

From: PORT MORESBY

Sent: Wednesday, 1 November 2023 7:57 pm

To: DS PDG; PACMM; DEVPP; PORT MORESBY

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

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: PAPUA NEW GUINEA - AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) LOUISA WALL VISIT 4-6 OCTOBER 2023 s9(2)(g)(i)

[RESTRICTED]

FORMAL MESSAGE: PAPUA NEW GUINEA - AMBASSADOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY (PACIFIC) LOUISA WALL VISIT 4-6 OCTOBER 2023 s9(2)(g)(i)

RĀPOPOTO – SUMMARY

Ambassador for Gender Equality (Pacific)/Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall visited Papua New Guinea for meetings with parliamentarians, government officials, church leaders, and sports and civil society organisations. The visit was an opportunity to demonstrate Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to supporting women and girls and to deepen our understanding of the challenges facing partners in Papua New Guinea as they work to achieve gender equality.

Despite discrete recent wins, including the passing of legislation criminalising SARV (sorcery accusation related violence) and the permanent establishment of the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, all stakeholders engaged with painted a s6(a) picture of (lack of) progress on gender equality in Papua New Guinea. s6(a)

There are many committed leaders at all levels and development partners working hard on the issues, s9(2)(g)(i)

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

HOHENGA – ACTION

- PACMM – to consider in your review of the Ministry's bilateral GBV programme in Papua New Guinea, especially for opportunities to support long-term change.
- DEVPP – to note (in context of Tai-a-Kiwa parliamentary programme and refresh) interest expressed by Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to visit Wellington (para 15).

PŪRONGO – REPORT

A visit to Papua New Guinea by Tuia Tāngata, Louisa Wall was completed in October (4-6). Ambassador Wall met with key stakeholders to discuss two main themes pertaining to the Pacific region as a whole: that the region faces critical challenges related to gender inequality, including high rates of violence

against women and limited female political representation; and individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions encounter various forms of discrimination and exclusion in the Pacific.

2 Ambassador Wall was accompanied by Post and DS-PDG's Office (Auld). We report on key themes and discussions below.

Churches – “gender-based violence is the silent killer”

3 Ambassador Wall met with twelve representatives, accounting for almost all the main denominational members, of the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches - a strong turnout suggesting the level of commitment to this theme.

4 Churches have partnered with the government and the DFAT “Church Partnership Programme” to provide a range of services including safe houses and are hoping to expand this partnership through a strategic initiative to provide for a GBV desk within Churches. This role would also help address sorcery accusations and related violence. The church leaders expressed strong commitment to their coordinated programme of work in this area and sought our advocacy for greater PNG Government support to Church GBV efforts.

5 Church leaders agreed that gender equality was a “critical and sensitive” issue and described the general level of understanding around these issues as low. Church leaders said they were working hard, particularly with boys and men, to address harmful stereotypes and traditional norms for women and women's duties.

6 Participants also discussed bride price cultures and practices across Papua New Guinea noting, as did others, that current practices had changed from their traditional origins which focused much more on the forming of relationships between families. Church leaders stated that family expectation of bride price often raised the “value” of the girl-child but also resulted in understandings of “ownership”.

7 We touched briefly on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including in relation to the LGBTQIA+ community, where Church leaders described their extreme concern at the re-emergence and steep increase in HIV AIDS cases across Papua New Guinea. The severity of the issue was reiterated in a later meeting at the Marie Stopes sexual health clinic, but the true scale of the problem was difficult to define due to a lack of testing and data s6(a)

8 The “ray of hope” for the Church leaders was their work with fathers and sons in addressing post-conflict and intergenerational trauma and “rehabilitating” them back into their communities.

Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

9 We had fruitful but sobering discussion over a breakfast meeting with Governor Allan Bird, Deputy Chair of the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (PPC-GEWE) and two Committee members (Lohia Boe Samuels MP; Ricky Morris MP).

10 The Committee was established as the successor to the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence, whose historic report of 2021 called on government to increase funding to a range of services to address the “endemic” GBV in the country.

11 The issue of s6(a) under-funding across all services required to stem and address GBV was a dominant theme in our meeting.

12 Ambassador Wall's visit coincided with the Parliamentary Committee on GEWE presenting [its first report to Parliament](#), which highlighted the "alarming rise" of gender-based violence (GBV) and sorcery accusation related violence across the country, and underscored the need for immediate action and for structural changes to address the issues it identified. The report's 29 recommendations included gender quotas in Parliament and increased support for law enforcement and healthcare services. The Parliament unanimously supported the inquiry, emphasizing the urgent need to address this pervasive issue.

13 Committee members spoke to a range of issues relating to women's empowerment, including a lack of economic opportunities for women (or encouragement to take up those available, e.g. RSE schemes); increasing rates of cyber-bullying and online image-based sexual abuse; and barriers to women's participation in decision-making.

14 While much of the discussion indicated lack of progress, Governor Bird pointed to the first convictions made under new sorcery legislation as a recent significant win, albeit with room for improvement in enforcement.

15 **Committee expressed interest in a visit to Wellington** to discuss legislative changes to address gender equality issues, including in the area of online sexual abuse and harmful behaviour.

Women's organisations

16 While Ambassador Wall was not able to meet with either of the two Women Parliamentarians, she did meet with Secretary Ubase for Community Development, Religion and Youth and his team. Secretary Ubase noted the very limited funding coming to gender and women's empowerment, but also shed some light on the resourcing complaints of the Churches s9(2)(g)(i)

He gave some insight into the troubles of the National Council of Women s9(2)(g)(i)

Council members had voted themselves off in protest and as the Council is governed by legislation, there was no mechanism to address the Council leadership until 2025. s9(2)(g)(i)

Reform was needed, s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

Ambassador Wall also met with Dame Carol Kidu, former parliamentarian.

Women in business

17 In a meeting with PNG's Women's Business Resource Centre, Ambassador Wall shared information on GTAGA and IPECTA.

Meeting with s6(d) at the High Commission

18 It was a pleasure to host members of the Key Population Advocacy Consortium (KPAC), a national coalition formed in 2018, which brings together seven national networks representing key populations and communities in Papua New Guinea:

s6(d)

s6(d)

19 The turnout for this meeting was very strong with some 25 KPAC members and associates joining and sharing personal stories and advocacy platforms. s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

20 s6(a)

Women in sport (rugby union, league)

21 Ambassador Wall and PNG Rugby Union board member and U15 women's coach Cybele Wari discussed goals for international competition and key challenges for union.

22 A "Super W" competition between Sāmoa, Tonga and PNG was in discussion for 2025, with the 2032 Olympics "a distant goal". Technical expertise and lack of basic equipment (such as uniforms, headkits, field dressings, corner flags) were described as barriers to growth in women's sport. Wari described social barriers as a threat to women's participation in rugby, including abuse on social media.

23 Ambassador Wall and Wari discussed various initiatives such as a recycling uniform programme, scholarships for PNG women players to New Zealand, visits by New Zealand sports management to PNG, or looking at sport coaching options through VSA.

24 With PNG RNL representative Cathy Neap, Ambassador Wall undertook to reach out to her contacts to advocate for PNG's inclusion in the Queensland Cup.

UN Agencies and other multilaterals

25 Ambassador Wall met with UN and other multilateral organisations resident in Port Moresby at their monthly cross-agency meeting.

26 All participants signalled clearly that Gender equality was a "top priority" for their organisations, addressed through various levers (e.g. ADB "pushing" for greater women's participation on SOE boards; World Bank requiring all projects to be "gender tagged", preparing a global gender strategy...).

27 UNICEF described the need to focus on children in addressing gender equality, adding that equality could not be achieved when nearly 30% of girls were married by age 18, meaning many girls were constrained from completing secondary education.

28 UNFPA were providing mental health and psychosocial support programmes in PNG; responding to its comments about the current "medicalised approach" of its services, HOM encouraged UNFPA to draw on experience of organisations in Bougainville and churches where there is significant expertise

in delivering these services large-scale at the community level. The UN Country Team representative commented that it was “refreshing” to hear about Ambassador Wall’s meetings with churches and centres like the Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre, where they discussed trauma-informed approaches to addressing gender-based violence. s6(a)

29 The UNDP representative shared that work to address “social norms” was not targeted in its PNG country programme s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

The Spotlight Technical Coordinator agreed that social norms work was “with a few exceptions, a mountain most donors do not want to climb”, but that while difficult and requiring long term commitment, it was fundamental if there were to be a shift on these issues.

30 In advocating for social norms work, the s6(a) shared Ambassador Wall’s view that versions of gender coverture (the outdated English common-law concept that dictated a women’s subordinated legal status upon marriage) persisted to this day s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

Health and referral services: ChildFund GBV Helpline and Marie Stopes

31 Ambassador Wall’s visit ended with meetings with the ChildFund’s free, national **GBV Helpline** and with SHRH service provider MSI Reproductive Choices (or “Marie Stopes”), both of which New Zealand supports.

32 **ChildFund** PNG Country Director Anand Das confirmed that the helpline was a vital service for women, girls and boys, and gender and sexual minorities. He shared that the helpline was receiving an increase in calls from perpetrators potentially seeking help or referral to counselling. ChildFund was having ongoing discussions about the helpline’s strategic plan and being adequately resourced to work with perpetrators as well as survivors. Ambassador Wall covered a wide range of topics with **Marie Stopes**, s6(a), s9(2)(g)(i)

The clinic confirmed it was “heavily reliant” on its parent company MS International, and was looking to wean itself off, but confirmed the funding enabled them to charge far less for services than other clinics and providers.

TĀKUPU – COMMENT

33 Ambassador Wall's visit served as a platform to underscore New Zealand's commitment to supporting gender equality and SOGIESC-related rights. While the visit engaged with a wide range of committed individuals and organisations, including plenty in leadership positions, including the Parliamentary Gender Equality Committee members, Church leaders, the Secretary of the Department for Community Development, Religion and Youth (who also has responsibility for gender and women), active NGOs, the UN and the rainbow community. Few discussions were positive about either the situation or the trend. s6(a)

34 Inadequate funding for gender equality programs was a recurring theme highlighted by churches, parliamentary representatives and the Department. NGO representatives described the GBV sector in PNG as “a car with no engine”. While the Parliamentary Committee is now permanent and serving to bring periodic attention to the issues, and its report was endorsed by Parliament, the real test will be

whether there is a broader political commitment from the leadership and Parliament to both implement and resource its many recommendations.^{s6(a)}

35 The visit also shed light on the challenges faced by the Pacific region in achieving true gender equality^{s6(a)}

KA MUTU / ENDS

Proactively released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade