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MSG Secretariat
Secretariat du GFLM
Melanesian Spearhead Group | Le Groupe Fer de Lance Mélanésien

Remarks at the Virtual Signing of the Grant Agreement between MSG Secretariat and the Pacific Community

5 August, 2024

Salutations

[Sarah McCartney, SPC Regional Director Melanesia

Jon Philp, The Acting Australia High Commission

Representatives of the MSG Member States

Staff of the Australian High Commission

Staff of the Pacific Community

Ladies and gentlemen]

Good morning olgeta.

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the signing of the Grant Agreement with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (the Pacific Community) concerning a project that seeks to better the lot of a gender that is often talked about in our region, dare I say invariably for political expediency, but, sadly, corresponding actions are yet to match the political hype and rhetoric.

Today marks an important step forward for the MSG Secretariat in our crusade to do our part in serving the needs of our womenfolk. Through this Grant Agreement, the MSG Secretariat, via the Pacific Community (SPC), and through the generous grace of the Australian Government, will receive AUD\$527,000.00 to support the Project on **“Promoting Melanesian Women to Enable Social and Economic Empowerment”**.

This is part and parcel of the efforts towards implementation of the 2038 MSG Prosperity for All Plan, and the 2022-2024 Corporate Plan strategy of enhancing the development of women and youths in Melanesia. It is one of the reasons why I have deliberately placed oversight of this project within the Trade, Investment and Economic Development Programme.

This project has three (3) basic components, and those that have handled this project from its inception would know that, due to funding constraints, some components of it have had to be scaled down or put back for the next phase. I am hoping that we can pick them up in the next phase.

Firstly, the project seeks to empower women entrepreneurs and elevate their capability and capacity to access markets and the export space in the MSG region.

It also seeks to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence. An MSG Sub-Regional Plan, as part of the MSG Gender Framework, will be developed to accelerate member governments approach to the prevention of *Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*. In the initial conception of the project, we had originally wanted to have a Police Case-Management System component to develop better and more effective ways and means of receiving complaints, managing, tracking and successfully prosecuting to finality gender violence cases.

A comprehensive MSG Gender Framework, based on the draft text that we have, will be crafted and finalised for approval by the MSG Governing Bodies. This will be supported with the development of an Implementation Plan informed by the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

To assist the MSG Secretariat, a Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) specialist will be recruited, under this project, to plot a way on how best to pursue and deliver on these three components.

An important component of the initial project was our aspiration to empower Melanesian women participation in politics and decision making. For us, it is critical to equip those successful women politicians in our Parliaments with the requisite resources, research staff for instance, to enable them to speak with authority on bills and issues, and to effectively advocate their innovative ideas and unique perspectives in a confident and cogent manner on the floor of Parliament.

Let me once again express that the MSG is grateful for this timely support from the SPC for this Project on “**Promoting Melanesian Women to Enable Social and Economic Empowerment**”. It demonstrates, in a manifestly practical way, our shared commitment and resolve to do what is right by our womenfolk in the gender space. This is an encouraging step in the right direction in our MSG/SPC joint efforts to empower women, support Member’s commitments to address VAWG and enhance women in leadership roles in Melanesia.

We, at the MSG, are committed to, and are confident of successfully prosecuting to completion this Project. The grant agreement for the MSG Gender Project is valid up to 31 December, 2025.

Let me acknowledge with appreciation the careful consideration that has gone into the development of this Grant Agreement by relevant staff of the SPC, noting that some components will need to be resuscitated in future, and look forward to working more closely with SPC on these and other endeavours.

I can assure you that the MSG Secretariat will continue to strive to elevate and mainstream gender and social inclusion issues within the respective programmes of the MSG Secretariat.

Let me also at this stage, take the opportunity, once again, to acknowledge the tremendous support of the Australian government whose generous contributions to the MSG Gender Project through SPC, the PCMU Project, and the Yut4 Melanesia

Project, signals a broadening in the scope and depth of our joint partnership engagements and collaborations.

Let there be no mistake, this Gender Project is a very significant step up for the MSG to demonstrate to our benevolent partners that we are up to the task and we can be trusted to deliver.

I have already mentioned the other projects to be funded by the Australian Government and we are looking forward to working with the Australian Government officials here in Port Vila, to develop other projects in the economic, social, sports, culture and security spaces.

The 2022 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the MSG and the Australian Government in Port Vila, Vanuatu, is certainly bearing fruits.

With these opening remarks, I thank you.

Tenk yu tru, Tangio tumas, Merci beaucoup, Vinaka Vakalevu, Oleti!

MSG Secretariat

2 August, 2024

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