

**Cook Islands Country Report  
For the  
Pacific sexual diversity and gender network  
("PSDGN")  
2<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Human Rights Conference  
("PHRC")**

**28<sup>th</sup> May- 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018  
Nadi  
Fiji**

**Valentino Wichman**

## **Background to the PSDGN**

The Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (PSDN) is a network representing the interests of LGBTQI in the Pacific region since 2007. The PSDN is a region-wide network of LGBTQI community Organisations and projects and is the first of its kind in the Pacific. It formed in recognition of the need to develop an effective regional response to the actual and potential threat that HIV and AIDS poses to LGBTQI across the Pacific. Currently the Pacific includes representation from Samoa, Papua new Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Marshal Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau and the Cook Islands. PSDGN hopes to expand its representation to include other Pacific countries in the near future.

## **What was the PHRC 2018 conference about?**

**2018 Pacific Human Rights Conference:** Advancing Human Rights related to issues around Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGISC) and human rights.

**The theme was:** My voyage, our journey, one ocean

## **Objectives:**

The conference aims were to:

- Develop a roadmap to achieve SOGIE-SC/LGBTQI inclusion in the Pacific by 2030.
- Strengthen and enhance networking and collaborations amongst the PHRC participants/organizations. Build ties, networking and training amongst PSDN members, other LGBTQI groups and SOGI Communities throughout the Pacific, through co-operation and working together to achieve the outcomes of the project.
- Increase knowledge sharing and update knowledge in the various areas of advocacy.
- Establish new partnerships with organizations new to the movement.
- Garner greater awareness and visibility of PSDN's programmes, leading to greater appreciation and advocacy of LGBTQI issues, as well as highlight the contributions of diverse LGBTQI groups and networks in the Pacific. In addition, the conference will consider how best to strengthen collaborations and partnerships across the region.
- Identify priorities in the conference will create a strong foundation for seeking partnerships with key stakeholders, international funding agencies, government and civil society organisations to promote and protect human rights.

## **Expected results:**

As a result of this conference, we expect to achieve the following:

- Contribute to Increased networking/knowledge sharing (sharing ideas, information, strategies and programmes) to affirm the dignity, equality and security of the SOGI community in the Pacific region.
- Contribute to Increased awareness/knowledge and skills on advocacy, research/evidence gathering; understanding of the policy development process; influencing skills; policy analysis; stakeholder management; lobbying / campaigning; media relations; awareness raising on

international HR rights law & Yogyakarta Principles to enhance respect for persons of diverse SOGI and its application to review the human rights situation and actively contribute to the PIFS Regional Policy fora, UPR, CEDAW, etc.

- Contribute to Increased partnerships and networks for advocacy and social action including reduction in violation of HR across the Pacific.

**The Conference was split into four thematic areas:**

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Health and Well being
- Social Justice; and
- Partnerships & Resourcing

**Meeting Outcome Documents**

- Conference Report
- Pacific LGBTQI Roadmap to 2030
- Outcomes Document

**The Cook Islands situation:**

The conference was primarily for gender and sexual minorities - or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) people - who live in the Pacific small island states. Many used terms from their own languages to describe their identity. It will mainly involved LGBTQI activists and Human Rights defenders already active or wishing to become so, from within the region. There were be a select few international experts invited to speak at the event as well as state officials, development partners and donors invited to be observers in some sessions.

The Cook Islands delegation looked at interventions in the following areas:

- Inclusion of Akavaine and Tutu tane into the language of all documentation;
- Pushing for the TTA strategy thematic areas of health, education and empowerment as key issues for the region.
- Changing neo colonial view points of the Cook Islands as a “small” country and incorporating our culture and identity into the forum documentation.
- Looking for funding alternatives.

**Te Tiare Association Background**

Te Tiare Association (“TTA”) was set up to bring together “Akavaine”<sup>1</sup> in the Cook Islands, to help nurture, strengthen and educate this important sector of our community. TTA is the only LGBT community group in the Cook Islands, and it’s over arching vision is “To Lead our own Destinies”. TTA was formally incorporated as a society in November 2007 and officially launched in June 2008 simultaneously forming partnerships with the Pacific Aids Foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Akavaine is a term which literally means to be a woman and is used in the Cook Islands context to broadly denote LGBTIQ community.

The desire to create better and safer communities, raising awareness of health issues and helping to promote betterment within our nation describe only a few characteristics of this group. These aspirations are not just confined to our communities at home in the Cook Islands, but look to forming positive working relationships and partnerships worldwide.

### **Te Tiare Association Delegation**

Shaniqua Ngaoire	President	Te Tiare Association
Regina Potini	Vice President	Te Tiare Association
Valentino Wichman	Secretary	Te Tiare Association
Tatryana Eden Lacroix	Mizz Jewel 2016 (NZ based)	Te Tiare Association

The conference was an opportunity for the delegation to make interventions around LGBTQI issues in the Cook Islands and possibly progress cooperation's with several Organisations during the margins of the Conference. This is also an opportune time to enhance the learning experience for each of the participants and provide feedback to TTA upon their return.

The delegation program included discussions in several areas including Human Rights, Culture and Traditions, Advocacy and Community Priorities, Community Engagement and Advocacy, Health and Wellbeing in the Pacific, Religion and Spirituality and discussion around legal instruments to assist with the wellbeing of LGBTQI in the Pacific.

#### **Action points in moving forward:**

- Confirm funding arrangements with GF through Te Marae Ora
- include Te Tiare representative in PRCC mechanism
- membership drive
- article in newspaper on conference and the way forward
- Amend action plan and implement
- start succession plan for younger members
- look more into economic empowerment

#### **Funding areas to look into:**

- Mama Cash
- Canada fund
- Freedom House
- Trans fund
- SPC small grant facility due 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018.

#### **PSDN PHRC CONFERENCE 2020**

The Cook Islands did not make a bid to host the next PSDN Conference in 2020 as the 2018 conference was supposed to be hosted by us however funding was insufficient. Samoa has indicated their interest to host in 2020

#### **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to acknowledge all agencies and individuals who assisted team Cook Islands for this Conference.

