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"Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."

~ Dalai Lama

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SAMOA'S FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER

According to UNWomen women's representation in national parliament in the Pacific Island countries is the lowest in the world as women hold only 6 per cent of seats. Women are not represented in parliaments in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Federated States of Micronesia.

The election of Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa as Samoa's Prime Minister is a milestone. Her leadership marks the end of Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi's 23 years as Prime Minister and she is the only woman head of government in the Pacific Islands.

64-year-old Fiamē is the daughter of Mata'afa Faumuina Mulinu'u II, who served as Samoa's first Prime Minister from 1959 to 1970, and was re-elected in 1973 and died in office in 1975. After his death Fiamē's mother, La'ulu Fetauimalemau Mata'afa, presented his constituency of Lotofagu. She was only the second woman to be elected to Samoa's parliament. She was appointed Samoa's consul general to New Zealand in 1989 and was Samoa's High Commissioner to New Zealand from 1993 to 1997.

From age 11 Fiame attended Marsden College in Wellington, and then she studied political science at Victoria University. She was 18 when her father died and she was given his chief title and became leader of her *matai* (clan). In 1985 she won her parents' former parliamentary seat of Lotofagu.

Under former Prime Minister Tofilau in 1991 she became Samoa's first female cabinet minister holding various portfolios. In 2016 she was appointed Tuilaepa's deputy prime minister.

She resigned in September 2020 in protest at Tuilaepa's controversial "three bills" which gave the Lands and Titles Court additional powers over the bestowal of lands and titles within families and villages and undermined judicial independence and the rule of law. The bills led to widespread protests and the formation of the Fa'atuatua I le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST Party) which Fiame joined as leader in March 2021.

Samoa's April 2021 election results were a dead heat – 25 seats for HRPP (Human Rights Protection Party) which had governed for nearly 40 years and 25 for the new FAST Party. An independent candidate then sided with FAST giving Fiame and her party a tiny majority. But Tuilaepa refused to accept his loss. Both parties said a coup had taken place and there were dozens of court challenges.

At one stage the election commission noted that only 9.8% of MPs were women, which was below the 10% quota and appointed a female MP from HRPP. The court of appeal revised the election commission's decision to create an extra MP and on 23 July declared Fiame the winner. Then the head of state, who usually presides over the swearing-in ceremony disappeared to a remote village, so the FAST Party held its own ceremony in a tent outside Parliament. Tuilaepa refused to recognise Fiame's appointment and called her swearing-in an act of treason.

When parliament reconvened in September, five months after the election, the new FAST government faced no opposition, because the Speaker refused to allow HRPP members to attend parliament due to their continued refusal to accept the election result. However, the supreme court ruled in favour of HRPP saying that the Speaker was obligated to swear in parliament's elected members. After the opposition MPs were finally sworn in Fiame and the former prime minister embraced.

Sources: 'The 'gals' behind Samoa's first woman PM' by Megha Mohan and Yousef Eldin, BBC 100 Women 8 December 2021; 'Samoa's first female leader has made history – she faces a challenging future at home and abroad' by Patricia O'Brien, The Conversation 28 July 2021; 'Samoa's First Female-Led Government Sits, But Opposition Barred' by Grant Wyeth, The Diplomat, 15 September 2021.

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NO TO AUSTRALIA'S NUCLEAR-POWERED SUBMARINE PLAN

The February 2021 GJOP Pacific Bulletin, Issue 23, looked at the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ) Treaty 35 years after it was first signed in 1985. The Treaty has 13 state parties: Australia, Cook Island, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tong, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. These parties have committed never to develop nuclear weapons, or to test them in their territories, and the treaty has contributed to the elimination of nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Ten of the state parties have also ratified the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which came into force on 22 January 2021. But TPNW is not supported by Australia or the world's nine nuclear-armed states, which include China, the United States and United Kingdom.

But in mid-September this year the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia announced a new defence alliance (AUKUS) under which America and Britain will help Australia deploy nuclear-powered submarines in the Pacific region.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. ICAN has major concerns regarding the Australian Government's proposed acquisition of nuclear submarines through the AUKUS partnership. While Prime Minister Scott Morrison has claimed that Australia is not seeking to establish a nuclear weapons program, ICAN urges the Australian government to give enduring effect to this assurance by signing and ratifying the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

It is unprecedented for a non-nuclear armed nation to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. UK and US submarines use highly-enriched uranium, to 93-97%, which can be directly used in nuclear weapons. The deal would require Australia to be the first to exploit a loophole in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Former Head of Verification at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Tariq Rauf, says: Australia's acquisition of SSNs [nuclear-powered attack submarines] could open a Pandora's Box of proliferation with non-nuclear-weapon States such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia and South Korea also acquiring nuclear-powered submarines and keeping nuclear fuel (both low and highly-enriched uranium) outside the scope of IAEA safeguards.

ICAN believes Australia should focus on reducing tensions and risks of armed conflict, seeking cooperation with all nations to address urgent shared global challenges. Further, Australia should not legitimise or involve itself in the warfighting strategies of nuclear-armed states. The US, Britain and China are investing massively in nuclear weapons modernisation, refusing to abide by their NPT obligations to pursue nuclear disarmament. The UK has recently decided to increase its nuclear weapons cap by 40%, in contravention of the NPT.

AUKUS plans include arming the proposed submarines with Tomahawk cruise missiles, which can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads, and increased stationing and visits of US/UK military forces in Australia. The stationing of any nuclear weapons in Australia is prohibited under the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (Rarotonga) Treaty. Australia must never host another state's nuclear weapons and should end rather than increase its role in assisting possible use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

The General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, James Bhagwan, said AUKUS's plans were a serious concern for a region still dealing with the fallout from nuclear testing. He said that the current chair of Pacific Islands Forum, the prime minister of Fiji (Frank Bainimarama) recently reiterated "that we want a blue Pacific that is nuclear free. It's at the heart of Pacific regionalism...this is something that government, civil society, churches have all been very adamant against, to keep our Pacific nuclear-free. We are still dealing with the fallout from nuclear testing." The Pacific Islands Forum continues to protest about Japan's plans to dump treated nuclear waste water into the ocean from the Fukushima power plant, that was damaged in an earthquake and tsunami ten years ago.

The 18-month "consultation period" should explore measures that reduce the risk of armed conflict and nuclear war; and ensure that Australia's obligations under the NPT and Rarotonga Treaty are reinforced. The most effective way to do this is for the Australian government to sign and ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Sources: Briefing note: Nuclear-powered submarines, October 2021, ICAN Australia; Australian nuclear-powered submarine deal raises concerns in the region, strikes at heart of Pacific regionalism by [Pita Ligaiula](#), 17 September 2021, PINA Pacific News Service.

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SEPIK RIVER COMMUNITIES FILE HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT AGAINST AUSTRALIAN COMPANY PANAUST OVER PROPOSED GOLD-COPPER MINE

Previous issues of GJOP Pacific Bulletin (Issue 19, June 2020 and Issue 24, April 2021) have covered the threats to the river communities of the Frieda River Mine and why it should not go ahead.

Now 2638 people from 64 villages along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea have filed a complaint with the Australian Government against Brisbane-based PanAust Limited, for failing to obtain their consent to the proposed Frieda River Mine. If built, the mine would be the largest ever in Papua New Guinea and among the largest mines in the world.

The complaint, filed with Australian National Contact Point for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), argues that the proposed mine poses a serious risk for communities living on the Sepik River.

The mine, proposed to be built in the headwaters of the Sepik River, includes a tailings dam estimated to be twice the size of Sydney Harbour, to be built in one of the most seismically active regions in the world. A failure of the tailings dam would cause environmental destruction and chemical contamination of the river, food and water sources and sacred sites, and result in loss of human life.

The complaint asserts that PanAust and its subsidiary, Frieda River Limited, failed to get consent from the Sepik River communities for the mine, despite its potential to cause them catastrophic harm. This violates their right as Indigenous peoples to give their Free, Prior and Informed Consent to developments that affect them.

The complaint was lodged on behalf of the affected community members by local organisation Project Sepik, a not-for profit organisation based in Papua New Guinea and an Australian non-for-profit Jubilee Australia Research Centre.

The complaint asks PanAust and its subsidiaries to pause all further mine development as all affected communities do not currently consent to the mine. It asks the company to undertake independently monitored consultation with all potentially affected communities and commit to discontinuing its plans for the mine if all affected communities do not give their Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

Emmanuel Peni, Coordinator of Project Sepik Inc, said: “The communities have been resisting ever since plans were made to build a mine. PanAust must listen to and respect the views of the Sepik River communities.”

The development of the complaint included a consultation with 51 Haus Tambarans (‘spirit houses’) along the River – which are important centres of spiritual, cultural and administrative governance – in April-May 2021.

Project Sepik and Jubilee Australia spearhead the Save the Sepik campaign. It’s recent report ‘The Sukundimi Walks Before Me’ outlines the dangers associated with the Frieda mine.

Sources: Sepik River Communities File Human Rights Complaint Against Australian Company PanAust Over Its Proposed Gold-Copper Mine, Jubilee Australia and Project Sepik; www.savethesepik.com

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