**U.S. Statement at the Universal Periodic Review of Tonga,**

**29th Session, January 15, 2018**

Thank you, Madame Vice President.

The United States welcomes the Tongan delegation to the UPR Working Group.

The United States commends the Government of Tonga on the recent successful national elections, which were a significant step in Tonga’s democratic transition. We are also encouraged by the announcement that Tonga will open a free legal center for women who are survivors of sexual or domestic violence.

We encourage Tonga to decriminalize LGBTI status and conduct, increase free legal aid for those in need, and implement policies to increase women’s participation at all levels in government.

Bearing this in mind, we recommend that Tonga:

1. Repeal the provisions of the Tongan Criminal Offences Act that criminalize LGBTI status and conduct;
2. Develop a broader legal aid system that offers free legal counsel to indigent defendants;
3. Prioritize gender equality, as well as increase women’s participation at all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making in government.

Thank you.