



STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND  
POVERTY ALLEVIATION OF THE FIJIAN GOVERNMENT - DR. TIKO LUVENI

56<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, NEW YORK (5<sup>TH</sup>  
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Madam Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me to begin by bringing you a warm welcome from the Fijian government and its people. Our  
population of 837,000 people is centred in rural and peri-urban areas, and the theme of this year's CSW  
could not be more suitable in the rural context where the contribution of rural women to sustainable  
socio-economic national development is vital.

Madam Chairman, in the context of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and meeting the MDGs,  
I would like to align Fiji's statement with that of the G77 and China, which restates with the challenges,  
obstacles and needs of rural women in Fiji.

Madam Chairman:

The Fijian Government prioritizes policies that promote gender equality in the decision making process,  
through the empowerment of women. In this regard, I would like to outline key initiatives in the national  
context:

1. We continue to support women taking up leadership positions in the traditional meetings of the  
three high chiefs by the more conservative Fijian society. There are 223 women chiefs  
of traditional clans compared to 1,376 men. The positive is that women are not denied their  
traditional inheritance. With respect to the new women chiefs, community based leadership and  
empowerment initiative is necessary to continue to bolster their leadership positions. About 300  
women are members of hospital boards and village committees. Given the strength of kinship  
in our communities, such leadership roles are a bridge to improve health care.
2. In line with the existing Domestic Violence Decree and a National Commission to Zero  
Tolerance of Violence against Women, 173 local communities have in 2011 decided to zero

tolerance in their communities, and the aim is to increase this number by 12 communities annually. Such commitments by rural and urban communities is supported at the national level by legislative frameworks such as Fiji's Family Law Act and the Gender Decree, and the provision for social services in the areas for education and health that prioritise the needs of women and children.

3. Rural women's access to Productive Resources, Markets and Financial Institutions has been a recent area of focus. The ability of rural women to engage in income-generating activities has in the past been curtailed by no or limited access to financial services. The Micro Finance Unit and the National Centre for Small and Micro Enterprise Development has identified rural women as a group with potential to create sustainable economic development. The majority of women as their majority clientele – 78% of the cases of the Micro Finance Unit and 87% of the NCSMED.

4. The Government's Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development has prioritized, for the period of 2007-2012, the improvement of Infrastructure and Service Delivery. With the assistance of bilateral development partners, 1900 sewing machines have been distributed to a myriad of women's communities to support their income-generating activities. This activity is also contributing to rural livelihoods and sustainable development by providing women access to safe water, electricity and access to markets.

With access to markets, for from home, rural women who make up 87% of market vendors in Fiji's urban areas will need support services such as a reduction in their time in the cities and to visit selling their produce. This is a project that government has been working with UN Women to deliver, and continues to alleviate poverty, given that a report by UN Women highlights that 70% of market vendors' incomes are used to support basic family needs. In this context Madam Chair, I wish to acknowledge the work that has been done by UN Women in Fiji, and look forward to working with UN Women in the areas of economic and social empowerment for women as you consolidate and prioritise its work for the future.

Madam Chair,

These are a few of the initiatives that need the support of some international partners. I cannot emphasize enough that the ability of small countries like my own to meet the targets that we have together created for ourselves, through the Millennium Development Goals, and the outcomes of the 25<sup>th</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly is dependant on our collaboration and partnerships with the wider international community.

The obstacles and challenges in eradicating poverty and providing an empowering environment where women can operate in their chosen field without fear of stigmatization, discrimination or violence, are many. These challenges are not deterring us from action, and Fiji remains committed to both international and national goals in this respect.

I thank you Madam Chair.