



Statement by the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, Mr. Themba Kalua

On the occasion of the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, 2023

Monday, 27 November 2023, Tooa Salamasina Hall, Sogi

- Father Mauola Leilua
- Minister for Women, Community, and Social Development, Afioga Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio’o
- Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Associate Ministers
- The Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Emily Luck and other Members of the Diplomatic Corp
- Representatives of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations
- My dear colleagues from the United Nations
- Members of the media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honored to stand before you today, representing the United Nations system, as we mark the official launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in Samoa. My sincere gratitude goes to you, Honorable Minister and your staff at the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development for leading this important campaign.

Globally, violence against women and girls remains a pervasive human rights violation, with a staggering 736 million women—almost one in three—having experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence. In Samoa, available statistics, reveal that 37.5% of women have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Nine out of 10 children in Samoa experience severe forms of punishment at home. These statistics must serve as a compelling call to action.

The 16 Days of Activism against GBV is annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations



around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

This year's global theme 'UNITE! Invest to prevent violence against women and girls,' resonates powerfully with Samoa's chosen theme: 'Respect is a shared responsibility.' Recognizing that violence is not only a violation of individual rights but an affront to the very fabric of Fa'asamoa, we emphasize the urgency of preventing and eliminating gender-based violence.

The United Nations in Samoa is proud to support the government and various civil society organizations in responding to and preventing gender-based violence.

For example, we have supported the Inter-agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection, led by the Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development in partnership with UN Women, UNFPA, and UNICEF, which exemplifies a survivor-centered approach.

But services alone won't solve the problem; we need to address the root cause – gender inequality. Embracing respect in our homes, communities and institutions, is not merely a courtesy but a powerful tool in dismantling the foundations of gender inequality and violence. It calls for a fundamental shift in societal norms, challenging stereotypes and prejudices that perpetuate violence and limit the rights and potential of individuals, particularly women and girls, based on their gender identity. The UN's support extends to community-based awareness through the Talanoa Toolkit and the National Prevention Framework and Action Plan, showcasing our collective commitment to prevention.

A big part of the progress from UN's support has been through the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative implemented through UN Women, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA and UNICEF. The Spotlight is coming to an end this year. We are committed to develop a successor programme under government's leadership and with the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders including women's rights organizations, and with the support of development partners.

While we have seen some progress in the fight against GBV, we must acknowledge that more needs to be done. I therefore want to suggest three things as we step our efforts:



1. To ensure a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach involving government, community leaders, the church, civil society, private sector, development partners, the United Nations and other stakeholders.
2. To increase investments in civil society organizations especially women led organizations, and to promote women's participation in all spheres of life.
3. To engage men and boys in the fight against GBV for a lasting change.

As a man, I want to briefly speak to my fellow men, my Samoan brothers. Let us be unambiguous in our stand – violence against women and girls is never acceptable. It is not a sign of strength, but a demonstration of weakness. We must hold ourselves accountable for our actions and, equally important, hold each other accountable. When you witness an incident of gender-based violence, do not remain a silent bystander. Speak up, intervene, and support survivors. Real strength lies in fostering environments of respect and equality.

As we culminate the 16 days of activism on December 10, Human Rights Day, which this year, coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us recommit to the principles of equality, freedom, and justice. Women's rights are human rights, and this truth must guide our journey toward a Samoa where violence against women and girls finds no refuge.

I would like to commend the Government of Samoa for its commitment to addressing GBV, the development partners who are supporting the government's efforts and civil society organizations that are often in the forefront of this fight in the communities.

Together, let us work tirelessly for a Samoa where violence has no place, and where every woman and girl can thrive in a society built on respect, equality, and justice.

Fa'aaloalo ole faiva tauave o tagata uma. Fa'afetai tele lava.