

Statement by Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) Inc. for the sixty first session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand), in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2010, works for gender justice and equality for women and girls across all ethnicities and ages. Since its establishment in 2000 Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has been closely involved in and led actions to promote gender justice and the empowerment of women. The primary objective for the organisation is to monitor, review and report on progress in advancing the well-being of women and girls both in New Zealand and in the Pacific sub-region. Attaining their full human rights is our priority. We believe overcoming disparities in the workplace and the elimination of all aspects of violence and discrimination against women and girls are critical to the attainment of full human rights.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand)'s mission and goals have aligned well with all eight of the Millennium Development Goals. In particular Goal Eight: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; provides the imperative for ongoing activity to promote the full empowerment of women and girls.

The changing world of work has opened up new perspectives for the empowerment of women and girls in almost every nation. While these changes offer exciting possibilities now and in the future full access to new technologies, increased on-the-job training and a wider range of academic qualifications can only be possible when women and girls are encouraged and are financially able to grasp the challenges that accompany the changes. Regrettably financial concerns still limit New Zealand women and girls in their fullest access to new opportunities in the workplace.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) in reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action for the New Zealand Country Report at the twenty-year mark, took into account the changing workplace environment as a driver for women's economic empowerment. We found that access to the changes was cross-cutting to all of the eight Millennium Development Goals. We believe that not only in New Zealand, but in every nation, responses to the Millennium Development Goals have set the scene for the effective implementation of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. The intersectionality of extreme poverty and hunger, universal education, the promotion of gender equality, improvement of maternal health and lifelong health have all had impacts for New Zealand women and girls as we strove for full uptake of the Millennium Development Goals. Reporting for Beijing + 20 suggests that a similar intersectionality was exhibited worldwide.

The increasingly diverse population profile now found in New Zealand has added to the challenges in achieving full economic empowerment for women. Engaging with women and girls in some two hundred different ethnic communities now calling New Zealand home means special strategies are required if successful workplace empowerment is to be assured for all. Such diversity is increasingly common in other parts of the world as migrants and refugees seek safer havens. Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and fostering the innovation called for in Sustainable Development Goal 9 will be key to success. Flexibility and the willingness to trial new workplace architecture will be critical. We strongly urge the Commission to target Sustainable Development Goal 9 in the sixty first session outcome statement as a critical action for all governments.

It will also be critical that governments and non-government enterprises recognise the special needs of some particular groups of women and girls. All women deserve respect and opportunities to participate fully in society. In all of its reporting for Beijing reviews, the Universal Periodic Review and for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has reached out to women at the edges of society who struggle to have their issues recognised. We have developed a close relationship with disabled women of all ethnicities. We have also provided opportunities for lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer individuals to be heard as they are often marginalized and feel disempowered by society. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) recognises their vulnerability and is committed to supporting the concerns of all who live at the margins of society. Discrimination is disabling.

In access to decent work and pay indigenous women have often been overlooked. It is therefore very pleasing to note the Emerging issue/Focus area: The empowerment of indigenous women. Particularly concerning is discrimination against our indigenous Maori women who, among other issues, continue to face multiple workplace challenges. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has been gratified to establish a close relationship with the Maori Women's Welfare League. We will go forward together in our resolve to eliminate such discrimination as we take up the Sustainable Development Goals.

In overcoming workplace challenges in New Zealand much still needs to be done regarding the insecurity of casual work, lack of clarity in employment contracts for security of tenure and firm adherence to equal opportunity policies. Alongside almost every other country New Zealand has not succeeded in closing the gender pay gap - currently 12 per cent - nor overcoming workplace harassment or unconscious bias.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand)'s mandate within its special, consultative status with the Economic and Social Council is to make the voices and concerns of women in Pacific Island nations heard more loudly at the international level. The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly challenging especially in low-lying islands of the Pacific sub-region. It is now acknowledged that to effectively combat climate change women must be actively involved. Pacific Island governments must therefore provide girls with access to appropriate education for sustainable employment with equal pay to equip women for their crucial role in overcoming the effects of climate change. Monitoring and reporting on how Pacific Island women, the majority of whom are indigenous women, are faring in the face of climate change will be a continuing responsibility for Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand). A large number of Pacific Island women now live in New Zealand. Their welfare must also be paramount as we enthusiastically promote the Sustainable Development Goals.

A question we pose is that if a nation like New Zealand which is well-respected for its human rights record and level of economic development has huge issues still to overcome for the advancement of girls and women within the Sustainable Development Goals, how much more difficult will it be for less developed nations to succeed in attaining the aims of the Sustainable Development Goals. We therefore urge the sixty first session of the Commission on the Status of Women to stand in solidarity with women in developing economies and suggest concrete strategies to assist them in attaining economic empowerment through the Sustainable Development Goals.

Now, as never before we have the possibility through the Sustainable Development Goals to create a sustainable future for all people, and in particular to promote women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. It behoves governments in United Nations member states to do everything in their power to implement effectively the seventeen objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of bringing about, among other things, gender equality in respect to the workplace.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) calls for urgent action by the Commission through a strong outcome statement from its sixty first session to reinforce government commitment to gender equality in the workplace. Only then will the full benefit for women who now make up a significant percentage of the world's current workforce be realised in increased productivity, financial security for families through a living wage policy and food security for all people.