

Statement by Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) Inc. for the sixty second 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 establishment in 2000 Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has developed strong leadership promoting gender justice and empowerment of women. The organisation monitors, reviews and reports on progress in advancing the empowerment and well-being of women and girls in New Zealand and the Pacific sub-region. Overcoming challenges and ensuring equal opportunities for all women, especially rural women is critical for New Zealand, a country with a significant rural economy. Access to and participation in media and associated technologies have a crucial role in the empowerment of all women, particularly rural women.

Information technology features significantly in rural New Zealand with wide ranging use of technologies on farms from daily management to connecting with the wider community. For rural women worldwide connectivity is critical, impacting all aspects of life and social interaction. Limited or poor access to the internet affects family life, business management, schooling for children, challenging support networks especially where a woman's safety is threatened even where there is a high level of development.

Rural women's access to finance may be a source of stress and is significant and potentially isolating for partners of migrant rural workers in New Zealand dependant on their partners work visa to live in New Zealand. These women are entitled to work or study but there are often limited or no opportunities in the rural areas for independent work therefore are totally dependent on their partner for financial support. Similar issues are to be found in many states.

Women's titles to land remain an issue worldwide. Women are active in agriculture but many do not have or have lost rights to land. This may be due to relocation, forced or voluntary, or result of colonisation and imposition of patriarchal laws. The resulting poverty, food insecurity and disempowerment adds to the challenges for rural women.

Isolation is a major issue for many in rural communities. In New Zealand services in small rural towns are limited and transport to larger centres is necessary to access many facilities. Most New Zealand women drive but those who cannot or who do not have a vehicle must either rely on friends, neighbours or family for transport. Public transport in rural New Zealand is limited.

Access to health care especially maternity care is often restricted for rural women. They may need to travel to larger centres for care. Postnatal care may be limited or non-existent.

Support services are often scarce or difficult to access for rural women. Rural communities are small and tightly knit limiting a woman's ability to obtain help leaving a violent/abusive relationship. Rural New Zealand has seen an increase in migrants undertaking farm work. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) is concerned for the welfare and safety of migrant women facing isolation and in cases of

domestic violence unable to access help. These women have little or no knowledge of New Zealand laws and systems. Their partner may withdraw immigration sponsorship when violence is reported.

Mental health issues are of increasing concern in New Zealand's rural communities with women under particular stress. These women do not seek help as they are busy coping with farming concerns including floods, droughts, financial issues, family and maintaining community. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) is concerned that mental health services nationwide are not responding to current demand. For the rural sector these services are woefully inadequate. The need increases worldwide as climate change increases.

Effects of climate change and natural disasters compounded by isolation are a major challenge globally for rural women. Pacific women, particularly on atolls, face rising sea levels which destroy gardens and plantations. New Zealand suffers the effects of climate change from prolonged drought to extreme flooding. Earthquakes and volcanic activity further impact isolation with poor access or evacuations disrupting communities as seen in the Pacific region where volcanic activity forces relocation of whole communities. Women carry the burden of disruption as they seek to support and provide for their families. Speedy provision of aid to disaster areas is critical but often lacking in rural areas. Access to remote rural communities and isolated farms requires efforts by combined services as in the Kaikoura earthquake in New Zealand. Despite being a highly developed country there were still delays and difficulties providing adequate services to all.

Access to information technologies such as the internet are invaluable in providing connectivity and minimising isolation for rural and indigenous women worldwide. Many of New Zealand's indigenous Māori Women live in remote rural areas which are economically depressed adding to increased poverty. Despite a high level of coverage and a programme to extend high quality broadband many rural areas still face poor quality old technology internet services limiting connectivity. Updating services is an even greater challenge for underdeveloped states.

Enhanced connectivity through technology has created better opportunity for Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) to extend its mandate within the wider Pacific sub-region to interact with and support women's organisations. Electronic sharing of the Samoan language leaflet on the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women with women's organisations in Samoa is an example.

The review theme is cross-cutting to all aspects of the lives of rural women enhancing outcomes from the priority theme. Traditional media of Radio and Television incorporate social media platforms, all widely used by women and girls. Women in New Zealand appear regularly as frontline reporters in all media. Almost half reporters are women but less than 10 percent of stories focus on women. Women in media regularly face gender and sexual harassment. A lack of guidelines/protocols to address harassment leave many women feeling that gendered harassment is simply part of the job. There is continuing concern at ongoing sexualisation of women and girls in the media and advertising in particular; a prime issue in most states.

Information communication technology is very much part of life in New Zealand with various platforms routinely and successfully used by women and girls. A Not for Profit safety organisation (Netsafe) supported by the Ministries of Education and Justice provides excellent online information on the constant threat of online bullying, scams, pornography and grooming targeting young women and girls.

Media and Information Communication technology have much to offer women and girls worldwide. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will be assisted through increased use of technology platforms. Business development, work opportunities, education and health all benefit from sharing of experiences through increasing connectivity throughout the world, especially assisting rural women's empowerment and gender equality.

Despite widespread use of media in everyday life, female participation in the Information Communication Technology industry is low. New Zealand, where engagement is high, only 23 percent of the workforce is female. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) urges promotion of Information Technology careers to women and girls throughout the world.

Access to communication technologies enables women to maintain family and community connections around the world. Family and cultural links across huge distances make women feel affirmed. Solidarity of purpose can gain momentum. Communication technologies enable financial independence and the ability to support families in a safe, sustainable environment. Use of technologies increases visibility, promoting acceptance of difference in increasingly diverse population.

The two themes for the 2017 session intersect perfectly. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) urges the Commission through the sixty second outcome statement to promote equality of access to safe and secure access to information technology for all women. Realising Sustainable Development Goal 5 to encourage women and girls to undertake work in the information technology sector and raise the profile and acceptance of women in the media is of paramount importance to empowering all women, but particularly so for rural women. As challenges are far greater for rural women in underdeveloped states where land tenure is fragile, finance extremely difficult to secure and access to quality plants and seeds for crops uncertain we urge the Commission to continue efforts to seek sustainable solutions. Let us stand in solidarity with rural women throughout the world as they continue to play a critical role as food producers and guardians of fertility of much of the land devoted to agriculture.