

## A shift from awareness to accountability: Nurturing a community that is mutually responsible to protect and care

*(Thursdays in Black and 16 days of activism Campaign)*

### CONCEPT NOTE

## Background

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”  
— **audre lorde**

In 1994, delegates from 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) met in Noumea and endorsed collective principles and a plan of action to advance gender equality in the region – The Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Since 1994, there have been two substantial reviews of the PPA, in 2004 and 2015, with the current iteration endorsed by Ministers for Women in 2017 as the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030. The primary objective of the Pacific Platform for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights is to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments in order to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls. It incorporates regional and international instruments for promoting gender equality, including the 2012 Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as commitments made by PICTs to progress gender equality. The PLGED, endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2012, is particularly important. This high-level declaration sets out specific policy actions to progress gender equality ‘in the areas of gender-responsive government programmes and policies; decision-making; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; and health and education’. Other commitments include national gender policies, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the SAMOA Pathway, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA)- with its strategic framework and key actions for realising gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Progress towards implementing the PPA is monitored and evaluated at the triennial conference of Pacific women.

Violence against women is one of the critical areas of concern in the BPA and remains a priority issue outlined in the PPA. Violence against women (VAW) is not neutral nor does it discriminate. In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence tends to be hidden, and victims are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence. We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets – in all places in our societies. Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive manifestations of gender inequality in the Pacific. It reflects attitudes about male privilege, the lower status of women in social systems and the related unequal power dynamics at play within families and communities. In the Pacific the most widespread form of violence against women relates to intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence. Physical and sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated by strangers is also reported at levels higher than world averages.<sup>1</sup> Violence against women and girls with disabilities is also reported to be high.<sup>2</sup>

Violence and discrimination commonly experienced by LGBTIQ persons have tended, until recently, to largely remain under the radar, and the focus on high levels of intimate partner violence may have left other forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Links to multiple studies on Violence Against Women in the Pacific can be found on the website of the Australian government program Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/>

<sup>2</sup> 2013. UNFPA. A Deeper Silence. <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPAReport-ADeeperSilenceA4PublicationLR3%283%29.pdf>

family violence less examined. The submission made to the Constitutional Review Commission in Fiji in 2012 and recent publication of the results of research on the lifetime experiences of human rights violations by LBT persons<sup>3</sup> has clarified formerly hidden or ignored dimension of violence that are counter to Fiji's constitutional protection for all persons from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

VAW is all too common here in the Pacific- Pacific women continue to be plagued by harassment, abuse and violence in their daily lives. It has been reported that VAW in the region is well above the global average of thirty-five per cent. The *“ten national VAW studies conducted over the last 10-15 years in the Pacific show that, on average, two out of three women experience intimate partner violence and/ or sexual violence during their lifetime (compared to one out of three at global level). Current levels of violence against women (over the last 12 months) in the Pacific are approximately one out of every three women. These levels are very high compared to global averages for lifetime and current violence experienced by women. In addition, the studies show that women in the Pacific mainly experience the more severe forms of violence and often for many, many years, as few options exist to escape this violent life”*.<sup>4</sup> In simple terms, many women and girls are not safe in their homes, the one place where they should be safe, and now they have been told to 'stay home' in this very unsafe place.

Violence against women (VAW) is an urgent human rights, public health, development and public policy issue. It also remains a major global public health and development threat and is further during times of conflict, crises and emergencies. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it brings about its own complexities as more women and families are self-isolating and self-distancing themselves to reduce and limit the spread of infection. With the possible disruption of social, protective and response networks including the limitation in accessing support services further, exacerbate the risks of VAW. What this means is that the risk of women experiencing physical, sexual and psychological violence during the COVID-19 pandemic is quite high.

Governments and development partners recognise that ending violence against women requires changing social norms and entrenched gender power dynamics. These changes take time, integrated and well-funded initiatives and continued advocacy from both male and female leaders in communities, churches and governments. Challenges include finding means to adapt political and development programming cycles to the scale and scope of the effort required. To change mind-sets, attitudes and behaviours towards violence against women, a community of care and a community to protect must be nurtured and cultivated. MWCSO as an organisation must be aware of the atrocities that women and children continue to face and be able to be in a position of being able to make decisions and design programmes and activities that will DO NO HARM and shift from just being aware to the situation of VAW in the Pacific but to accountability. It is time to demand for accountability for VAW and the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (EVAW) which underlie gender based-violence.

## Rationale

Violence against women is high in Samoa is both a symptom and driver of gender inequality. Increasing regional coordination and development of integrated service protocols are gradually improving services for survivors but large numbers of women do not report violence due to fear of stigma or further retaliation.

From an organisational point of view, MWCSO has carried out extensive awareness programs on ending VAW in member countries, collaborating with both government, civil society organisations and the private sector. We work to ensure that GBV/VAW-related measures including psychosocial support and wellbeing is included in COVID-19 response plans and ensure it is accessible in our current context of social/physical distancing.

MWCSO continues to lead all efforts and provide support to all the stakeholders in the countries (including police, lawyers, nurses and judges, STNs, SNs and SMS) who have a role to address Domestic Violence. MWCSO has collaborated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to plan for future actions in support to the Spotlight initiative, including:

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<sup>3</sup> DIVA for Equality (2019) Unjust, Unequal, Unstoppable: Fiji lesbians, bisexual women, transmen and gender non conforming people tipping the scales toward justice.

<sup>4</sup>UN Domestic Violence Guide. National Violence against Women studies have been conducted in Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau.

- Developing standardized training tools to support multi sectoral admin data collection
- Quality prevalence and/or incidence data on Violence against women and girls including Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence- and analysis
- Developing standards for Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence frameworks etc.

In light of VAW statistics and situation in the Pacific, we intend to change behaviours and attitudes by nurturing a community that is mutually responsible to protect and to care internally in Samoa. The two campaigns that will be used to cultivate a community that will shift the paradigm from awareness to accountability are:

(1) **Thursdays in Black:** Thursdays in Black is about Resistance and Resilience

*Thursdays in Black* grew out of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), in which the stories of rape as a weapon of war, gender injustice, abuse, violence, and many tragedies that grow outward from such violence became all the more visible. But what also became visible was women's resilience, agency and personal efforts to resist such violations.

The campaign was inspired by:

- The Mothers of the Disappeared in Buenos Aires, Argentina who on *Thursdays* protested at the Plaza de Mayo, against the disappearance of their children during the violent dictatorship.
- The Women in Black in Israel and Palestine, who up to now protest against war and *violence*.
- Women in Rwanda and Bosnia who were protesting against the use of *rape* as a weapon of war during the genocide.
- Black Sash movement in South Africa protesting against apartheid and its use of violence against black people.

The campaign is simple but profound.

- Wear black on Thursdays.
- Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence.
- Encourage others to join you. **Often black has been used with negative racial connotations. In this campaign, Black is used as a colour of resistance and resilience.**

(2) **16 days of activism.**

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence against women (or 16 days as its commonly known) is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute (CWGL). MWCSO has been involved in raising awareness on violence against women through information sessions on Domestic Violence Policy and the "16 days of activism against violence against women" campaign commemorated every 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10<sup>th</sup> December. The dates for the campaign were chosen to link violence against women and human rights and emphasize that gender-based violence against women is a violation of human rights: since 1991, the campaign has been active between November 25, the International Day Against Violence Against Women, and December 10, International Human Rights Day. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day; December 1, World AIDS Day; and December 6, which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. The 16 Days Campaign is an organizing strategy for individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence against women.

## Objectives

In light of VAW statistics and GBV situation in the Pacific and in particular Samoa, we intend to raise awareness, change behaviours and attitudes towards VAW/EVAW/GBV by nurturing a community that is mutually responsible to protect and to care internally within MWCSO and externally.

As part of this campaign, we want to build a community that is respectful and non-violent. We will do this by:

### Internal (MWCSO)

#### **Awareness**

- Raising awareness about gender-based violence against women as a human rights issue.
- provide a forum in which individuals can discuss GBV issues and to develop and share new and effective strategies
- demonstrate the solidarity of women around the world organizing against gender-based violence against women

#### ***Policy Implementation/Resourcing***

- Assist and support with the implementation of the National Policy on Family Safety: Elimination of Family Violence within MWCSO and across government.

#### **External**

##### ***Awareness***

- Work with Government Ministries to build and raise awareness on EVAW and GBV

#### ***Policy Implementation/Resourcing***

- create tools to support governments to implement commitments to eliminate gender-based violence against women<sup>5</sup>
- Develop and resource the implementation of Domestic Violence Policies- including sexual harassment policies within CROP agencies.
- Prioritisation of GBV and EVAW issues.

## **Outputs**

#### **Internal MWCSO**

##### **Thursdays in Black**

- Wear black every Thursday till the end of the year
- One short paragraph every week by Minister or CEO
- One weekly email from the Social Club (email update)
- Monthly video reflection from CEO Level/Ministerial
- Social media updates
- Photo collages and photo messages

##### **16 Days of Activism**

- 16 days of activism messaging
- 2 statements by Executive
- 1 exhibition (for the 16 days)
- Social media updates
- Photo collage and photo messaging

It is envisaged that through the two campaigns above, we have an assigned SPC counsellor on standby to support psychosocial, mental health and wellbeing of all SPC staff.

#### **External MWCSO**

- Combined Government of Samoa effort and support towards GBV/EVAW – a submission for cabinet to approve all Public Service to wear black on Thursday
- Discussions to develop and resource the implementation of Domestic Violence Policies including Sexual Harassment Policies to be informed by the National Prevention Framework.

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<sup>5</sup> About the 16 days of activism campaign: <https://16dayscampaign.org/about-the-campaign/>

## Timeline and Milestones

Activity Description	Timeline	Person Responsible
<b>Thursdays in Black</b>		
Wear black every Thursday till the end of the year		All MWCSO Staff
One short paragraph every week by Minister or CEO		Rotate Divisions – ACEOs to be in charge
One weekly email from the Social Club (email update)		Social Committee
Monthly video reflection from CEO level		ACEO – Social Development to lead
Social media updates (awareness & information)		MWCSO Communications
Photo collages and photo messages (messaging)		Communications
<b>16 Days of Activism</b>		
16 days of activism messaging		Social Development Programme
2 statements by Executive		
1 exhibition (for the 16 days)		MWCSO
Social media updates (awareness & information)		CEO Forum and Ministers
Photo collages and photo messages (messaging)		Social Committee
Assigned counsellor on standby to support psychosocial, mental health and wellbeing of all MWCSO staff.	June- December	*Check with partners
<b>External MWCSO</b>		
Combined Government effort and support towards GBV/EVAW	June- December	Social Development and Office of CEO
Discussions to develop and resource the implementation of Domestic Violence Policies including Sexual Harassment Policies.	June- December	Social Development