

**Oral Statement at the 87th Pre-sessional Working Group
UN Committee on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) of Solomon Islands
30 May 2023**

*Delivered by: Mr Budi Tjahjono
Check against delivery*

Madam Chairperson,

Franciscans International, with our partners in Solomon Islands, would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide inputs for your consideration for the list of issues prior to reporting for Solomon Island. The focus of our joint submission is on the negative impacts of logging activities on the human rights of women and girls, including as related to increased incidents of violence against women including sexual abuse; trafficking and prostitution; participation in political and public life; economic and social benefits; and on rural women more generally. Although the negative impacts of logging on the enjoyment of human rights are felt by both men and women, women and girls are disproportionately affected, while they receive the least benefits from logging activities.

Violence against women including sexual abuse

In Solomon Islands, gender-based violence is a persistent issue. Despite the adoption of the Family Protection Act 2014, which established a legal framework to address domestic violence as a criminal offense, as well other laws, policies and commitments, the prevalence of violence against women and girls is still high in the country. We were informed of allegations of sexual exploitation occurring in areas of logging concessions, between men working in logging areas and local women and girls. In addition, the presence of logging activities has created a situation where the sudden increase in salaries for local men involved in the logging industry has resulted in the increased consumption of alcohol, which fuels patriarchal acts of violence against women, including domestic violence.

Suggested questions for the State:

- *Please provide information on policies and measures taken to prevent and prosecute sexual abuse and domestic violence, and in particular, when such instances occur in the areas of logging concessions. The authorities should also document such cases.*

Trafficking and prostitution

We acknowledge the provisions of the Penal Code and Immigration Act 2012 that criminalize sex and labour trafficking, as well as the Immigration Act 2012 which addresses offences related to human trafficking and smuggling. However, we are concerned that there has not been effective implementation of existing laws and policies that prevent and punish trafficking in women and girls, including trafficking linked to the logging sector. In 2021, only two alleged perpetrators involved in trafficking were brought before the courts in Solomon Islands, which resulted in one conviction; he served his term and has since returned to his country of origin.

Suggested questions for the State:

- *Please provide information on steps taken towards the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.*

- *Please provide information on measures or mechanisms for investigation, prosecution, and sentencing of trafficking offenders.*

Participation in political and public life

We acknowledge the adoption of the National Development Strategy of 2016-2025 whose aim, amongst others, is to improve the social and economic lives of all Solomon Islanders, to improve gender equality, and to establish targets for the representation of women in Parliament, ministries, State-owned enterprises and in local government.

The patriarchal nature of Solomon Islands culture is underpinned by social norms and customary values that establish a hierarchy in which women often play a subservient role. Entrenched male dominance of State, faith-based and traditional institutions result in situations where men often make decisions on behalf of women. We are concerned about the under representation of women in the public life. Currently, there are only four women members of Parliament.

Suggested questions for the State:

- *Please provide information on measures taken to increase the presence of women in Parliament, Ministries, and positions within the executive branch of the government as well as other decision-making positions in public offices.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure that women participate in decision-making processes on issues related to logging activities, including whether women are consulted in any due diligence processes mandated by the State.*

Impact of logging on livelihood and environment

Women and girls in Solomon Islands play a key role in providing food for their households, including in rural areas where logging activities take place. Environmental degradation due to intensive logging affects their access to food. Among other impacts, logging not only depletes sea and forest food resources, but also introduces alien species that wreak havoc on crops. Our members and partners who live around logging operations expressed their concern regarding threats to biodiversity by new species, such as giant African snails, rhino beetles, red ants and Asian bees, which are likely to have been brought incidentally by the logging machines coming from outside Solomon Islands.

The consequences of the destruction of forests and land by logging activities are considered very severe by the community: soil is now eroding and further exposed to sun and rain; water sources are drying up; rainfall is not dispersed efficiently causing flash floods and landslides in some areas and drought conditions in others. The rights to healthy environment and to adequate standards of living of women and girls are affected.

Suggested question for the State:

- *Please provide information on measures taken to address the negative impacts of logging on the right to adequate standard of living, the right to health, the right to food, the right to water, and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for women and girls, including those in rural areas.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure that women and girls are meaningfully engaged in the development and implementation of climate change and disaster risk reduction policies.*