



A Network of People  
Building Peace

## **Peacebuilding Commission: Ambassadorial-level meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Pacific Islands**

Sharon Bhagwan Rolls – GPPAC

Thank You, Chair.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict – GPPAC and Shifting the Power Coalition, I would like to congratulate the Peacebuilding Commission on convening this first regional meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Pacific Islands.

We thank you for this opportunity for us as a network of local peacebuilders in the Pacific to contribute to the discussion and highlight some of the innovative approaches the region uses to respond to the most critical human security priorities facing the Pacific.

*Imagine trying to feed your family and keep them safe during ongoing insecurity of natural disasters caused by climate change... and then coronavirus hits...*

*COVID19 has exacerbated the urgency to address the intersecting health, economic and climate-related issues in local communities across the peace-development-humanitarian nexus.*

This year, shortly after the COVID19 pandemic hit, Tropical Cyclone Harold further challenged the joint capacity of the Pacific region to respond to the situation. In addition to lockdown and disruption of supply chains already affected by COVID, TC Harold brought heavy rains damaging food gardens, homes and infrastructure.

Our women-led assessments across the Pacific revealed that women cannot afford to feed their children, purchase sanitary pads or even masks; people with disabilities receive little support. Economic insecurity is rising due to the loss of employment, directly impacting conflict trajectory by fuelling domestic violence, as well as community violence, as we have seen in several Pacific

Island countries. We are also mindful that public mis-information regarding the pandemic contributes to greater insecurity within communities.

**The situation requires the integration of gender analysis across peace-development-humanitarian work and the language of human security in COVID19 response and recovery communication across our Blue Pacific Continent.**

As a network of local peacebuilders, GPPAC-Pacific, in collaboration with the Shifting the Power Coalition, has adapted our work to support prevention, awareness raising, and preparedness in the context of COVID.

As members of **the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster**, we work to ensure that response and recovery measures in the 6 member countries use gender, age, disability and location (rural/urban) disaggregated data in order to reach the most marginalised and support the long-term solutions that sustain inclusive peace.

We consistently call attention to human security and recognized the impact of securitization on climate change and its impact, as outlined in the advocacy paper we did with **UNFPA and the Office of the High Commission on Human Rights**.

We welcome the establishment of **the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway** and feel that **the Boe Declaration on the Regional Security** along with the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Rights must be integrated in peace, development and humanitarian work in the region through a coordinated effort.

Today's challenges do not come as a surprise for us.

In 2015, GPPAC Pacific, worked with UN Women to integrate language on climate change in the 2015 Global Study on UNSCR1325 and supported the innovative – at that time – language of Security Council Resolution 2242 on the impacts of climate change and the global nature of health pandemics on the trajectory of conflict.

Now, as expressed in **the consultation for the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review on Gender, Climate and Peace in the Pacific**, a key priority for the GPPAC Pacific network members – women-first responders, faith communities and others – is to connect all parts of the Triple Nexus through a gender lens, by preventing violence, including gender and family violence; assisting local communities understand the information about COVID19, as well as providing support for communities to cope with the economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

***Just a few examples include:***

- Pacific Conference of Churches has been running a food security programme in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu to provide seed banks for vulnerable communities.
- In Bougainville, the Nazareth Centre has reached close to 600 people through COVID-19 awareness sessions in North and Central Bougainville.
- With support from the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Programme, a total of AUD \$36,500 has been disbursed in response to COVID-19 and TC Harold emergency response to support women and their families.
- The Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding is creating a dialogue space to discuss coping.
- Transcend Oceania - is using mainstream media to bringing attention to human security approaches identified by community leaders to discuss community safety and protection.

**However, in order to better active the inclusive Triple Nexus in response to the pandemic we note the need to**

- 1) Strengthen regional peacebuilding capacities and coordination of a joint response;
- 2) Better align local and government efforts; and
- 3) Strengthen gender-sensitive analysis in framing the current response to COVID and any upcoming crises.

More specifically,

**A joint comprehensive response to COVID across the Triple Nexus should include:**

- The development of regular commonly agreed multi-stakeholder processes that allow all stakeholders to share, access and discuss their separate analyses; ensure a common understanding of risks; and jointly determine how to best respond to them;
- Strengthening application of the human security approach in line with the Boe Declaration; and
- Ensuring funding for peacebuilding is flexible to reflect the changing nature of threats. Donors' priorities should be shifted to go beyond "traditional" peacebuilding and learn from methodology of local responses that touch upon all parts of the Triple Nexus.

**The alignment between national and local efforts should include:**

- Integrating a conflict prevention approach in the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway to strengthen National Humanitarian Policies and management systems through enhanced partnerships with civil society;
- Building the capacity of national and local actors across to undertake a greater role in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

**Strengthening gender analysis should include:**

- o The intentional use of a gender lens when it comes to designing of fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance programmes, inclusive of various women's experiences, including young, pregnant, older women, women with disabilities and women in remote islands; and
- o The establishment of a Pacific Women's Mediators network in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum to enhance women's leadership and contribution across the nexus in the Pacific, including in the response to disasters and humanitarian crises.

**When it comes to the role of the UN,** it should support the existing knowledge and expertise in the Pacific in the operationalisation of the triple nexus, including by supporting the work and capacities of Pacific peacebuilders. We encourage the Peacebuilding Fund to prioritise filling the gaps that appear as a result of comprehensive analysis of the action across the triple nexus through sustained resourcing for inclusive, transformative preventative and peacebuilding action.

We need to redesign the table and shift the power to those who have the biggest stakes in sustaining peace in the region: women, young people, faith communities and the whole of the society in the Pacific.

It is time to develop a regional peacebuilding architecture that brings all stakeholders together to the table to share analysis: civil society, including women and youth, national governments, regional inter-governmental organisations and development partners, and supports the policy coherence, complementarity and non-repetition through multi-stakeholder processes like we are having today.

And, I thank you.