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United Nations Human Rights

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Regional Office for the Pacific

Launch of the Samoa Ombudsman / national human rights institution

Address by

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Deputy Prime Minister, representatives of all branches of Government,
Honorable Ombudsman and staff of your institution,
Representatives of civil society,
Representatives of the international and diplomatic community,
Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

It is my honour to participate at today's official launch of the Samoa Ombudsman institution, with its broadened mandate to promote and protect human rights. I convey the congratulations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, commending Samoa for having joined the increasing numbers of countries with a national human rights institution.

The establishment of the Samoa Ombudsman as a national human rights institution demonstrates Samoa's commitment to continue enhancing the protection of human rights. Independent and effective national human rights institutions have a central place in national human rights protection systems, and in addressing the most critical human rights issues, promoting the rule of law and ensuring accountability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to highlight three areas, among others, in which national human rights institutions (NHRIs) globally make positive contributions:

Firstly, as actors for positive change, independent and effective NHRIs are well-placed to address, and also to prevent, human rights violations. National institutions are active in protecting marginalised individuals and groups by ensuring that principles of non-discrimination and equality are incorporated into legislation and practice. They provide principled advice and assistance to Governments in meeting their human rights obligations. At the same time, they also provide timely information and advice to individuals, as rights holders, on access to justice and effective remedies. Their activities often span from handling complaints, undertaking investigations, monitoring the performance of obligations under human rights treaties, advising the State on the domestic application of international treaty obligations, recommending policy changes and providing training and public education.

These are key contributions.

Secondly, independent and effective NHRIs are key partners of the United Nations human rights mechanisms. They provide information, contribute to constructive dialogues, and follow up on recommendations from human rights treaty bodies, the special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. As highlighted already by Ms. Cullity, the establishment of the Samoa Ombudsman institution itself was recommended to Samoa in its review in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council, echoing prior recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Thirdly, independent and effective NHRIs can work together with the Government to promote ratification of important international human rights treaties and their implementation. I wish to highlight and welcome that Samoa in 2008 became State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Some of the other core international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

Rights, the Convention against Torture, the International Convention against the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as relevant optional protocols, have yet to be ratified. As we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, encourages States in the Pacific, including Samoa, to renew consideration of and become State Parties to more and eventually all core human rights instruments. This would further demonstrate Samoa's commitment to human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This launch is symbolically taking place today, 10 December, on international Human Rights Day. The universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, whether civil, cultural, economic, social or political, were reaffirmed at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. It crystallized the principle that human rights are universal, and committed States to the promotion and protection of all human rights for all people, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems. It also reaffirmed the importance of national human rights institutions, encouraging cooperation among national human rights institutions, regional organisations and the United Nations. As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of that event, which also led to the creation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, this is a good moment for states to reflect on their achievements or progress.

Also today, 10 December, in a few hours, South Africa's official memorial service for Nelson Mandela will take near Johannesburg. Millions of people, including many who never met him, are mourning and feel deep personal sorrow. I consider us incredibly lucky to have lived at a time when someone of that stature was among us, the greatest moral leader of our time. I know many for whom, like me, he shaped our direction in life, our consciousness of injustice and involvement in human rights. Let us all continue to draw inspiration from his life and lessons of reconciliation, courage and leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In welcoming today's step in Samoa to strengthen human rights protection, I would like to recognize the positive role played by a range of stakeholders, in the shaping and institutional setup of the Samoa Ombudsman as a national human rights institution. It is the welcome outcome of a process over several years conducted by the Government, with the participation of civil society, the parliament, the Ombudsman institution, and other partners. Also the United Nations Human Rights Office/OHCHR was honoured to, with partners, contribute assistance, comparative analysis and other advice, throughout this process.

In closing, I want therefore to reiterate UN Human Rights Office/OHCHR's continued commitment to support, with partners, the Samoa Ombudsman with its broadened mandate and function as a national human rights institution, with a view towards achieving full compliance with international standards, the 'Paris Principles', joining the international cooperation frameworks of national human rights institutions ahead, and its independent and effective functioning ahead.

I wish all success to the Samoa Ombudsman in the future endeavors.

Thank you for your attention.