

Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Consideration of the report submitted by New Zealand

***Statement by the Minister of Women's Affairs,
the Honourable Jo Goodhew***

Introduction

E aku rangatira, tēnā koutou katoa. Ka nui te honore ki te mihi ki a koutou katoa. *[Translation: Distinguished members of the Committee. It is a great honour to greet you all at this important event today].*

Madam Chair, it is a great privilege to present New Zealand's 2010 and seventh report under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and to provide an update on recent developments. I look forward to a constructive and open dialogue with the Committee today.

I acknowledge the Chair of the Committee Ms Silvia Pimental, of Brazil, Professor Niklas Bruun from Finland, the country rapporteur for New Zealand and other members of the Committee.

I am Honourable Jo Goodhew, Minister of Women's Affairs, Associate Minister of Health, Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector and Minister for Senior Citizens.

I acknowledge my colleagues from the New Zealand Mission to the United Nations, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner from the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, and my Ministry officials. I am particularly pleased that a strong delegation of representatives from New Zealand civil society groups are participating in this process, adding accountability and transparency to the work done in New Zealand. Plans had been made for the Māori Women's Welfare League to take up support from the Ministry of Women's Affairs to participate in this process, but regrettably unforeseen circumstances have prevented this.

I look forward to a constructive discussion on progress towards ensuring New Zealand women are able to realise their potential in an environment free from gender discrimination.

Importantly, I reconfirm New Zealand's strong commitment to the Convention.

We are a nation with a proud record...

A small nation of four and a half million people situated in the South Pacific Ocean.

In 1893, we led the world as the first country where women won the right to vote, through their determined but lawful efforts.

Since then, progress towards women's full participation at all levels has continued. New Zealand women enjoy the protection afforded through a strong statutory framework giving them full and equal rights.

At our last census just under 78 percent of us identified as being of European descent. Māori, the indigenous population were around 15 percent, Pacific peoples are 7 percent and Asian 9 percent.

We recognise that women in New Zealand are not all the same. Indigenous women, Pacific women, Asian women, women with disabilities and migrant women may have unique challenges and contributions and may require targeted approaches to ensure they have equal opportunity.

New Zealand continues to maintain its role as a leader in the field of gender equality. We were ranked sixth out of 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap report for 2011 and fifth out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index.

But we do currently have some challenges, and I'd like to outline some of them.

Like many countries, we are experiencing uncertain and volatile economic times. However, we are pursuing a path of responsible fiscal management to build a more productive and competitive economy.

We have a robust plan in place to rebuild the city of Christchurch after the damaging earthquake that took place in February 2011, and the continuing aftershocks.

In addition to the social impact on members of the community, the economic impact of this rebuild is estimated at \$20 billion or 10 percent of GDP.

In this challenging context, growing and fully utilising New Zealand women's knowledge, skills and experience is even more important.

Now, to the 2010 Report...

I would like to outline key issues from our seventh report and to highlight progress since we tabled this report in 2010.

We are proud of our record of human rights and our legal framework that provides women with comprehensive protection against all forms of discrimination.

New Zealand does not have a formal written constitution. The provisions of the Convention are incorporated into our domestic law and expressed in a range of legislation rather than one

single constitutional law. These laws include the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, the Human Rights Act, and the Equal Pay Act.

While outcomes for women are improving, as Minister of Women's Affairs, my priorities for the next three years are those areas where a sharper focus is needed: greater economic independence for women, more women in leadership and increased safety from violence.

Greater economic independence is possible when women have choice in education, training and work and are able to make the best use of these skills in order to achieve better outcomes for them and their families over their lifetime.

More women in leadership has benefits for organisational performance at both the management and governance level, as demonstrated by the significant body of research that cites the link between gender diversity in leadership and positive outcomes for organisations. Improved organisational performance is also good for our nation.

Violence against women comes at a great cost to individuals, their families and the economy. We have had significant positive changes in legislative settings. However, further work is required to significantly reduce the incidence of violence against women and children.

In the international setting, New Zealand is a strong supporter of UN-Women. As a current member of the UN-Women Executive Board, we have been active in highlighting areas of concern to our Pacific neighbours, particularly those related to the regional architecture (including civil society advisory bodies) and increasing women's political participation. We also facilitated joint statements on behalf of the Pacific states, New Zealand and Australia.

I am also pleased to advise that the Minister of Foreign Affairs recently agreed to the development of a New Zealand 1325 National Action Plan to demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to women, peace and security.

Let me now focus on New Zealand's progress in relation to some of the specific Articles of the Convention.

Article 7: Participation in political and public life

In New Zealand women currently hold 39 of the 121 seats in Parliament – 32 percent. Six of the twenty Cabinet ministers are women and there are an additional 2 women Ministers outside Cabinet. Three of these 8 women Ministers are Māori.

The Government is actively working to appoint more women to state sector boards and to encourage the private sector to increase the number of women in leadership roles.

There is compelling evidence that greater gender diversity in governance correlates with better decision making and organisational performance, providing economic and other benefits.

My Government has a target of 45 percent of women on state sector boards by 2015. It is currently running at 41 percent.

A number of government and non-government databases feed qualified and skilled women into nomination and appointment processes. As the demand for suitably qualified women has increased it is evident that we need to grow the numbers of women on these databases.

The Ministry is also working with a group of business leaders, the 25 Percent Group, on how companies can increase the number of women in senior roles. The group has set a target of 25 percent women on our top 100 company boards by 2015.

This group includes Chairs and Chief Executives of a number of our major companies, the New Zealand Stock Exchange, and the Secretary of the Treasury.

The New Zealand Stock Exchange has announced the introduction of a diversity listing rule. This rule will require listed companies to provide a breakdown of the gender of their board members and senior management.

This is a wonderful example of government, women and the private sector working together to increase the number of women in private sector leadership.

Article 10: Education

We are committed to improving student achievement and educational outcomes for all New Zealanders.

Our targets for the public sector include two specifically on education. The first is that by 2016, 98 percent of children starting school will have participated in quality early childhood education. This will be an increase of 3 percent on current levels, which themselves are impressive.

Our second target is to have, by 2017, 85 percent of 18 year olds achieve National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 2.

In 2011, 73 percent of girls and 66 percent of boys leaving school had at least NCEA level 2.

In 2010, 59 percent of Māori girls and 74 percent of Pacific girls left school with NCEA Level 2 or higher qualification.

This compares well with 2006, when only 39.6 percent of Māori girls and 54.4 percent of Pacific girls attained this level.

There are more women than men participating in tertiary education. In 2011, women were 57 percent of those enrolled, up from 55 percent in 2008.

There are also more Māori and Pacific women successfully participating in tertiary education, which includes certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate levels, where they do so at a greater rate than either European or Asian women.

The challenge remains to translate these successes in education into employment and earnings outcomes.

We are seeking to broaden the fields of study women choose and to increase the proportion of women at the highest levels of tertiary study, particularly Māori and Pacific women.

By encouraging young women to take up a wider range of study options, it will lead to a wider range of employment options and enhance their life-long economic independence. We are committed to improving student achievement and educational outcomes.

Article 11: Employment

We have made solid progress on our gender pay gap. Since we tabled our 2010 report the gender pay gap has reduced from 12 percent to 9.6 percent in 2011 for median hourly earnings (of all working women) - the lowest since we began measuring it.

Addressing the remaining gender pay gap is a complex issue. It is caused by a number of interrelated factors such as occupational and vertical segregation, business size, differences in qualifications and labour force participation, as well as unknown or unexplained factors, including discrimination and unconscious bias.

Further legislation is unlikely to fully address this range of factors. Instead, our approach is to achieve sustainable change by addressing the factors underpinning the gender pay gap.

Reducing the gender pay gap requires action by Government and also by employers, careers advisers, business leaders and employee groups and workers.

For example, my government is actively supporting young women to consider a wider range of career options, to encourage their participation in non-traditional areas of education, training and employment.

My Government has agreed to extend flexible working arrangements, currently available to those with dependents, to all workers. Quality flexible work is about people having the opportunity to ask their employer to make changes to the hours or times they work and where they work.

Article 12: Health

New Zealand has a comprehensive health care system with subsidised access to health services for all residents.

Women's life expectancy continues to improve and, on average, women have better overall health outcomes than men.

Comprehensive screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer are already contributing to lower rates of women's morbidity and mortality.

Breast Screening Aotearoa provides free screening every 2 years for women aged 45 to 69. As at 2011, 71 percent of all women in this group were screened.

Targeted campaigns have raised awareness of the breast screening programmes for Māori women and Pacific women who have lower rates of screening.

Since the National Cervical Screening Programme began in 1990, there has been a 65 percent reduction in mortality from this disease. In 2009, there were only 44 deaths from cervical cancer. The gap between Māori and non-Māori mortality rates for this disease is narrowing.

To further reduce the incidence of cervical cancer, girls aged 12-18 years have been offered free human papillomavirus immunisation since 2008.

Consistent with its work on reducing preventable maternal mortality and morbidity, New Zealand focuses on providing high quality, safe and accessible maternity services. The Maternity Quality and Safety programme, launched in 2011, includes the development of the first set of New Zealand Maternity clinical indicators to benchmark performance, and maternal and infant outcomes.

Article 13: Economic and social benefits

The Government, as a result of an agreement with another political party, the Māori Party, has implemented an innovative approach to social sector services called Whānau Ora.

The Whānau Ora approach reframes how government and providers interact with individuals, by seeing them as part of a whānau, or family or wider collective, and responds to those holistic needs and aspirations.

It strengthens and improves outcomes for whānau by developing whānau leadership and transforming the delivery of social sector services to provide integrated whānau-centred support at the community level.

The Whānau Ora approach is being implemented by 33 collectives that cover over 200 providers of health, social and community services.

Many are using “whānau navigators”, people who support whānau to access the services and supports they need, and to realise their own aspirations and potential.

Currently they are working with around 2,000 whānau which reach out to 33,000 individuals.

The aim is to identify key goals, increase connectedness and strengthen self-determination.

The Government has broadened the focus of Whānau Ora from health and social services to include employment, housing, educational achievement and the wellbeing of vulnerable and low income whānau.

The Government is also introducing changes to the welfare system to provide a pathway out of welfare and to encourage beneficiaries into education and employment. The Government strongly believes that the way to address poverty is through education and employment. Women are disproportionately represented in sole parent benefit statistics: for that reason they, and their children, will stand to benefit the most from government assistance into education and employment.

Articles 15 and 16: Increasing women's safety from violence

I remain concerned about the level of violence still being perpetrated against women and children.

Surveys indicate that between a quarter and a third of women will experience partner violence or sexual violence at some time in their lifetime.

The Government is developing practical and innovative strategies to reduce violence against women, reduce violent crime, and improve women's safety.

We recently announced 10 results that we will require the public sector to achieve over the next five years.

These include that by 2017, we aim to reduce the projected number of children who experience assaults by a very ambitious 25 percent.

We have also set a target of reducing violent crime by 20 percent: this means 7,500 fewer violent crimes each year by 2017. Related to this, we have set a target of reducing reoffending by 25 percent by June 2017, this means around 18,500 fewer victims each year from 2017.

A significant proportion of violent crime takes place within families, and many perpetrators of violence against women are

repeat offenders. Sustained reductions in violent crime and reoffending will reduce harm to women, their children and the community.

The Government is taking additional steps to promote women's safety in the area of law and order. Specialist family violence courts are already enhancing access to justice for women who experience violence within their homes. We are strengthening bail laws, making it harder for those accused of the most serious offences to get bail.

We have strengthened the range of responses available to Police attending family violence incidents. Since July 2010 Police have been able to issue Safety Orders. These orders allow Police to remove a person from the home when they have reasonable grounds to believe that family violence has occurred, but there is insufficient evidence to arrest them.

The Government is only one player in increasing women's safety from violence.

The Government continues to support effective community-led initiatives and work with communities to help them find their own solutions.

We are proud of our community-driven campaign that aims to change attitudes and behaviour towards any kind of family violence. To raise awareness that violence within families is

not okay, the campaign uses the phrase “it’s not okay, but it *is* okay to seek help”.

The strongest impact of the campaign is on Māori men and women and Pacific women where, in response to a survey, one in five said they had taken action as a result of the campaign.

We’re committed to trying out new approaches to make a difference to this complex and intractable issue.

Tokelau

I now want to cover progress in human rights and the status of women in Tokelau. Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory under the United Nations Charter. It has a population of approximately 1,400.

With New Zealand’s full endorsement because we strongly believe in the principle and practice of self-determination, Tokelau undertook, with UN assistance and supervision, votes in both 2006 and 2007 on whether it would change its current relationship with New Zealand. On each occasion, this tiny remote community set a two thirds majority to trigger such a change. In each vote, that level, and I stress it was set by Tokelau and not New Zealand or the United Nations, was not reached. So, Tokelau remains a non-self governing territory of New Zealand.

At its March 2010 session, the General Fono endorsed the National Policy and Action Plan for the Women of Tokelau 2010-2015. The plan aligns with Tokelau's overall approach to link economic and social issues to an ongoing development of local institutions of government.

The Fatupaepae, or Women's Committee, is a core grouping in each village. In addition there is a National Council of Women, which despite resource challenges, has remained operative, and met twice this year.

Tokelau has its challenges but it is facing up to them with determination. It is encouraging to see the leadership role that Tokelau women are taking and New Zealand will continue to support both human rights and the status of women in Tokelau.

Concluding comments

New Zealand remains committed to the Articles of the CEDAW Convention. We are pleased with our progress but we are not complacent about the challenges ahead. We look forward to your questions.

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa
[Translation: In conclusion and thanks, my greetings to the distinguished members of the Committee].