

## THE FIJI YOUNG WOMEN'S FORUM NATIONAL DECLARATION 2022

The Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) is co-convened by three feminist organizations i.e the House of Colours (HOC), Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni (ELFA) and femLINKpacific with support provided by Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) as Secretariat. The forum builds on the initial Fiji Women's Forum and a rich tradition of activism of Fijian women throughout Fiji's national history. The FYWF represents voices of young, diverse Fijian women, capturing their lived realities and calling for immediate action. Women are underrepresented across various levels of decision-making spaces in Fiji, despite the fact that women make up 49.3% of Fiji's population, according to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2017 Census Results. The Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF) through divisional dialogues bring young women leaders and activists together, aged 18 – 35 years to discuss barriers and strategies to young women's meaningful participation and representation in decision-making spaces.

This document serves as the Fiji Young Women's Forum National Declaration to our National leaders, Government Ministries, Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations, Media Houses, Community leaders and other stakeholders, calling for immediate action and implementation.

### **Education**

We call on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) and the State to prioritise young diverse women's access to education by providing more avenues for scholarships for marginalised groups, including women with disabilities, people of diverse SOGIESC<sup>1</sup> and young women in rural and remote communities. Additionally, the Ministry of Education needs to be able to provide a more holistic quality of education at Primary School level, and we strongly recommend that education on human rights be added to the primary school curriculum via a child friendly methodology, so as to nurture an understanding of equity, equality, inclusivity and diversity.

### **Economic**

We petition the Private Sector, Consumer Council of Fiji, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labour and the National Employment Centre to provide awareness and training support on Finance Management, Economic Independence, improving Financial Literacy within rural and remote communities, additionally, provide grants for youth entrepreneurship schemes. We have identified challenges and gaps within economic empowerment schemes, and thus call upon the State to provide practical training, unemployment aid and assistance, as well as create and implement policy towards creating avenues of economic empowerment in Cultural Creative industries. We also call on the Ministry of Labour to encourage businesses and Employers to employ young diverse people within their organizations free from discrimination.

### **Health**

We, young women in all our diversities face challenges in Fiji's Health Sector, and thus call on Government leaders, Health Care Providers, the Ministry of Health and relevant stakeholders to channel better funding and an increased budget to the Ministry of Health. To allow for free and efficient health care services, specifically ambulance services as well as to strengthen protocols for complaints from the public. We demand that the Ministry of Health provide gender sensitisation training from the medical school level and this to be better enforced in the hospitals and health centres.

### **Environment**

We call on leaders to uphold the practice of meaningful consultations on the issue of unsafe Evacuation centres (EC's) during humanitarian crisis. We acknowledge and recognise that the safety and security of people living with disabilities and members of the SOGIESC community is compromised in Evacuation Centres during Humanitarian crisis. Local government structures and village development committees must include young diverse women in consultations for infrastructure planning<sup>2</sup>

### **Media**

We emphasize the need for increased awareness and further research in grassroots communities, to accurately identify the impact of gender inequality in political spaces and the media. We call upon the State to review the harsh penalties

<sup>1</sup> Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics

<sup>2</sup> such as drainage, streetlights, bus shelters, rubbish disposals and the excessive cutting of trees

of the Media Industry Development Act 2010<sup>3</sup> to promote freedom of the press. We call for the promotion of freedom of expression, opinion and speech without the fear of being victimised or suppressed.

## **Personal**

The Fiji Police Force in collaboration with the Land Transport Authority must develop an online alert system, allowing young women to directly report sexual harassment in public service vehicles, and cyberbullying. Further, we urge the Land Transport Authority to assist in mandating that public service vehicles must clearly showcase toll free helplines for women and children in their vehicles. Moreover, the State must ensure its budgetary processes are in line with the National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action and takes into consideration the needs of rural and remote communities including young women's access to basic services.

## **Community**

We recommend that decision making spaces in the communities; particularly in rural and remote communities, are inclusive of the voices of diverse young women, village meetings, *tikina* planning meetings to be inclusive of our voices.

We urge local leaders, community leaders, and all relevant stakeholders to engage in consultations with diverse and marginalised communities and to co-operate with them on development projects. This, to ensure that people with disabilities, members of the SOGIESC community and young diverse women's voices are considered particularly amidst humanitarian crisis. We emphasize the need for increased awareness in grassroots communities and further research to be done, so as to explore the impact of gender inequality in political spaces and the media.

## **Political**

We underline the importance of fair representation and meaningful participation for young diverse women, and calls on leaders at all levels to engage and integrate young women of all backgrounds in decision-making areas. We firmly advocate for a consultation on the use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) for women in politics in order to improve women's representation in Parliament. In the approaching 2022 General Elections, women must unite with other women and female leaders. We call on Political parties to have quotas for representation for young people as candidates.

We urge Political parties to take head of the voices of young diverse women, people living with disabilities and members of the SOGIESC community and women living in the rural and remote communities to create safe spaces that allow for effective communication. We emphasize the need to increase awareness and training on democratic and electoral processes by targeting young women's groups and conducting door to door surveys on individuals' awareness of democratic and electoral processes. We call on politicians, the Fijian Elections office and Fiji Electoral commission to provide information in the vernacular on political processes; to create an online database portal, so that registered voters can vote in any polling station. Additionally, for them to implement affirmative policies to encourage political participation of people living with disabilities, members of the SOGIESC community and young diverse women.

For queries, please contact the Fiji Young Women's Forum Co-Conveners at:

House of Colours: [houseofcolours15@gmail.com](mailto:houseofcolours15@gmail.com)

Emerging Leaders Alumni Forum: [fj.alumni.elf@gmail.com](mailto:fj.alumni.elf@gmail.com)

femLINKpacific: [luisa@femlinkpacific.com](mailto:luisa@femlinkpacific.com) ; [media@femlinkpacific.com](mailto:media@femlinkpacific.com)

Fiji Women's Rights Movement: [timaima@fwrn.org.fj](mailto:timaima@fwrn.org.fj)

<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Section 24 on Offences relating to content regulation and Section 43 on Offences relative to Special Features of Media Organizations of the Media Industry Development Act 2010