



Kiribati women show their skills in Parliament

By Online Editor

5:18 pm GMT+12, 11/08/2011, Kiribati



Women take part in a mock parliament debate,
Photo: UNDP

The Maneaba ni Maungatabu (Parliament) was a scene of intense debate and dialogue this week as thirty I-Kiribati women – thirteen women from Tarawa and seventeen women from the outer islands – came together for the first ever mock Parliament for Women in the Pacific.

At the closing debrief for the mock Parliamentarians, the Speaker of the National Parliament of Kiribati, Taomati Iuta said the exercise was very encouraging.

“Today’s performance in the House was very impressive. Some of you already sound like real parliamentarians. At the end of this mock Parliament, I hope that constituents will now have a more positive attitude to women, if and when you run for Parliament.”

During the debate, the women on the Government benches were questioned on wide ranging issues from Government’s policy on public transport for school children, reserved seats for women in local and national elected bodies to increasing the number of polling stations for voters in outer islands.

Teewata Rokete, an Opposition MP in the mock Parliament, questioned the Government on its policies for people with disabilities.

“The real Kiribati Government has not yet finalized the National Disability Policy so I asked the mock Government when Cabinet would endorse the policy. A draft was done in 2007, but it is

2011 and the draft has not yet been finalized. I questioned why the Government has been so slow. It is very important for people living with disabilities that the Government take action to make sure that they have access to necessary services and support. I was very pleased that the Minister in our mock Parliament assured me the policy would be endorsed by Cabinet before the next parliamentary session. I hope the real Government will do the same.”

Following question time, members discussed a motion put forward by Opposition Member, Tereti Tabutoa, urging the Government to focus on enacting and enforcing a specific domestic violence law.

“There are many Government policies on women’s issues but too many of them are not implemented. This is why we need a law to deal with domestic violence. I moved this motion to urge the Government to pass legislation to protect our women and children. It is a real concern to me that even when women go to the police, they are encouraged to reconcile. We need a law to make sure that all our community knows that violence against women and children is not acceptable.”

Tabutua’s motion was unanimously passed by the House after an active debate from Members on both sides of the benches.

The last order of business was a debate on the passage of the proposed Youth Reproductive Health Rights Bill 2011, which proposed requiring free condoms to be provided in government primary and secondary schools and for sex education classes to be compulsory for students over 8 years of age.

Reflecting on the debate and the mock parliament, Ritite Tekiau, one of the participants and Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs said the experience was very positive.

“I am very pleased to see that Kiribati women are ready for this type of political activity. This mock Parliament demonstrated in a real way the commitment and interest of women both in Tarawa and in the outer islands to enter politics. The questions raised were excellent and drew to our attention some issues that our Government could work more actively on. Our Ministry is very grateful to see such interest because we very much want to support women’s efforts to participate in our Government.”

MP Teburoro Tito, a current Member of the Opposition and a former President of Kiribati, was with the participants throughout the training to provide coaching on parliamentary practice. At the end of the meeting, he had high praise for the participants in his final debrief.

“I am very excited by what I saw. You have made history here. I have been very impressed at how you have worked in Parliament. Because of our culture, nobody has really seen the potential that our women have to engage in politics, but over these last few days, I have seen that you can perform better even than some of our current MPs. I wish you luck, especially those of you who run in our next elections.”

Kiribati will be holding national elections in the next few months. This initiative was designed to provide an opportunity for potential women candidates to develop and apply their public advocacy skills. It was also intended to encourage the broader community to reflect on the importance of electing more women into the Kiribati National Parliament.

The training and mock Parliament for Women was spearheaded by the Kiribati Parliament and the Kiribati Department of Women. It was supported by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme, with some funding support provided by the Commonwealth Local Governance Forum.

SOURCE: UNDP/PACNEWS