



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **International Women's Day: UN recognizes steps to empower women and calls for sustained political leadership to overcome remaining challenges in Samoa**

In the lead-up to International Women's Day on March 8, the United Nations Resident Representative in Samoa, Ms. Nileema Noble, acknowledged the important steps taken by the Government to empower women. "Samoa was the first Pacific Island country to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," she said, ahead of a two-day summit organized by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development to review progress towards the advancement of women in Samoa.

The Government summit, which starts today (March 8) in Apia, brings together national ministries and departments, civil society and the private sector to assess achievements and challenges on Samoa's National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. But, with less than five years to achieve the globally agreed MDG Goals, national commitments on reducing the opportunity gap between men and women in employment, political representation and ownership of assets, remain significant. To meet these challenges sustained and unwavering political leadership is absolutely critical, Ms Noble said, and everyone could reap rewards. "The Samoan economy stands to benefit greatly from the wider participation of women in the workforce and decision making. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) studies in Asia-Pacific region have indicated that GDP of a country could increase by 2-4% annually if women's employment were to increase to 70%," Ms Noble said.

Women across the Pacific report violence in their homes. Ms Noble said. "Such violence undermines development and generates instability and it will not be eradicated until all of us – including men and boys – refuse to tolerate it." UNDP studies show that over 60% of Pacific countries are still without domestic violence laws. Domestic violence also extracts billions of dollars from national economies because it burdens the health care systems and reduces the productivity of women.

"The challenge now is to remove barriers of discrimination which preclude talented and strong Pacific women from fully realising their human potential. Over the coming months, the UN system here will expand its technical assistance to the Government to meet national gender equity targets. Last year's Tsunami has placed an extra burden on many people in Samoa, but especially women. The Early Recovery programme of the UN family is supporting the Government to ease the burden on displaced families, especially women,' Ms Noble said.

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