****

***Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation***

Thank you, madam moderator. I’m Viva Tatawaqa, a Management Collective member of DIVA for Equality Fiji, QAQA Grassroots Young Feminist network, RESURJ, PICAN and the Pacific Islands Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice, speaking at this session on behalf of the Women’s Major Group on Sustainable Development.

As a grassroots community organizer and mobilizer from the Pacific region of small island states, the **challenges with water, sanitation and hygiene** is one that we come across every single day. In 2015 it was reported that almost 70% of people living in the Pacific are without access to improved sanitation, women have 50% rate of unmet contraceptives and almost 50% lack access to improved drinking water supplies.

Insufficient access to water resources and WASH is worsened by the climate, economic and ecological linked crises, which is already significantly increasing water scarcity and stress. Climate, DRR & Humanitarian response has led to greater menstrual health action but needs to strengthen gender focus, and to ensure full attention to gender justice, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

On the climate frontline, we witness and live the consequences of inadequate access to water and sanitation on the human rights, privacy, safety and wellbeing of women, girls and gender-diverse people, and this worsens from the loss and damage we are already facing. For us this is not the future, it is NOW.

Water and sanitation are on our mind constantly, from drinking, to waste management, and includes education and health care settings - lack of access to water disrupts girls and women’s daily lives with long walks to access water. Issues of poor access to education, disrupted sexual and reproductive health services and impacts all our livelihoods. There are also specific effects for paid women workers as well as all women engaged in unpaid care, domestic and communal work. As the ILO states, women already do over 76% of unpaid care work globally, and this rises to 80% in Asia and Pacific. The effects of poor water and sanitation make this endless work so much harder.

 Beyond household work burdens, women and girls face specific challenges caused by insufficient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools and tertiary institutions, work and healthcare facilities including profound lack of menstrual health services —disrupting their education and preventing access to all areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

**We recommend that governments at the national and sub-national levels and all stakeholders work together to:**

* Recognize access to water and sanitation as gender justice and human rights issues and ratify, domesticate and implement related international human rights instruments;
* Prioritize safe water and sanitation services in rural and maritime areas in consultation with communities and civil society organizers
* Ensure that community-owned water services are adequately resourced, that the people who run them are trained and supported, and that gender equality and human rights is promoted throughout
* Ensure strengthened education focus on WASH, go beyond schools, use gender transformative and socio-economic, ecological and climate justice approaches, address gaps in all areas, AND tackle harmful societal norms.

Water, sanitation and hygiene management decisions are not gender neutral. They have core impacts on women’s and gender diverse people’s human rights and social, economic, ecological and climate justice. Intersectional differences and inequalities between genders influence how individuals and communities use and make decisions about water and determine the extent to which the human rights to water and sanitation are inclusive and participative, and able to be fulfilled for all. Thank You.

ends.