

From: PORT VILA

Sent: Tuesday, 7 November 2023 10:08 am

To: DS PDG; PACMM; DEVPP

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

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: VANUATU: AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) LOUISA WALL VISIT 27-29 SEPTEMBER 2023

[SENSITIVE]

RĀPOPOTO - SUMMARY

Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific)/Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall has visited Vanuatu for a series of meetings focused on women in leadership, kastom (tikanga), gender-based violence, and the challenges faced this year by members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Her visit provided an opportunity to demonstrate Aotearoa New Zealand's support for women and the LGBTQIA+ community, ^{s6(a)}

Ambassador Wall brought the additional objective of raising government partners' awareness of the Revitalised Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, which Pacific Leaders were expected to endorse in November.

The visit highlighted the following:

- The 'temporary special measures' which guarantee women's representation in the two municipal councils are set to expire at the end of this electoral term; none of the stakeholders we met indicated they were preparing a campaign for their renewal.
- New Zealand is supporting a number of strong NGO organisations through Phase II of the bilateral gender programme. Localisation is well established and one further partner is on track to localise from its 'parent' NGO in 2025 – we will review our mode of support to them in 2025

HOHENGA – ACTION

^{s6(a)}

PŪRONGO – REPORT

^{s6(a)} A visit to Port Vila, Vanuatu by Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall was completed in September (27-29).

Ambassador Wall met with key stakeholders to discuss

a wide range of issues relating to justice, women in leadership, gender-based violence, kastom, and politics. HOM and Policy Adviser (Jimmy) and DS-PDG's Office (Auld) accompanied Ambassador Wall to her calls, which also helped broaden Post's insights into the needs and challenges faced by partners and vulnerable groups, and deepen relationships.

Meeting with the Department of Women's Affairs

2 Ambassador Wall met with key government partner the Department of Women's Affairs (Governance Program Officer Sakaren, Economic Empowerment Officer Pakoasongi) to learn about their work. Discussion focused on eliminating violence against women and girls, and women in leadership.

3 DWA advised there were 11 women (out of 30 elected officials) across municipal councils – six of which were in reserved seats. There are no women in the provincial councils (out of about 90 members), and one woman (MP Julia Kings) out of 52 members in Parliament.

4 DWA was in the process of creating a **National Plan** to bring more women into national and provincial decision-making (and is looking to SPC for support). Consultations were set to take place in early 2024.

5 DWA advised it was not aware of the **Revitalised PLGED**, nor its proposed commitment to accelerated measures to increase women in leadership^{s6(a)}

Ambassador Wall noted her availability to assist in processes to explore options for Permanent Specific Measures that would facilitate women's political participation.

6 s6(b)(i)

Temporary Special Measures – reserved seats for women in municipal elections set to expire ...

7 The Vanuatu National Council of Women described its long-standing advocacy for greater numbers of women in decision-making.

8 VNCW said a broad-based campaign on government to increase women's representation, drawing on Vanuatu's ratification of CEDAW, led to an amendment to the Municipalities Act in 2013. The subsequent reserved seats for women (three each on the Port Vila and Luganville municipal councils) equated to a 30 to 34% quota for women on these bodies.

9 This measure is understood to be effective for four terms, or 16 years (expiring 2029).

... with no agreed or clear plan ahead

10 s6(a)

Comment: since Ambassador Wall's visit, the Electoral Bill has

been (again) redrafted to harmonise its electoral laws, and proposes one reserved seat for women in each municipal council^{s6(a)}

11 VNCW said it hoped to hold its next national conference in 2024, bringing together provincial and municipal elected officials and party presidents, and would likely consider the issue then as an opportunity to renew support for women's political leadership.

12 Both DWA and VNCW described political will/the attitudes of political leaders towards women nominees, as a major obstacle to increased women's participation.

13 While there were some champions^{s6(a)} DWA said awareness raising was required to encourage more women to seek election and to address the deeply entrenched attitudes against women's political leadership.

14 Prompted by a suggestion by Ambassador Wall, DWA said it would consider more **regular DWA-led workshops with Parliamentarians** (the last one took place in 2010, on "Gender and Elections"), possibly coinciding annually with International Women's Days.

Bride price and kastom

15 We benefited from a wide-ranging and informative discussion across all meetings on the changing role of 'bride price' in ni-Vanuatu society.

16 All stakeholders agreed that different practices of bride price across Vanuatu were a significant factor in the condoning of violence against women. The payment of bride price to the bride's family served both to justify gender-based violence (because of the perception that the woman had been bought) and to perpetuate it (as a cultural or financial barrier to the woman seeking help).

17 All stakeholders also agreed that current practice of 'bride price' was at odds with kastom, and that the average bride price had "exploded" in recent years, from 80,000-85,000 vatu (a standard the Malvatumaru / Council of Chiefs had at one point set (before later correcting and removing endorsement of monetary payment)) to "up to 1 million vatu".

18 Stakeholders described present day bride price to be a distortion of kastom; it did not reflect the traditional exchange of goods or "marriage exchange" between the bride and groom's families. Ambassador Wall expressed interest, especially during the meeting with the Vanuatu Kaltoral Senta, in the terms that are used in Vanuatu's indigenous languages to describe this marriage exchange, and whether New Zealand could support any projects under way to reframe the practice. [Comment: our gender programme includes support to the Kaljoral Senta's Field Worker Programme, which provides such a mechanism].

Visits to partners working to address Gender Based Violence

19 Ambassador Wall met key NGO partners, the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the World Vision Vanuatu REACH Family Centre.

20 The Vanuatu Women's Centre, which is the longest-standing partner working in the EVAWG space, provided us a tour of their facilities and described their work. It estimated that at their main

centre in Port Vila, it provided assistance to women in approximately 200 cases of GBV every month. It also shared anecdotes relating to RSE schemes and some of the additional pressures it is placing on women.

21 The **REACH Centre** delivers an impressive programme aimed at reducing violence against women and children by focusing on working with offenders, particularly men. Its initial concept, which focused on raising gender awareness with faith and religious leaders, showed that while it was successful in shifting leaders' views, this had little impact on the incidence of GBV in their communities. Its focus shifted to providing counselling to men, and finally to extending services to women and girls impacted by violence.

22 In her remarks, Ambassador Wall commended the organisation, sharing in their aspiration to make sustainable change in communities outside crisis/incarceration incidents.

23 The REACH Family Centre shared its "Roadmap to Localisation" plan to be an independent and locally-led national counselling centre by the end of 2025.

V-Pride and support for the Fashion Show

24 During a tour of Wan Smol Bag, a key local NGO partner working on social and cultural change, Ambassador Wall visited the co-located leading LGBTQIA+ advocacy group V-Pride.

25 We discussed and offered our support to V-Pride to access two funds that could support its awareness projects: the MFAT's Equity and Inclusion Fund, and the GEF Equal Rights in Action Fund.

26 s9(2)(g)(i)

TĀKUPU – COMMENT

s6(a)

MUTU - ENDS