a National Women's Policy. Even more important than policies is the need to implement national action against violence, to build mainstreamed capacities in schools, education opportunities for women, and to further open the door to women's participation. And perhaps one of the most daunting questions for our nation is climate change, without concerted global, national and local action to address a global challenge that is a gendered dimension – our vulnerability to natural hazards and unprecedented risks to our development – and our very security.

Our government is challenged by limited capacity and resources. However, we must note critical progress which has emerged, and areas that need to be strengthened – this includes the 2009 – 2012 Labour and Employment, the National Resource Development Committee, tasked with CEDAW and ILO issues, reformation of gender issues within national planning – and in particular, the 2009 – 2012 Labour and Employment, as well as some progress on MDG 3 in relation to gender advances in education and employment. Our ongoing initiatives and aspirations include addressing:

- Violence against Women – through boosting law enforcement and legal protection, networking and community awareness, and women/children protective services
- Economic and Political Participation – through leadership training, boosting targeted jobs and educational opportunities
- Gender & Climate Change – through mainstreaming awareness, adaptation and energy strategies and sustainable livelihoods for women

The Marshall Islands – working through both the own government and UN Women, a national NGO of which I am a member – is taking steps with our partners to accelerate progress. A spread of projects are showing promising results – working with assistance from UN Women to strengthen national legislation – and working in an innovative coalition with government assistance by the IIN Trust Fund – to address domestic violence.

Yet critical gaps remain, and we have the solutions to address them. Our development partners to consider how partnerships to advance our goals in gender in the Marshall Islands and the Pacific region is a critical investment in our future.