

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONSULTATION FOR THE REPORT
BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON

***How to create and maintain
civil society space? What works?***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wider and new space for civil society can be created through the formation and development of new organisations specifically designed for the purpose of closing gaps in the delivery of universal human rights at all levels.

New organisations which have greater capacity to respond quickly to emerging issues and unexpected opportunities can be very effective change-makers. Tightly focused, universally acceptable objectives, regular strategic planning, low budget, programmes and projects with appeal to women of all ages and ethnicities, especially younger women, are essential to maintaining their strength as agents of change.

INTRODUCTION

This contribution to the Consultation on *How to create and maintain civil society space? What works?* focuses on the creation and development of two non-governmental organisations for women. They are the Bridgebuilders Network for Presbyterian and associated churchwomen established in 1996 and Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) established in 2000. Both were created to serve a specific purpose trialling a new model for successful outcomes in advancing the human rights and fundamental freedoms for women and girls.

They have each been very successful in fulfilling their overarching objective becoming highly respected for their work in development and empowerment for women and girls through the United Nations programme, action to implement the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, and advocacy to overcome discrimination in many areas critical to their future well-being.

Features common to both are:

- ❖ Very clear objectives aligned to both ongoing and emerging issues aimed at empowering women and girls
- ❖ Aims which have universality and which have endured since the inception of the organisations have given a stability of purpose
- ❖ A simple structure based on a low budget, low fees and projects designed to attract outside funding grants
- ❖ Strategies for engagement with younger women and girls
- ❖ Programmes and activities which appeal to a broad cross-section of women by age, economic status and ethnicity
- ❖ Strategic planning which includes succession planning for leadership roles

PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS OF A NEW MODEL

To give the flexibility to take up new issues and challenges demanded by current development agendas requires organisations to be able to act quickly and efficiently as opportunities arise. Some older organisations have lost their ability to take prompt action because of cumbersome rules, failure to renew their leaders, lack of energy due to members' age and/or uninteresting programmes, and high cost of membership. The two recently established organisations described in this contribution to the dialogue have trialled a new model based on simple structure, mentoring of women for leadership roles, a low membership fee, a focus on young women and girls, and project funding from outside sources. Projects usually require a short time of effort. A number of short term projects have greater appeal to busy women who can commit a small amount of time where they perceive they can make a difference.

This streamlined and cost-effective structure has proven very effective for the Bridgebuilders Network and Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) (PWW(NZ)). In a short period of time they have become well known and highly regarded for their work. Young women are keen to serve on their committees. They have opened up new space for women to be heard as they both aim to be the voice for those without a voice.

BRIDGEBUILDERS NETWORK: *A New Space For Christian Women*

The Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in September 1995 was the catalyst for the formation of new organisations to take forward the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action. The large gathering of women from so many countries enabled groups with similar objectives to have the time to network together, building close relationships and planning future action. They returned home to further discussion, making the decision to join with others aiming to make a difference for women and girls.

As National President of the Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa New Zealand I and a second representative attended the Beijing Conference as observers. There we were impressed by the energy of women searching for new ways to achieve gender justice for women and girls. As soon as we returned home I determined to uplift the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action in founding a network which would provide a new channel of communication in the Pacific sub-region and in particular to raise the voices of Pacific Island women at the international level. The Bridgebuilders Pacific Basin Consultation was called in Auckland, New Zealand, in late February 1996 as an action outcome to the Beijing Platform very soon after its adoption. In particular Paragraph 288 calling for an increase in "linkages between networks and organisations" and "a consistent flow of information between all concerned" was implemented. Women leaders from 16 countries attended. As the Association had not previously invited women from other countries to meet with them the Consultation was a significant landmark in its history. The unanimous decision was taken to establish the Bridgebuilders Network. The Network provided a new space

from which Christian women in Asia and the Pacific can be heard at the regional and international levels.

Connections have been fostered with women from counterpart organisations in our near neighbour countries through six subsequent very successful triennial Consultations in Fiji, South Africa, Vanuatu, Taiwan, Samoa and New Zealand. As Presbyterian Women had no international body the new space created by the Bridgebuilders Network has provided through the Consultations and by regular newsletters dialogue on common issues of concern with the opportunity to raise these in solidarity in the global context. Best practices from our collective organisations were shared on such matters as renewed nuclear testing in the Pacific, other pressing environmental issues such as climate change, gender discrimination for women and girls, and peace and justice. Promoting international understanding is a pillar of Bridgebuilders activities.

Enduring objectives for Bridgebuilders are to ensure human rights are universal; environmental development will be people-centred, sustainable and ecologically sound; and justice and peace will be achieved for all people. The New Zealand member, Bridgebuilders Trust, has a multicultural membership, includes women from many organisations and promotes activities for young women through:

- Projects to achieve peace and conflict resolution
- Presentations on Restorative Justice
- Support for victims of abuse
- Publishing of educational resources for women and parents
- Support for refugee and migrant families.

For more information see the web site: bridgebuilderstrust.org.nz

PACIFIC WOMEN'S WATCH (NEW ZEALAND) (PWW(NZ)):

Creating Space to Fulfil the ECOSOC Mandate "to make the voices of women in Pacific Island countries heard more loudly at the international level"

PWW(NZ) based in Auckland, New Zealand, sharing an office with the Bridgebuilders Trust, links to the wider Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW), a regional network of women's groups which has five sub-regions (Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific).

PWW(NZ) has the Mission to attain Gender Equality, Development and Peace within universally accepted aims which have endured since the organisation was established in 2000. They are to:

- Monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN General Assembly outcomes document and other programmes of action in New Zealand
- Enhance women's leadership and promote gender equality in all decision-making processes

- **Monitor, review and report on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls**
- **Pursue and uphold gender justice**
- **Share information on good practice and lessons learned in advancing the status of women through effective communication.**

The effectiveness of our mission to attain Gender Equality, Development and Peace was recognised in July 2010 when PWW(NZ) was granted special consultative status as a national body with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). During the application process PW(NZ) was a test case as an organisation with a low level of funds which nonetheless had shown considerable capability in furthering the work of ECOSOC. We were given the mandate to work to make the voices of women in Pacific Island countries heard more loudly at the international level as they currently had no organisations holding consultative status.

PWW(NZ) works closely with the Bridgebuilders Trust. The organisation has created a new space for:

- **the research and collection of new data on women and girls to give a longitudinal measure of how they are faring in their daily lives**
- **the review, monitoring and reporting on the status of women living in New Zealand for post Beijing Reviews in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015**
- **the research and presentation of highly regarded targeted NGO Alternative CEDAW Reports to the UN CEDAW Committee 2007 and 2012, and the Interim Report 2014**
- **the research and presentation of a submission for New Zealand's 2nd Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council 2014**
- **Monitoring progress on implementing the Millennium Development Goals**
- **Consideration of the Action Plan for Human Rights in New Zealand.**

PWW(NZ) is a member of the Ministry of Women's Affairs International Caucus, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission's Diversity Action Programme and the CEDAW Coalition of NGOs. A Conference is held each year, workshops nationwide collect data for review of the Beijing Platform for Action, consultations to prevent people trafficking are attended, and a great deal of mentoring and support has been given on the issue of forced and underage marriage.

A group of at least 15 members attends the Commission on the Status of Women in New York each year. They have presented noteworthy NGO parallel events.

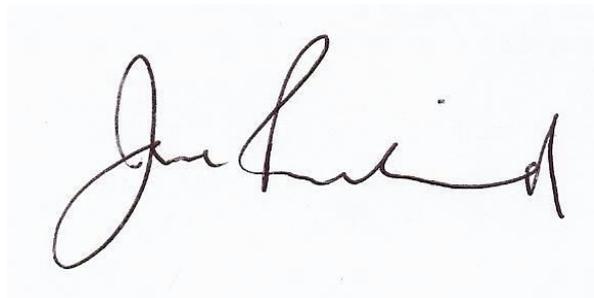
For more information see the web site: pacificwomenswatch.org.nz

CONCLUSION

The Bridgebuilders Network and Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) have created in just a few years since their establishment wide respect for their smooth functioning and flexibility of action in driving forward equality for New Zealand women. Their efforts to raise the voices of women in the Pacific Islands have been applauded. The holding of Bridgebuilders Consultations in Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa have given women in those nations their first experience of organising an international event - a hugely empowering undertaking. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has provided funds for small projects in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Links with women in both Asia and the Pacific sub-regions enabled me while on the Board of the International Council of Women (ICW) to establish and register in 2008 the ICW Asia-Pacific Regional Council. The formation of that Regional Council had been pending for some time. Seven years on, with very successful annual workshop meetings behind it, the Asia-Pacific Regional Council is leading a robust programme for gender equality and the sustainable development goals. In November 2011 the first event ever held by the ICW in a Pacific Island location was a Seminar in Nadi, Fiji - a landmark event which I led with the National Council of Women of Fiji.

It is anticipated that all of the new organisations described here will be well maintained while enjoying sustained future growth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Prichard', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Jane Prichard QSO

30 September 2015