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Dear Mr. Salato,

In my capacity as Rapporteur for Follow-up on Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), I have the honour to refer to the examination of the combined initial to third periodic report of Solomon Islands at the Committee's fifty ninth session, held in November 2014. At the end of that session, the Committee's concluding observations were transmitted to your Permanent Mission (CEDAW/C/SLB/CO/1-3). You may recall that in the concluding observations, the Committee requested the Solomon Islands to provide, within two years, written information on the steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 11 (b), 25 (b) and 33 (g) and (h) of the concluding observations.

The Committee welcomes the follow-up report received with a 3-month delay in February 2017 (CEDAW/C/SLB/CO/1-3/Add.1) under the CEDAW follow-up procedure. At its sixty-seventh session, held in July 2017 in Geneva, the Committee examined this follow-up report and adopted the following assessment.

Regarding the recommendation made in **paragraph 11** of the concluding observations, that the State party “accelerate the process of adopting the new federal constitution and include in it, provisions on equality between women and men, the prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination against women and multiple and intersecting discrimination in both the public and private spheres, and sanctions, in line with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention”: The State party informed on the development of the draft federal constitution of Solomon Islands, which will include provisions on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The draft shall be completed by June 2017 and adopted in 2018. With regards to provisions on equality and non-discrimination, the State party referred to Clause 19(1) and (2) of the draft, which provides that “everyone is equal before the law”, including the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognised in the constitution. Moreover, it referred to Clause 19(3), which prohibits discrimination on several grounds, including discrimination based on sex but not on sexual orientation, and reported that this clause sets grounds for the prohibition of intersectional discrimination. In addition, the State party indicated that Clauses 19(3) and (4) prohibit indirect and direct discrimination of any individual on any of the prohibited grounds, while 19(6) entitles the Government to take legislative and other measures to protect or advance equality for disadvantaged persons.

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According to alternative sources of information, Clause 16 of the draft constitution provides that customary practices prevail over women's rights and freedom, thus opening doors for a regression in women's right to the inheritance and acquisition of land, resources and property.

The Committee welcomes the steps taken towards the adoption of a new federal constitution, which includes clauses on equality and non-discrimination, addressing direct and indirect discrimination, sets grounds for the prohibition of intersecting discrimination and provides for measures to protect or advance equality. The Committee however regrets the inclusion of a provision giving customary practices priority over rights and freedoms which are defined in the Constitution. The Committee considers that the State party took some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

The Committee recommends that, in relation to paragraph 11 of the concluding observations, the State party provide, **in its next periodic report**, information on further actions taken to include in the Constitution provisions on non-discrimination in the public and private spheres and sanctions, ensure that women's rights are not limited based on customary practices and expedite the adoption of the Constitution.

Regarding the recommendation made in **paragraph 25** of the concluding observations, that the State party "take measures to ensure that the police respond to and investigate complaints regarding violence against women and that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished, and collect data on the number of prosecutions and convictions, including at the provincial level": The State party reported that following the adoption of the Family Protection Act in 2014, the Family Violence Policy was amended, allowing police officers to enter private premises in order to stop violence and make arrests without a warrant, setting standards for victim protection and for the identification and investigation of offences. It moreover informed that a review of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), which guides police response to family violence, was to be completed by November 2016. The State party further provided information on the delineation of responsibilities of the Sexual Assault Unit in 2015. This unit does not only investigate incidents, but also provides advice and guidance to other officers who are investigating sexual assault incidents and refers cases further for prosecution. Regarding data collection, the State party reported that with the adoption of the Family Protection Act, this responsibility was given to the National Community Policing and Family Violence Unit, which concentrates on reported cases of family violence and collects data monthly from all the provinces of Solomon Islands. Aiming to ensure the availability of information on cases of violence against women and to enhance information management within the justice sector for effective prosecution, the State party informed that it has commissioned the development of a Justice Information Management System (JIMS).

Alternative information before the Committee reported on cases of secondary victimization by police officers, which are particularly frequent with women and girls with disabilities, and on police officers showing reluctance in the application of procedures when responding to domestic violence. Reports moreover underscored the need to introduce Family Courts, as well as local courts, which would establish protection orders and assist victims in rural areas.

The Committee welcomes the amendment of the Family Protection Act, the review of the Standard Operating Procedures of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and the delineation of responsibilities of the Sexual Assault Unit, guiding police response to cases of violence against women. It moreover welcomes the introduction of monthly data collection from all provinces, and the development of a Justice Information Management System. However regretting the lack of information on measures taken to ensure implementation of these acts and procedures for effective investigation and prosecution, to avoid secondary victimization and to collect data at the provincial level, the Committee considers that the State party has taken some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

The Committee recommends that, in relation to paragraph 25 of the concluding observations, the State party provide, **in its next periodic report**, information on further actions taken to ensure implementation of the new Standard Operating Procedures of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in the response to and the investigation of complaints regarding violence against women. Take measures to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished, complete the development of the Justice Information Management System (JIMS) to collect data on the number of prosecutions and convictions and include data at the provincial level.

Concerning the recommendation made in **paragraph 33** of the concluding observations, that the State party “strengthen efforts to retain girls in school, including pregnant girls, facilitate the return to school of young mothers after giving birth by adopting the policy on second-chance education currently under consideration and by providing adequate childcare facilities, and ensure that girls are not expelled from school because they are pregnant and by imposing appropriate sanctions on those responsible for such dismissals”: The State party indicated that the Education Act of 1978 is under revision and that by the end of 2016, it was to be replaced by two separate bills: the Tertiary Education and Skills Authority Bill and the Education Bill. It added that the latter bill is aimed at increasing access to tertiary education and skills development, whereas the former provides for early learning and primary and secondary education, and that equal opportunity for all, including for those who are disadvantaged, is one of its guiding principles. The State party also informed on the Education Strategic Framework 2016-2020 (ESF) and its underlying National Education Action Plan 2016-2020, which sets out targets for the elimination of gender disparities in all levels of education. The State party further informed on the ongoing development of a Second Chance Education Policy and a Strategy on Equity, Inclusion and Gender Equality.

The Committee welcomes the development of legislation and policies to improve girls’ access to education. It however regrets the general nature of these provisions, and the lack of information on the specific measures aimed at ensuring that pregnant girls and young mothers continue and / or return to school, as well as measures to provide adequate childcare facilities and to prevent girls’ expulsion of school on the grounds of their pregnancy. It finally regrets that a policy on second-chance education has not been adopted yet. The Committee considers that the recommendation **has not been implemented**.

Regarding the recommendation that the State party “continue to develop and promote age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health to address early pregnancies”: The State party reported on sexual and reproductive health educational programmes, which are targeted at youth and children aged 10 to 25 and channelled through the Reproductive and Child Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. It added that these programs include information on contraceptives and family planning. The State party further reported on the development of a manual for Community Peer Educators and on the availability of 8000 Jadelle implants to girls in both urban and rural areas with no age threshold.

According to alternative information before the Committee, access to information sexual and reproductive health and corresponding services are concentrated in urban areas and are not yet part of the school curricula. Moreover, reports illustrate the reluctance of health workers to hand out available contraceptives to girls.

The Committee welcomes the introduction of educational programmes and initiatives on sexual and reproductive health to prevent early pregnancies. It is however concerned at unequal access to such education throughout the country and institutions. The Committee considers that the State party has taken some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

The Committee recommends that, in relation to paragraph 33 of the concluding observations, the State party provide, **in its next periodic report**, information on further actions taken to:

1. Strengthen efforts to retain girls in school, especially pregnant girls, facilitate the return to school of young mothers after giving birth by adopting the policy on second-chance education and by providing adequate childcare facilities, and ensure that girls are not expelled from school because they are pregnant and by imposing appropriate sanctions on those responsible for such dismissals.

2. Introduce age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health in all school curricula to address early pregnancies and ensure implementation of ongoing initiatives, especially in rural areas.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women