

**Madam Chair, Honourable Ministers, Senior Officials , civil-society organizations and partners,**

**Bula vinaka.**

I am Olivia Baro, Ecumenical Animator for Youth Ministries at the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), a member of the Pacific Women Mediators Network (PWMN), and a mother

Thank you for inviting faith voices into this Ministerial Dialogue on Collaborating to Advance Regional Gender Equality under the Revitalized Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED).

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At the February 2025 “PCC Regional Women’s Meeting” in Lautoka, over fifty women from thirty PCC member churches reaffirmed that \*Genesis 1:27\*—all people created in God’s image—requires the church to dismantle gender-based violence (GBV) and patriarchy. The meeting’s Gender Equality Theology sessions underscored that GBV is a sin and that confronting it is core discipleship, not an optional add-on.

PCC’s Safe Churches Ministry—comprising Gender Justice and Child Protection teams—trains clergy and lay leaders to make every sanctuary a place of safety. Those teams are on duty travel in the North Pacific this week, equipping congregations that face the impacts of climate change like sea-level rise, food security challenges and education to name a few , and their work aligns directly with PLGED commitments on protection and child wellbeing.

Our partnerships with UNWomen and the SPC’s Pacific Women Lead programmes resources church women’s fellowships and youth groups to combine Gender Based Violence prevention with trauma-healing and Women empowerment and Leadership. Every activity is reported through our Gender Status Card for the Women Ministry in the churches to track the institutional progress in the Work on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children.

Thirty-six national denominations now mark \*\*Break the Silence Sunday\*\* the Sunday before the 16 days of Activism, preaching on GBV, Safe homes, church and communities and men’s accountability. Post-service dialogues have already sparked congregational policy reviews and referrals to national helplines—tangible steps toward the Ocean of Peace vision of communities free from fear.

Through the \*\*Pacific Regional Ecumenical Youth Council, which I have the honor to convene, young women and men facilitate peer talanoa about technology-facilitated GBV, climate anxiety, and non-violent masculinities, inter-generational trauma, Nuclear legacy , political violence etc . The Council would like to propose that PLGED monitoring must include youth-generated data so that the Declaration remains inter-generational in practice, not only on paper. In our recent Youth conference in February- We were reminded by a quote by Richard Rohr ‘ Pain that is not Transformed is Transferred’.

Part of our CALL includes - ‘The future of the Pacific is our responsibility, and we will not wait for others to act. Our faith calls us to be prophets of justice, caretakers of creation, peace-builders and champions of decolonisation. We are committed to the Act. We will continue learning, building alliances, and standing in solidarity with all those fighting for a just, free, and thriving Pacific.

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Our engagement with **Pacific Women Mediators Network** has allowed us to equip women—Youth, Church leaders and Church workers—to prevent and mediate conflict. The PWMN has enabled us to strengthen our engagement in understanding the complexity of geopolitics in our region. How to prioritize and move but importantly go beyond our Network apart from our churches that we have come to know through this network.

PWMN mediators work where state systems do not reach, weaving customary practice, faith values, and modern mediation. A Marshallese member recently recalled the legacy of *lejmaanjuri*—women peace envoys—linking that heritage to present-day advocacy for a nuclear-free Pacific. Such culturally grounded approaches exemplify the link between gender equality, human rights, and the holistic security envisioned in the Ocean of Peace Declaration.

PWMN asks that each Forum Island country establish a liaison point so women mediators can feed early-warning insights into national security mechanisms and the **Boe Declaration Action Plan**. More flexible, conflict-sensitive funding is also essential; travel, childcare, and protective equipment remain major barriers to women's rapid deployment.

PWMN is piloting case-logging templates aligned with the Safe Church Framework. Aggregated findings will help governments and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat assess how far PLGED commitments on women in peace processes are being met.

### **Joint recommendations**

1. **Integrate church-led Safe Church standards** into national disaster and humanitarian protocols, ensuring GBV and child-protection safeguards in every evacuation centre.
2. **Create demilitarised peacebuilding funds** with windows earmarked for faith-based and women-led networks, disbursed on simplified criteria and reported against PLGED indicators.
3. **Recognise PWMN members as accredited mediators** in national security and reconciliation bodies, with travel support to reach remote communities.
4. Intergenerational is key in our implementation not just in work or tokenistic but with intentional engagement.

'I don't just want a world where equality is discussed; I want a world where it is guaranteed. 30 years from now, our daughters and sons will look back and see that equality wasn't just an aspiration, but a reality that every home, school, state, and institution was committed to. This is the future, I hope to see a world where equality isn't just a topic we talk about, but a truth we live by, every single day'. :- inherit islands where a girl can stroll the shoreline without fear, where her church teaches leadership as service open to all genders, and where the thunder of warships has been replaced by children's laughter. Whether that vision lives or dies depends on the commitments forged here.

**Key asks:**

- What values or traditions from the past can we carry forward to shape a better future?
- What legacy do we want to leave for the next generation, especially in the fight for gender equality and social justice?
- How can we ensure that hope remains a driving force, even when the challenges seem overwhelming?

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**The Kanak principle of **\*\*Do Kamo\*\***—ongoing transformation into authentic humanity—calls every sector to constant renewal. When churches reform their own structures, and women mediators receive the authority and resources they merit, our region moves closer to an **\*\*Ocean of Peace\*\*** where justice rolls down like living water.**

**\*Vinaka vakalevu.\* May the God of peace bless our collective journey.**