

Statement by Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) Inc for the Sixty Third session of the United Nations 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 all women and girls. Since its establishment in 2000, Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand)'s primary objectives are 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. The organisation's founding documents state our recognition of the indigenous Māori women as tangata whenua and the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of New Zealand. This all-encompassing recognition of all women also takes into account the many ethnicities and cultures of everyone who reside in and call New Zealand home. New Zealand is now the most ethnically diverse country in the world; many women and their children also identify with multiple ethnicities.

The priority themes for CWS63 2019 are social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These priority themes allow our organisation to highlight the work we are achieving and to empower women worldwide to dialogue together to find solutions for all. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has now placed much more emphasis on highlighting the inclusion of all women in recognition of the growing disparity within and between populations of women. The Committee in its Concluding Observations on New Zealand's eighth periodic report 2018 noted, with concern, that indigenous women and ethnic minority women, in New Zealand, are still exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination particularly when accessing public services such as health, justice and education.

In August 2018 Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) was gratified to host an Indigenous women's conference, on International Indigenous Day, and all presenters were indigenous women. The topics ranged from biodiversity and climate changes in New Zealand to the ongoing effects of colonisation on indigenous women and also indigenous teenage mothers. New Zealand needs to rethink its approach to incorporate and celebrate diversity and the intersectionality of women.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) has deliberately fostered and developed strong connections with other women's organisations. This provides many opportunities to enable women who reside at the fringes of society and who struggle to have their issues raised, to amplify their voices and tell their own stories. Gender inequality is most visible across all levels of society when women are forced into the adversarial systems of the judiciary where power and control are clearly discerned. Positive collaboration with non-governmental organisations has resulted in a review of New Zealand's Family Court system. We urge all member states worldwide to address gender justice for women.

Another example of positive collaboration was the announcement by the Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues) at the Maori Women's Welfare League's National Conference, September 2018, of a whole of government approach to end family and sexual violence. This announcement was most poignant given there is a concentration of high levels of domestic and sexual violence perpetrated against indigenous women and girls. The challenge rests with the State, to implement the necessary social protection systems to fully realise the proposed strategy that could eliminate all aspects of violence from all sectors of society in New Zealand. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) strongly encourages other countries to consider this integrated whole of government approach model. A statement of support in CSW63's agreed conclusions for a whole of government approach to ending violence would be very powerful.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) belongs to the Access Matters Alliance New Zealand. Access Matters works towards creating a truly accessible Aotearoa New Zealand. Our organisation believes that access to public services must be more than just simply access to a building, a service or information but more importantly that our disabled friends and family can access these services with ease, and dignity. While New Zealand has not kept up with international developments and trends on access to public services, the New Zealand government has now begun working on accessibility legislation.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) believes that it is critical that both government and non-government enterprises recognise the special needs of some groups of women and girls who are particularly vulnerable. There can be no true empowerment of all women and girls when certain groups are left behind. Our organisation values equally and respects all women in New Zealand. Indigenous, Pacific and ethnic minority women continue to suffer from stereotyping and racism. This leads to differential outcomes across the full spectrum of employment which then magnifies the intersectionality between welfare dependence, extreme poverty and homelessness.

Access to justice for indigenous, Pacific and ethnic minority women is too often denied due to lack of funds, and the difficulty is compounded by the diminishing of legal aid. The social protection systems for women that should be in place are very much wanting in New Zealand. We strongly recommend an increase in legal aid to those women most vulnerable.

The government should provide alternatives to detention especially for soft crimes such as driving and state offences. Justice and the police need to adhere to the Bangkok Rules and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders. These actions by the government would ameliorate many of the injustices towards incarcerated women and girls. There is now an urgent need for the practical application of sound social protection systems for the safety of women and children throughout the world especially during this time of great upheaval due to forced migration, wars and famine. We demand that CSW63 must provide a forum for these issues to be discussed.

Climate change has severe implications for New Zealand and our neighbours, the Pacific Island nations. Our countries are situated in the largest ocean on the planet hence the danger of rising sea levels is a very real threat to our existence and to the environment. Pacific Island nations now experience higher temperatures, small islets are disappearing into the ocean and erosion is occurring on all sides. Homes that were once beside the sea have been swallowed up by the sea, and women can no longer plant any root crops due to the salinity of the water. Internationally the world needs to commit to decreasing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. When we consider sustainable development, the decreasing ability of women in Pacific Island nations to live on their land is rapidly diminishing. The review theme of women's empowerment is the link to sustainable development.

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) considers the concept of sustainable equity should be embedded throughout all facets of government actions and secured within a 5-year plan for women that would be organic to and based on the Sustainable Development Goals. We would encourage all member states to adopt an action plan based on the Sustainable Development Goals. The New Zealand government has been very slow to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into a women's action plan. We strongly urge the Commission to encourage all member States to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into domestic law as a critical action.

Women's work is critical to the global economy, peace-making, education and caring for the next generation. Looking forward to CSW63, Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) believes that while much has been achieved in women's rights, there still remain many challenges for women and girls both nationally and internationally. Women's rights are human rights.