**OUTCOME STATEMENT**

**Forum on Women Candidates’ Participation in the 2017 PNG Election**

**18 August 2017**

No women will be sitting in the 10th Parliament when it holds its first session next week, even though 167 women contested as candidates in the recent elections, more women than have ever before nominated for the PNG National Parliament. These women contested seats across the country, both open and regional, and ran with the endorsement of political parties and also as independent candidates. Despite their increased numbers, there are now no women in the National Parliament, the first time this has happened in 25 years and the third time this has happened in our history.

Our own Constitution enshrines the right to “*equal participation by women in all political, economic, social and religious activities*” in Directive Principle 2(5). Vision 2050 identifies gender in one of its seven pillars. Milestone 19.4 explicitly commits the Government to ensuring “*the political system in PNG is actively promoting stability, gender equality, democracy, transparency, accountability and economic development in Papua New Guinea’s national interest*.” Yet, PNG has joined only four other countries in the world – Vanuatu, the Federated States of Micronesia, Qatar and Yemen – in having no women Members of Parliament at all. This is despite the many commitments this nation has made to gender equality and women’s political participation over many decades. Specifically, PNG ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination on Women* in 1995 and endorsed the *Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration* in 2012, both of which called for the adoption of measures, including temporary special measures, to accelerate women’s leadership in decision-making. More recently, PNG signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals, which require under Target 5.5 that PNG “*ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making*.”

As the new Government and the 10th Parliament of PNG look towards the future, it is essential that our leaders, as well as the men and women of our nation, come together to ensure that women’s voices are effectively included in national decision-making processes, including within the National Parliament. Women constitute half of the population and deserve to have this reflected in the highest decision-making body in the country. PNG women have the constitutional right and capability to participate in and lead our nation’s governance and development. As candidates, they have the right to participate on an equal footing with their male counterparts, supported by their communities, promoted by political leaders and protected from violence, intimidation and electoral fraud.

This Forum brought together Papua New Guineans from all sectors, including government officials, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media, as well as interested citizens, all of whom are committed to women’s political participation. This Forum discussed the recent elections and a range of issues affecting women’s participation in elections. To address the many challenges identified, the Forum agreed to establish a Working Group for Women in Parliament 2022 and beyond, that will work together to ensure that women are elected to the next Parliament.

There are five years until PNG will go to another national election. In that time, it is imperative that we find ways for women’s voices to be heard within the National Parliament and build towards their eventual election. To that end, this Forum recommends the following urgent actions:

1. The Government and Parliament should immediately renew their efforts to implement temporary special measures to support women’s political participation, in order to immediately address the deficit of women in the National Parliament, including any or all of the following options:
	1. Passing a parliamentary motion to task a parliamentary committee with implementing 2 nominated seats for women in accordance with s.102 of the Constitution for the 2017-2022 term of Parliament;
	2. Reviving the Bills tabled during the 2012 parliamentary session to give effect to s.101(1)(d) of the Constitution in order to implement 22 seats for women, to come into effect from the 2022 election. This reflects the commitment of Prime Minister Peter O’Neill on 17 August 2017 to progress reserved seats options;
2. The Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPCC) should be given every support necessary to implement its mandate in order to support women’s political participation, including by:
	1. The NEC and Parliament providing immediate political support to enact critical gender-responsive amendments to its legislative framework;
	2. Ensuring sufficient funding for the IPPCC to work with political parties and with women candidates to build their commitment and capacities over the next five years;
3. The Government should commission an independent review of the 2017 elections, in order to identify gaps and areas for improvement in supporting women candidates and voters to participate fairly, freely and safely;
4. The Government should work with local stakeholders and development partners to:
	1. Revisit the findings and recommendations from the 2007 and 2012 Election Diagnostic Assessments of Women Candidates’ Participation, as well as this Forum, in order to develop an action plan focused on ensuring women’s election to 11th National Parliament following the 2022 elections;
	2. Immediately commence the process of formulating a PNG Gender Policy to fill the gap left by the last policy which expired in 2015. The Policy must include provisions for enhancing women’s political participation. These priorities should also be integrated into the revised MTDP-3 that is currently under development;
	3. Develop and deliver a 5-year program of capacity building for women candidates. A well-rounded package of skills development should be delivered that builds women’s leadership, policy, public speaking and campaigning skills. This should be complementary to other activities already underway;
5. The Government should provide specific support to the Electoral Commission, the IPPCC and key government and non-government bodies to support women candidates to run in the upcoming 2018 Local Level Government elections;
6. The Government, Electoral Commission and IPPCC should work with interested stakeholders to:
	1. Explore options for addressing the critical need for women candidates to access campaign financing. For example, a public fund could be established to collect and distribute money for women candidates;
	2. Develop a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to voter and civic education in order to educate our citizens about the value of women in leadership and accountable democratic governance more broadly. Building the commitment of voters to electing women as their leaders is critical to ensuring women’s electoral success in the long-term;
7. The Ministry for Inter-Governmental Relations should work with interested stakeholders to explore options for building the capacity of women in sub-national decision-making bodies, including provincial and local level governments, as well as District Development Authorities.
8. The Government should strengthen the capacities of the national mechanisms dedicated to promoting women’s empowerment and gender equality, including:
	1. Relocating the Office for the Development of Women (ODW) to sit within the Office of Prime Minister and the National Executive Council. It is important to have an official champion for gender equality within Government. The ODW should be adequately resourced to more effectively lead the national effort to promote women’s political participation and gender equality, including by regularly and proactively convening stakeholders across government, civil society and the private sector to take concrete action.;
	2. Adequately resourcing and strengthening the capacities of the National Council for Women to perform their role most effectively, including by working with women candidates and voters.