



**Vanuatu Coalition for Gender Equality**  
**Joint Stakeholder written submission to the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the Universal**  
**Periodic Review**

**Due date: 11 October 2023**

**Description of the Organisations' main activities**

This submission to the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) brings to the United Nation Human Rights Council (HRC), the voices of eight (8) women-led Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and associations registered under the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organization (VANGO). These CSOs and associations have come together to form the **Vanuatu Coalition for Gender Equality (VCGE)**, and include the following:

<p><b>Women Against Crime and Corruption (WACC)</b>          Vanuatu Women against Crime and Corruption” (WACC) was established in 2008. It is an independent, voluntary, advocacy organization, working to raise awareness, prevent crime, promote the interests of victims and assist communities to work together to create peaceful, safe and harmonious places to work and live. WACC engages in advocacy and networking at the national, regional and international levels, and humanitarian and relief work in Vanuatu. WACC is the lead contributor for this submission and coordinated its drafting.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b>          House Number 7,          Saralana,          Port Vila, Vanuatu  <a href="mailto:jviregagaru@gmail.com">jviregagaru@gmail.com</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b>          WACC Vanuatu</p>
<p><b>Tongoa Shepherd Women’s Association (TSWA)</b>          TSWA is registered under Vanuatu Financial Services, VANGO, and the Koalisen Blo Liftimap Edukesen (KOBLE). It was established in 2014 to advocate for Human Rights, Climate Change, Quality Education and Women economic empowerment, psychosocial support and mental health. The association also currently works together with the Australian National University to document the various aspects of history of the Shepherd Islands. The association works with women in the Shepherd group in Vanuatu.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b>          Manples Area, Port          Vila, Vanuatu</p> <p><a href="mailto:alicekalan@gmail.com">alicekalan@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Mitingar Women and Girls Association (MWGA)</b>          The Mitingar Women and Girls Association was established in 2015. It is a registered not-for-profit community organisation collaborating with local, regional and international partners. Their goal is to support the determined efforts of the women and girls of Vanuatu in building a stronger, safer, healthier and more prosperous future for themselves and their communities.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b>          Lenakel, Tanna,          Vanuatu</p> <p><b>Mailing Address:</b>          Mitingar Women and          Girls Association          P.O.Box 3364          Lenakel, Tanna          Vanuatu  <a href="mailto:marykaviamu@yahoo.c">marykaviamu@yahoo.c</a></p>

	<p><a href="http://om.au">om.au</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:marymitigar@gmail.com">marymitigar@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Silae Vanua Market Vendors Association (SVMVA)</b></p> <p>Silae Vanua (SV) Market Vendors Association was established in 2014. It is a local market vendors association which emerged as part of a UN Women Market for Change project. SVMVA aims to achieve for its financial members, the following: gender and social inclusion considerations, coordination of and provision of capacity building, advocacy for social and welfare benefits, as well as organisation and coordination of their interests.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b> Port Vila Central Market, Port Vila, Vanuatu</p> <p><b>Mailing Address:</b> P.O.Box 6032 Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:leijohn917@gmail.com">leijohn917@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Kivhans Vanuatu Women and Girls Human Rights Association (KVWGHRA)</b></p> <p>KVWGHRA was established in 2018. It works to amplify the voices of and empower indigenous women and girls through capacity building to allow them to full participate within their communities. Furthermore, the association advocates for the removal of barriers against indigenous women to actively participate in social, political, economic and cultural life.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b> Godden St, Freshwater, Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:millyengodden@gmail.com">millyengodden@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Port Vila City Council of Women (PVCCW)</b></p> <p>The Port Vila Town Council of Women was established in 1979. Its mission is to promote, preserve and protect a resilient livelihood through, lobbying, advocating, networking and educating people in the Port Vila City Communities. The objectives of PVCCW are to coordinate the women of Port Vila Town to: contribute towards the development of Vanuatu; promotion of unity through knowledge sharing, skills and resources; build networks locally, nationally, regionally and internationally; ensure women are included in decision-making at the municipal and national levels; awareness-raising on policies and laws.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b> VNCW House Saralana, Port Vila, Vanuatu</p> <p><b>Mailing Address:</b> C/o – Vanuatu National Council of Women P.O.Box 975 Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:iatikajane53@gmail.com">iatikajane53@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Vanuatu Young Women for Change (VYWC)</b></p> <p>The VYWC was established in 2014. It is a young women’s group which aims to address sexual and reproductive health and rights for young women. It was established in 2013, and is registered under the Vanuatu Financial Service Commission, the NGO Desk of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and is a member of the Vanuatu Association of Non-governmental Organisation (VANGO), which is the umbrella organisation of NGOs in Vanuatu. One of their key activities is to develop the capacity of young women to lead trainings, awareness-raising, capacity building for communities, and advocacy on SRHR for young women.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b> CWR Building, State Area, Port Vila, Vanuatu</p> <p><b>Mailing Address:</b> P.O. Box 1709, Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:vywcsecretariat@gmail.com">vywcsecretariat@gmail.com</a></p> <p><b>Facebook:</b> Vanuatu Young Women for Change</p>

<p><b>Vanuatu Widows Association (VWA)</b>  VWA was formed in 2012 following the declaration of the UN Secretary General for the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June to be marked annually as the International Widows Day around the world. The Association aims to raise awareness about widows’ rights and wellbeing. It generates public awareness, mobilise resources, and advocate for policy changes and programs that improve the lives of widows in Vanuatu.</p>	<p><b>Physical Address:</b>  C/o - House Number 7,  Saralana,  Port Vila, Vanuatu</p>
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## A. Introduction

- Worldwide rates of women representation in the national level political spaces are low with 26.1%. In the Pacific Islands region, whilst the numbers have doubled in the last ten years from twenty-six in 2013 to fifty-two in 2023<sup>i</sup>, the proportion in relation to the number of men, is still depressingly low. The picture is even more bleak in Vanuatu, with only one woman currently in the national parliament versus fifty-one men.
- In 2016, 261 candidates contested Vanuatu’s national general elections. Ten of these were women (3.8% of the total number of candidates). In 2020, seventeen women (6%) contested in the Vanuatu national general elections, out of 295 candidates. In both elections, no women were voted into parliament.<sup>ii</sup> In 2022, in a snap election, seven women candidates contested. The Hon Gloria Julia King was elected in after a gap of 13 years. Vanuatu achieved its independence in 1980. To date, only six women have been elected to national parliament from 1980 to 2023.
- The VCGE notes that the Vanuatu Government accepted 92 UPR recommendations as part of the UPR 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle. Gender equality, in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) formed 23% of the recommendations.<sup>iii</sup> There were also specific recommendations provided to the Vanuatu Government in relation to the participation of women in political and public life, which this written submission seeks to address. This written submission from the VCGE seeks to highlight the issue of the under-representation of women in decision-making, particularly at the national, provincial, and municipal political levels.

4. The purpose of this written submission is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to provide an assessment in relation to the recommendations provided to and supported by the Vanuatu Government from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle of the UPR, specifically in relation to participation of women in political and public life. The assessment is based on data and evidence sourced from various reports, as well as anecdotal evidence based on the experiences of VCGE members working in the sector. Secondly, it seeks to provide recommendations, as part of this theme, to be provided to the Vanuatu Government as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the UPR.
5. The following themes/issues will be discussed in this written submission:
  - i. Addressing the under-representation of women in political and public spaces through development and implementation of national frameworks.
  - ii. Addressing the under-representation of women in political and public spaces through affirmative actions.
  - iii. Negative Social Norms as barriers to women contesting and being elected to the national Parliament, Provincial and Municipal level governments.

## B. Developments since the UPR 3rd Cycle Review

### i. Context

6. The Vanuatu Coalition for Gender Equality (VCGE) acknowledges the Government of Vanuatu for committing to/ratifying the various international and regional instruments/frameworks which promotes the political representation of women, including: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA); the Pacific Platform for Action (PPA); the Revised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED); and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy).
7. Section 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu also recognises, that, “subject to any restrictions imposed by law on non-citizens, all persons are entitled to the following fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual without discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, religious or traditional beliefs, political opinions, language or **sex** but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to the legitimate public interest in defence, safety, public order, welfare and health....”<sup>iv</sup>
8. *Vanuatu 2030: The People’s Plan* is the country’s National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 – 2030 (NSDP) and outlines the national roadmap for development. Vanuatu 2030 charts the country's vision and overarching policy framework for achieving a stable, sustainable and prosperous Vanuatu within the next fifteen years, and in doing so sets out the national priorities and context for the implementation of the new global Sustainable Development Goals over the same period. The Society Pillar of the NSDP outlines its objectives in terms of social inclusion. Policy Objective SOC4.2: Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women, children and vulnerable groups.

9. Recommendation 19.a from the CEDAW Committee’s concluding observation (CEDAW/C/VUT/CO/4-5) also called for the Vanuatu Government to develop “a comprehensive strategy to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that discriminate against women...focusing particular attention on the recognition of the importance of women’s contributions to society, their empowerment and their participation in decision-making processes....”
10. The VCGE acknowledges that the Vanuatu Government as part of the UPR 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle “supported” six recommendations relating to the participation of women in political and public life. The following is an assessment of the implementation relating to these recommendations, since the previous review, as well as further recommendations put forward by the VCGE for the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle.

ii. **Addressing the under-representation of women in political and public spaces through development and implementation of national frameworks**

11. The VCGE notes that Albania raised the issue of the promotion of access by women to leadership positions and participation in politics within the framework of the National Gender Equality Policy, in recommendation 90.60, at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle. At the same session, New Zealand in recommendation 90.72 also encouraged Vanuatu to continue to increase its efforts to encourage the representation of women in Parliament and in other aspects of public life.
12. Since its last report towards the UPR 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle, the VCGE is pleased to note that the Vanuatu Government has endeavoured to update its Gender Equality Policy 2020 – 2030. Strategic Area 3 of the policy seeks to promote the political representation of women at all levels. The VCGE acknowledges and commends the Vanuatu Government’s achievement in developing this national policy which outlines the country’s priority and provides a roadmap for its journey towards achieving the political representation of its women. Specifically, Strategic Area 3 of the policy outlines the following objectives:
  - a. Objective 3.1: To promote gender responsive governance.
  - b. Objective 3.2: To enhance women’s full and equal participation in leadership and decision making.
  - c. Objective 3.3: To strengthen coalitions and collective action towards women’s leadership and political representation.
13. The VCGE notes that the Gender Equality Policy 2020 – 2030 was launched in 2021. Since then, there have been some progress, but implementation has been slow to pick up. The VCGE recognises that there is a need for more socialisation of the policy to ensure that all women in Vanuatu understand how the policy impacts them, their rights and opportunities. Additional to this, members of the VCGE identified that within the national women’s machinery Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA), there are constraints in human, financial and technical capacity. It is, therefore, essential that there be more collaboration, coordination effective resource-sharing with members of women’s CSOs to ensure the effective implementation of the policy, particularly with regards to Strategic Area 3.
- 14. It is recommended that the Vanuatu Government:**
  - i. Adequately resource (both human and financial) the national women’s machinery (Department of Women’s Affairs) and the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) to ensure that it can fully implement Strategic Area 3 of the Vanuatu Gender Equality Policy 2020 – 2030.
  - ii. Through the DWA, strengthen the coordination with VNCW and the Vanuatu Association of Non-governmental Organisations (VANGO) to socialise the National

Gender Equality Policy.

- iii. Integrate the National Gender Equality Policy 2020 - 2030 into the Political Party Registration Bill, as well as all other relevant policies regarding gender discrimination.

15. The VCGE also notes that the Political Party Registration Bill (the Bill) is currently being developed by the Electoral Office, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. There are provisions included in the Bill for women to be part of the Executive of each of the political parties upon their registration. The Bill was scheduled to be tabled during the first ordinary meeting of the Parliament in May 2023; however, it was withdrawn.

**16. It is recommended that the Vanuatu Government:**

- i. Urgently proceed with tabling the Political Parties Registration Bill in Parliament and enact it.

17. The VCGE also acknowledges the efforts of the Vanuatu Government to develop the Bill for the Electoral Act of 2023 (Electoral Bill). In May 2023, the Electoral Bill was tabled in Parliament during its first ordinary sitting. The VCGE noted that there were provisions included relating to 30% quota reserve seats for women at national and provincial level governments. The Electoral Bill was withdrawn for further consultations. VCGE notes that in later drafts of the Electoral Bill, the above provision was removed.

**18. It is recommended that the Vanuatu Government:**

- ii. Urgently conduct further consultations, including a gender legal analysis on the draft Electoral Bill, with the support of the government's national institutions for women such as the DWA, the VNCW along with the VANGO, so as to address any direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of gender.
- iii. Re-insert into the Electoral Bill, the provision relating to the 30% quota reserve seats for women at both the national and provincial levels.
- iv. Undertake a gender legal analysis of all relevant legislation to incorporate, fully, the principles of gender equality and prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of gender, in both the public and private spheres.
- v. Mandate political parties to review their party policies to ensure these do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, and that these provide for women to be included in the Executive arm of the parties.

**iii. Addressing the under-representation of women in political and public spaces through affirmative actions**

19. The VCGE notes that Angola and Canada in recommendation 90.67 and recommendation 90.70, respectively, further raised the issue of women in political and public spaces and recommended that the Vanuatu Government implement affirmative actions through quotas and targets to ensure representation of women in the political sphere, and especially in Parliament. This was recommended during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group.

20. The Municipalities Amendment Act No.11 of 2013 established reserve seats for women to contest local municipal elections. This was a temporary special measure allowing for reserve seats for three terms (12 years). This amendment allowed for a 30 per cent (30%) quota for women's representation within the municipal councils of Vanuatu.

21. This amendment was implemented in the two municipal governments of Port Vila and Luganville, in 2013 and 2014 respectively. In these two municipalities, this has resulted in an increase in the number of women being elected. The municipal level elections for the 2018 - 2021 term saw the election of 11 municipal female councillors (accounting for 25.6% of all municipal councillors) and seven provincial female councillors (7.1% of all provincial councillors).<sup>v</sup> However, the temporary special measure provision included in the Municipalities Amendment Act No.11 of 2013 has since lapsed.

22. Whilst numbers have risen, anecdotal evidence gathered from former women councillors show that within the councils, women councillors who are elected through the reserve seats are exposed to discriminatory behaviours and disrespect by their councillor colleagues (most often their male colleagues). Women councillors get told that they do not deserve to be representatives of the people because of the way they entered (through “reserve” seats).

23. At the national level, the discussion on allocating reserve seats/quotas for women, is also slow to gain traction. In Vanuatu, and similarly in other Pacific Islands Countries (PICs), where resources provided to the gender sector is limited, there is a strong need for greater collaboration, discussions, coordination, and resource-sharing between the key women’s organisations (the national women’s machinery and women’s civil society organisations). Based on the VCGE’s assessment, this has been limited, in the context of Vanuatu, thus slowing down discussions and advocacy surrounding the issue. Within the municipalities, it is evident that there also needs to be greater discussions by the women councillors in order to push to address women’s issues.

**24. It is recommended that the Vanuatu Government:**

- a. Urgently table a Bill to amend the Municipalities Act to legislate the extension of the temporary special measures (reserve seats).
- b. Through its DWA, collaborate with development partners and CSOs to conduct programs, including awareness-raising campaigns, on the benefits of temporary special measures in order to increase people’s acceptance of reserve seats for women.
- c. Legislate reserve seats for women at the provincial and national levels.

**iv. Social norms as barriers to women contesting and being elected into the national Parliament, Provincial and Municipal level governments.**

25. The VCGE notes that Spain recommended at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle of the UPR, during the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group, that the Vanuatu Government “establish effective measures to ensure that women can be represented in the national Parliament, as well as reverse the social discrimination affecting women and protect them in cases of gender-based violence (90.73).

26. Vanuatu’s electoral system is the *first-past-the-post* or simple majority system. This system is disadvantageous to women who seek to contest, because in the Vanuatu traditional structure, accepted social norms and practices influence how people perceive and give legitimacy to the roles of men and women in the political sphere, often to do with the strong associations between men, masculinity and political leadership. Women candidates

contesting for the national elections encounter many barriers to which limit them from being elected to Parliament, and these are complex. These include the reluctance, and in some cases direct opposition, of both men and women to acknowledge women's place in the decision-making processes of the country. These attitudes are deeply rooted in societal beliefs, attitudes and norms influenced by *kastom* and religion. One woman who has contested numerous elections, both at the provincial and national levels, cited that in some communities, chiefs and traditional leaders have maintained that politics was the domain of men, and against *kastom*, challenging her decision to contest. Because of this they refused to support her, and other times restricted her from entering the village to campaign.<sup>vi</sup>

27. Vanuatu is also largely a patriarchal society, where men make the decisions especially with matters outside the domain of the home. When women intend to contest an election, they are expected to seek the approval of community and traditional leaders, who in Vanuatu are mostly men.
28. Recommendation 19.a from the CEDAW Committee's concluding observations (CEDAW/C/VUT/CO/4-5) also called for the Vanuatu Government to develop "a comprehensive strategy to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes that discriminate against women, in conformity with the provisions of the Convention. The strategy should include education and awareness-raising campaigns targeting women and men at all levels of society, including council chiefs and community leaders, and focus particular attention on the recognition of the importance of women's contributions to society, their empowerment and their participation in decision-making processes, including at the community level. The strategy should engage civil society organizations and the mass media to combat discriminatory stereotypes and negative social attitudes towards women and promote positive and non-stereotypical portrayals of women".

**29. It is recommended that the Vanuatu Government:**

- a. Invest more resources into the national women's CSO umbrella organisation (VNCW) and the national women's machinery (DWA) so that they can take lead in working closely with the civil society umbrella organisation, VANGO, to conduct programs which seek to address negative social norms which act as barriers to women's political participation and in public spaces.
- b. Collaborate with CSOs to conduct a study on public attitudes and perceptions towards women's leadership and political participation, in order to inform it of the barriers to women's representation in the political sphere and provide recommendations for addressing these.
- c. Support the education of voters in local communities through more dialogue at community levels about the benefits of women's political participation, and gender equality in parliament/political space.
- d. Implement the recommendation 19.a from the CEDAW Committee's concluding observations (CEDAW/C/VUT/CO/4-5).
- e. Review and enforce all the relevant laws to do with gender at all levels of society, ensuring inclusiveness of all marginalised groups in order to eliminate discrimination and social norms which encourage patriarchy.

## C. Annex 1: List of Organisations and their Contact Persons

#	Organisation	Contact Person/Position	Physical Address/ Email Address
1	Women Against Crime and Corruption	Jenny Ligo Founder/Chairperson	<b>Physical Address:</b> House Number 7, Saralana, Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:jviregagaru@gmail.com">jviregagaru@gmail.com</a>
2	Tongoa Shepherd Women's Association (TSWA)	Alice Kaloran Founder / President	<b>Physical Address:</b> Manples Area, Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:alicekaloran@gmail.com">alicekaloran@gmail.com</a>
3	Mitingar Women and Girls Association (MWGA)	Mary Jack Founder / President	<b>Physical Address:</b> Lenakel, Tanna, Vanuatu  <b>Mailing Address:</b> Mitingar Women and Girls Association P.O.Box 3364 Lenakel, Tanna Vanuatu <a href="mailto:marykaviamu@yahoo.com.au">marykaviamu@yahoo.com.au</a> <a href="mailto:marymitigar@gmail.com">marymitigar@gmail.com</a>
4	Silae Vanua Market Vendors Association (SVMVA)	Leiwia John Vice President	<b>Physical Address:</b> Port Vila Central Market, Port Vila, Vanuatu  <b>Mailing Address:</b> P.O.Box 6032 Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:lejoh917@gmail.com">lejoh917@gmail.com</a>
5	Kivhans Vanuatu Women and Girls Human Rights Association (KVWGHRA)	Mary Anne Bani Chairperson	<b>Physical Address:</b> Godden St, Freshwater, Port Vila, Vanuatu  <a href="mailto:millyengodden@gmail.com">millyengodden@gmail.com</a>
6	Port Vila City Council of Women (PVCCW)	Jane Iatika President	<b>Physical Address:</b> VNCW House Saralana, Port Vila, Vanuatu  <b>Mailing Address:</b> C/o – Vanuatu National Council of Women P.O.Box 975

			Port Vila, Vanuatu <a href="mailto:iatikajane53@gmail.com">iatikajane53@gmail.com</a>
7	Vanuatu Young Women for Change (VYWC)	Anne Pakoa President	<b>Physical Address:</b> CWR Building, State Area, Port Vila, Vanuatu  <b>Mailing Address:</b> P.O. Box 1709, Port Vila, Vanuatu  <a href="mailto:vywcasecretariat@gmail.com">vywcasecretariat@gmail.com</a>  <b>Facebook:</b> Vanuatu Young Women for Change
8	Vanuatu Widows Association (VWA)	Mare Kalkoa President	<b>Physical Address:</b> C/o - House Number 7, Saralana, Port Vila, Vanuatu  Email to Jenny Ligo at <a href="mailto:jviregagaru@gmail.com">jviregagaru@gmail.com</a>

<sup>i</sup> Pacific Women in Politics, [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023] from <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, [Accessed 13 September 2023] from <https://www.pacwip.org/country-profiles/vanuatu/>

<sup>iii</sup> Vanuatu Universal Periodic Review infographic, [Accessed 26 Sept 2023] from [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session32/VU/Infographic\\_Vanuatu.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session32/VU/Infographic_Vanuatu.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu, [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023] from <https://www.gov.vu/images/legislation/constitution-en.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> UN Women, Gender Equality Brief for Vanuatu, retrieved 26 Sept 2023, from [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/UN\\_WOMEN\\_VANUATU.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/UN_WOMEN_VANUATU.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Mary Jack Kaviamu, [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023] from <https://devpolicy.org/author/mary-jack-kaviamu/>