

From: PORT MORESBY

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To: DS PDG; PACMM; DEVPP; PORT MORESBY

Cc: DCE; CEO; ALL DIVISIONS (FM); ...ALL POSTS; FM.P/S MFA (Seemail)

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: BOUGAINVILLE - AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) VISIT 2-4 OCTOBER 2023 – BOUGAINVILLE LEADING THE REGION?

[RESTRICTED]

FORMAL MESSAGE: BOUGAINVILLE - AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) VISIT 2-4 OCTOBER 2023 – BOUGAINVILLE LEADING THE REGION?

RĀPOPOTO – SUMMARY

An October visit by Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific)/Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall, to Bougainville, highlighted the degree to which the Autonomous Region, despite its unresolved political status and meagre resources, is leading the Pacific in terms of institutionalising women's representation.

The visit provided for excellent engagements with women parliamentarians, women leaders within the public service, civil society organisations, local government and communities, focussed primarily on women in leadership and gender-based violence. The discussions highlighted both the value, and broad acceptance (though more in matrilineal areas than patrilineal ones), of key measures instituted by the Autonomous Region to ensure 50/50 gender equality at local government level and reserve seats at the regional level. These measures are leading, both for the Pacific and globally, and are clearly not the end point for Bougainville women who have plans to push for further reforms.

The meetings also offered insights into the legacy of the Bougainville conflict on issues relating to gender equality: as a catalyst for guaranteed representation of women in decision-making, as the cause of inter-generational trauma and violence continuing to affect women and girls, s6(a)

Ambassador Wall used the visit to raise awareness of the Revitalised Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, which Pacific Leaders were expected to endorse in November.

HOHENGA – ACTION

Hei titiro māu – for information.

PŪRONGO – REPORT

A visit to Bougainville by Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall, was completed on 2-4 October as part of a larger visit to Papua New Guinea (reported by separate FM). Ambassador Wall met with key stakeholders and community leaders to discuss a wide range of issues relating to women's representation in decision-making, gender-based violence and related issues such as access to health and justice. Ambassador Wall was accompanied by PMY HOM and Senior Development Coordinator (Kopi) and DS-PDG's Office (Auld).

Reserved seats and 50/50 splits – women in leadership...

2 A meeting with **Autonomous Government of Bougainville representatives** provided an overview of permanent specific measures to guarantee women's political participation in Bougainville.

3 Representatives shared that women's contributions to the peace process in Bougainville during and after the conflict served as a catalyst to strengthen social perceptions of women as constructive decision-makers and peace builders, helping promote positive attitudes in the Autonomous Region to gender inclusive political participation.

4 In 2004, in recognition of the significant contributions made by women and combatants in the conflict, three seats were reserved for each in the newly-established, 41-seat House of Representatives. In addition to the three reserved seats for women, two women successfully contested open seats in the most recent (2020) election, bringing the proportion of women in parliament to 12.2 per cent. Bougainville is in the process of developing a new Constitution and from initial consultations it is becoming clear that many want to keep the reserve seats, though there remain some dissenting voices.

5 Ambassador Wall also raised law reform for people of sexual and gender diversity and asked whether this would be addressed within the review of the Constitution. The issue was acknowledged and noted as something that was yet to be discussed.

6 Ambassador Wall's **visit to Kamewots Ward (Selau)** highlighted the "unique" legislation enabling women's equal voice in local decision-making in Bougainville. A panel and village forum led by the ward's chairwoman discussed the Bougainville's Community Government Act which requires the gender of the ward Chair and Deputy-Chair to alternate every periodic election, thus providing 50/50 representation. This equality of representation enjoyed clear support of the community who gathered for the meeting, who were focused more on the challenge of effective local governance and meeting the needs and aspirations of, particularly, young people in the villages.

... and plans to achieve greater representation

7 **AGB representatives** similarly confirmed that Bougainville's reserved seats were permanent and enjoyed broad support. To protect and enhance gains made, the ABG has done a comprehensive review of its Gender Policy soon to be presented with aims to promote gender equality and achieve greater women's representation in parliament. In support of this, Bougainville also has a Gender Committee (Women, Peace and Security Committee) in Parliament to address their issues. They have started to put in place Gender focal points in each of the departments of the ABG. There are plans to have an Office of Gender Equality in place under the Office of the Chief Secretary.

8 The **Bougainville Women's Federation** (sister organisation to Papua New Guinea's National Council of Women) shared with Ambassador Wall its work supporting women in leadership through regular meetings with the parliamentarians in the reserved seats; its plan to establish its own party by 2025; and its work to develop leadership pathways, training and education for women and girls. The Federation had recently made a submission to the Bougainville Constitution drafting committee, requesting that reserve seats for women be increased to thirteen, to allow at least one woman to represent each of Bougainville's thirteen Districts. s6(a)

s6(a)

Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre

9 Ambassador Wall had a fruitful discussion at **the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation** (Sister Lorraine Garasu, Sister Josephine, advocacy coordinator Agnes Titus), on the Centre's long-standing work responding to gender-based violence through advocacy, safe houses, counselling and referrals.

10 Sister Lorraine described the Centre's approach to education and awareness-raising as informed by Bougainville's conflict and post-conflict trauma, and added that conflict experiences often provided a lead in to indirectly discussing human rights and gender-based violence.

11 On the Centre's aim to run school programmes, Ambassador Wall offered to share the Mana Ake curriculum programme, as an example of how New Zealand was providing wellbeing support to children who had experienced trauma.

12 Other topics included bride price and corresponding indigenous terminology, sorcery and SARV. Centre participants agreed that the narrative and practice of bride price "needed to change" away from its function as payment to the bride's family, and to "revert" to its traditional meanings of showing appreciation to each other and cementing the marriage. s9(2)(ba)(i)

Wall asked about sexual and gender diversity and was reassured members were accepted as part of families and church communities.

TĀKUPU – COMMENT

13 Ambassador Wall's meetings with Bougainville leaders served to highlight actions taken by the **Autonomous Region of Bougainville** that are leading the Pacific in its response to the PIF commitment to women's political leadership. It was impressive to note the systematic provisions for representation of women in decision-making structures, grounded in the traditional value of and support for the leadership role of women, and the cultural recognition of women as peace builders and those trustworthy to fulfil this governance role. As a result, there appears to be progressive uptake and support for gender equality and women's leadership.

14 With the gains made, and a platform already established within Bougainville for women's leadership, the women parliamentarians, public service leaders and the Bougainville Women's Federation, are now using this platform to advocate for further gains at the regional parliament level. While issues related to sexual and gender diversity remain sensitive in Bougainville as elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, it was still possible to raise and hold conversations on these issues openly, and to receive responses that acknowledged some of the underlying issues.

15 Coincidentally, during the visit, polling was under way in a by-election for the North Bougainville seat in the National Parliament in which a significant number of women were standing. At the time of this Formal Message, the result confirmed that the seat had gone to a woman, Francesca Semoso (Pangu Party), bringing the number of women in the Papua New Guinea parliament up to three. Also noting that Francesca is the first Bougainvillean women to be represented in the Papua New Guinea Parliament.

KA MUTU – ENDS