

Balance of Power launch of *Nation Builders: Celebrating Women in the Private Sector*

12 October 2023

Minister of Climate Change, Hon. Ralph Regenvanu

Third Deputy Speaker, Hon. Julia King

Member of Parliament, Hon. Gaeten Pikioune

Director General, Office of the Prime Minister [Ms Cherol Ala]

Director, Department of Women's Affairs [Ms Rothina Ilo Noka]

Deputy Mayor of Port Vila [Councillor Jenny Tasale Regenvanu]

CEO VBTC

New Zealand High Commissioner [Ms Nicci Simmonds]

Balance of Power and Sista teams

Ladies and gentlemen

- Good evening long yumi evriwan
- Firstly, thank you very much for having me here tonight
 - a special thank you to the teams from Department of Women's Affairs, Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sista and Balance of Power for your work on this important project.
- The advancement of gender equality and promotion of women in leadership are central pillars of Australia's foreign policy.
- I wanted to mention up front that last week, I attended the official launch of Vanuatu's commitment to eliminate cervical cancer led by the Ministry of Health

- this is a very important first step in the fight against a disease that is preventable and curable and tragically affects 1,000s of women globally.
- Across all sectors of society there is a lot of work to be done to achieve our shared goals of gender equality and tonight's event embodies that ambition.
- This evening we are launching an important new resource showcasing many remarkable women leaders of Vanuatu - the second volume in the Nation Builders series.
- The first volume honoured 43 admirable female public sector leaders.
 - this second volume documents the stories of 40 women who have contributed greatly to national and community development through their work in the **private sector**.
- The private sector plays a vital role in modern economies.
 - it creates jobs, delivers access to much needed goods and services, contributes to tax revenue and stimulates overall economic growth
 - it is the **engine** of growth for many countries like Vanuatu.
- The importance of women's leadership in the private sector is proven,
 - multiple studies have demonstrated that companies that have women in leadership positions experience improved **performance, productivity** and **profitability**.
- Globally, the number of women in senior management and board positions is increasing, but slowly
 - despite the growing body of evidence demonstrating the value of more women in leadership, few women reach the highest levels of government and business
 - there is still plenty of work to do.

- The women honoured in this volume of *Nation Builders* are living this challenge
 - and through their stories, we recognise the many ways that they have been able to achieve their goals in areas that are dominated by men.
- While we celebrate these inspiring stories, this is only a portion of the many inspiring Ni-Vanuatu women that work in this important sector
 - there are women breaking down barriers every day in different sectors, across tourism, construction, financial services, retail, transport, manufacturing and more.
- Australia stands with the Vanuatu government and all stakeholders working to see more female leaders in Vanuatu
 - this is in line with Vanuatu's National Gender Equality Policy and National Sustainable Development Plan
 - Australia's new international development policy which places gender equality at the heart of our global aid program.
- Australia is investing in leadership across Vanuatu:
 - in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Public Service Commission we supported professional development and capacity building to 15 senior women from Vanuatu in Vanuatu's health sector
 - we currently have 27 women in Australia and Fiji completing their studies on our prestigious Australia Award scholarships
 - and we recently offered our scholarships for 2024 study and more than 50% were women.
- Australia partners with Vanuatu through programs like Governance for Growth, Vanuatu Skills Partnership and Balance of Power which:
 - support policy changes that encourage inclusive economic growth;

- improve training and employment outcomes for women through the national skills system;
- support programs to improve the economic empowerment of women in the communities; and
- promote more inclusive and effective leadership
- *Nation Builders: Celebrating Women in the Private Sector* is a collection of stories that are a testament to the impact of women leaders in business and recognises the tireless effort, determination and growth of these remarkable leaders
 - these women are role models for their colleagues and for young women, as is often said *‘You cannot be what you cannot see’*
 - they are paving the way for other women to take up leadership positions, both within the private sector and beyond.
- Congratulations again to everyone involved in the development of tonight’s photo exhibition and this book
 - while it is a snapshot of the present, I have no doubt that it will influence the future, not just for the private sector but for the country as a whole.
- Gud naet mo tankyu tumas.