

**UPR 15: TONGA**  
**New Zealand Statement**  
**Delivered by Ambassador Higgin, 21 January 2013**

New Zealand warmly welcomes Lord Vaea and the delegation of Tonga to the Council. The Kingdom of Tonga is one of our closest neighbours in the Pacific and we value our history of friendship and cooperation.

From the delegation's presentation today, we can see the progress made in many of the areas raised during Tonga's first UPR review. In particular, we join with others in acknowledging and celebrating the striking progress Tonga has made in transitioning to democracy. We wish to recognise the important leadership roles and active support their Majesties King George Tupou V and Tupou VI have played in the transition. Continuing these reforms and ensuring a vibrant Parliamentary democracy in Tonga will create a solid foundation for the promotion and protection of human rights generally.

Another theme of Tonga's UPR report and its presentation is the steps it has taken in respect of gender equality. New Zealand recognises the important role women hold in traditional Tongan culture and the respect it accords them. However, despite steps that the Government has taken, we note that this traditional role has not yet translated into equal participation in contemporary family, business, or political life. **New Zealand recommends that Tonga prioritise gender equality initiatives within its Tonga Strategic Development Framework and intensify its efforts to increase women's participation at all formal decision-making levels.**

New Zealand welcomes the practical steps Tonga has taken to address the endemic problem of violence against women, in particular through the police force's adoption of a "No Drop" policy to ensure the consistent investigation and prosecution of complaints of domestic violence, and progress in drafting specific violence against women legislation. **New Zealand recommends that Tonga strengthen its efforts to combat violence against women, and in particular that it works with civil society to address the societal attitudes and behaviours that underlie high rates of domestic violence.** New Zealand remains committed to continuing its collaboration with and support to Tongan authorities, particularly the police force, in addressing this important issue.

Malo 'aupito