



gracious acceptance of the invitation to give the opening address this morning.

Your Royal Highness made history in Tonga when you chose to run for Parliament as a People's Representative, and thus, became the first woman representative in Tonga's Legislative history. We are greatly looking forward to your sharing with us, your wisdom and experience.

Your Royal Highness, nearly twenty years ago, Claire Short, the UK MP wrote this:

When women of today compare their lives with those of their mothers and grandmothers, it is clear that massive social change is taking place. It is driven by women's desire to enjoy all aspects of their humanity. Women want to love their families and to have time for their children, parents, lovers, friends. Women also wish to use their brain and creativity, to be treated as equals at work and in public life. These reasonable aspirations are transforming the world. The old settlement was based on the assumption that women would service men and family, and that men would run the world of work and public life. The new world will see men and women sharing responsibility as equals in the family, the world of work and public life. This will transform the politics as the people who do most of the caring for others are allowed an equal voice. It is likely to make the world a better place.

These aspirations, Your Royal Highness, still resonate with women in the Pacific today and are echoed in the purposes of the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Project, which recognizes that along with economic empowerment and freedom from violence, women's access to leadership positions is vital if women are to participate as equals in the democratic development of their countries.

The project is tackling the continuing under representation of women in parliament and is aimed at improving understanding of the factors that constrain women's political participation, and to build the capacity of women MPs in the Pacific, the institutions in which they work, and the staff who support them. It also recognizes that change is also required in the work place culture and infrastructure of Pacific parliaments.

Your Royal Highness, this morning in this very room, we are witnessing a historic occasion for Tonga and the Pacific, a physical manifestation of the success and progress that women have made in politics and in leadership roles across the Pacific. Present in this room are women's vice-presidents, governors, Speakers of Parliament, Ambassadors, ministers, members of parliament, aspiring young politicians, and leaders in various areas of public life.

They represent the massive forward strides that have been by women across the Pacific.

Present, in this room, are powerful and influential women leaders from the Pacific who have made history in their countries, and who have made history in their own countries, and who have improved the lives of other women and their own communities. They have demonstrated exemplary leadership, creativity, passion, commitment, drive and determination and we can feel their energy, vitality, and get-up-and-go attitude, and we, the women of Tonga, want to be part of that success story, and, this morning we warmly welcome you, embrace you, and take you

into our hearts; we salute you, and we honour you, our sisters from across the seas.

We pray that your deliberations today will bear much fruit to nourish us for the next stage of our political journey.

Tu'a 'ofa atu