



## Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2024)

### High-Level Side Event: Advocating for Women and Girls in the Commonwealth

#### CONCEPT NOTE

Thursday 24 October 2024 | 1245 hrs - 1420 hrs  
Tanoa Hotel, Apia, Samoa

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#### 1. Background

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive and significant human rights violation that has continued to plague societies and has profound and far-reaching impact on women and girls globally, regardless of cultural, social, economic, or geographic background. Approximately 736 million women worldwide, or nearly one in three, have experienced intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at some point in their lives (30% of women aged 15 and older). This does not include sexual harassment. Almost one in four teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (24%) who have been in a relationship report having been the victim of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of intimate partners or husbands.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue of violence against women and girls. Lockdowns, social isolation, and economic stressors led to increased reports of domestic violence in many regions. Restricted access to support services and shelters further complicated the ability to respond to violence against women during the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic in 2021, 45% of women reported they had personally experienced VAWG, as had other women they knew. According to seven out of ten women, it seems more common for partners to abuse verbally or physically. Additionally, 60% of respondents said that they felt sexual harassment in public spaces had worsened.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Rationale

International commitments to attain gender equality and end VAWG are at the heart of Commonwealth priorities for sustainable development and economic growth. The Commonwealth Secretariat has supported efforts to engage high-level action on VAWG by convening the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Action Group in 2021 and 2022, and the Commonwealth Women's Forum in Kigali, Rwanda in 2022, the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting 2023; as well as through the ongoing implementation of the Commonwealth Says No More campaign and the Economic Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls (EconVAWG) project.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*



The Commonwealth Secretariat has facilitated experience-sharing and discourses on VAWG among member countries in order to build effective and collaborative pathways to address VAWG. At the margins of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda, the Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with The NO MORE Foundation launched the “Whole System Approach” strategy to help end VAWG and improve gender equality. The strategy urges more consistent and effective collaboration between governments, civil society and the private sector. In commemoration of the International Day to end Violence against Women (IDEVAW) in 2022, the Secretariat convened High Commissioners, survivors, business leaders and women’s rights campaigners to highlight cross-sectoral good practices, including legal, judicial, health and education measures, that could be used to tackle VAWG.

More recently in November 2023, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC hosted a high-level event at Marlborough House, London, which was aimed for dynamic women leaders to explore the prevalence of domestic violence and its effects on the physical and mental health of women and children and how it impedes sustainable development. The event was attended by Her Majesty The Queen, spouse/partners of Heads of Commonwealth member countries and representatives from government, business, academic and civil society.

The Secretariat recognises that high-level advocacy is crucial to ending VAWG - it plays a significant role in creating lasting change at systemic levels, helping to reshape policies, societal norms, and public attitudes toward gender-based violence. Building on this and the past events, a high-level in-person event is planned at the margins on CHOGM 2024 in Apia, Samoa, to galvanise increased advocacy for action to address VAWG.

### 3. Objectives

Recognising the potential for spouse/partners of Heads of Commonwealth member countries to leverage their standing or offices for advocacy, the event will allow for key stakeholders to;

- Share their practical experiences on advocacy in countering VAWG and in the push to eliminate cervical cancer;
- Discuss what works in advocating to address VAWG and eliminating cervical cancer;
- Amplify and build on existing initiatives such as the Commonwealth says NO MORE and the *Road to 2025: Achieving Elimination of Cervical Cancer in the Commonwealth*.



#### 4. Audience

The target audience are spouse/partners of Heads of Commonwealth member countries as well as Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers, dignitaries, VAWG changemakers and civil society.

#### 5. Format

The event will be held in an in-person format and is scheduled for a duration of 90 minutes. It would consist of an opening segment with remarks from key personalities, followed by a context setting segment to be delivered by an expert in advocacy and then, a segment on experience-sharing from identified stakeholders.

#### 6. Provisional Agenda

TIME	AGENDA ITEM
1245 - 1250 (5 mins)	<b>Welcome Remarks</b> The Hon Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molio’o, Minister of Women, Communities and Social Development, Samoa [tbc]
1250 - 1255 (5 mins)	<b>Video Interlude</b> (Commonwealth Says No More Chapter-the difference it is making on the ground)
1255 - 1300 (5 mins)	<b>Addressing VAWG in Samoa</b> Siliniu Lina Chang, President, Samoa Victim Support Group [tbc]
1300 - 1305 (5 mins)	<b>Special Remarks</b> The Hon Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister, Samoa (tbc)
1305 - 1310 (5 mins)	<b>Special Address</b> <b>VVIP</b>
1310 - 1315 (5 mins)	<b>Advocating for Women and Girls in the Commonwealth</b> The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth
1315 - 1320 (5 mins)	<b>Global Advocacy to Eliminate Cervical Cancer</b> Dr Nabeel Goheer, Chief of Asia, Middle East, Europe Region, PATH
1320 - 1325 (5 mins)	<b>The Launch of the Samoa Cervical Cancer Screening Package</b> Hon Valasi Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele, Minister of Health, Samoa (TBC)
1325 - 1330 (5 mins)	<b>Address</b> Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (tbc)



TIME	AGENDA ITEM
<b>Experience-Sharing</b>	
<b>1330 - 1405</b> (35 mins)	<b>Panel - Spouses/Partners of Heads of Commonwealth member countries advocacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Bahamas (tbc)</li><li>• Sri Lanka (tbc)</li><li>• The Gambia (tbc)</li><li>• Sierra Leone (tbc)</li><li>• Zanzibar (tbc)</li></ul>
<b>1405 - 1415</b> (10 mins)	<b>Fireside Chat: Enhancing Health Advocacy - the Role of Youth Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TBC</li><li>• Commonwealth Youth Representative</li></ul>
<b>1415 - 1420</b> (5 mins)	<b>Closing Remarks</b> Dr Arjoon Suddhoo, Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat
<b>1420</b>	<b>End of Event</b> Video interlude