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Statement submitted by Pacific Women’s Watch (New Zealand), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) monitors, reviews and reports on the status of women and girls with respect to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. Pacific Women's Watch has links with Asia Pacific Women's Watch and our mission is to attain Gender Equality, Development and Peace. Therefore we acknowledge the CSW 65 thematic area's as critical, especially in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. We concur with the United Nations Secretary-General's statements on the many gains from the Beijing Platform for Action over the last 25 years being at risk of being rolled back. We recognise the New Zealand Treaty of Waitangi and support the Sustainable Development Goals Targets by 2030, with regards to 10.2, 10.3 and 5.5, the articles from the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women into law and the development of policies across the whole of government. The Beijing Platform for Action Critical Area G "Women in power and decision-making" as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 25 ratified in 1966.

Pacific Women's Watch recognises the CSW 65 thematic theme's as critical especially towards women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already complex components for women and girls globally to attain gender equality and empowerment as many groups of women and girls will experience greater impacts than others. Women who fall into multiple groups such as indigenous, aged, disabilities, sexuality, human rights defenders; those voicing minority views, dissenting or "controversial" experiencing existing inequalities may feel the combined effects of COVID-19 more profoundly. However the greatest female disparities often lie within and between existing women's groups where many indigenous women remain critically under resourced, under represented and invisible to wider civil society. The Gender Equality Plans and Declarations do not reach this marginalised group. New Zealand now boasts the most ethnically diverse population in the world. The continued absence of women in all their diversity at the decision-making and leadership roles in the political arena merely prolongs the disadvantage of diverse women.

Aotearoa New Zealand has steadily maintained advancements on women's leadership and decision making roles within government since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. We are proud to report that in 2020 New Zealand boasts strong female leadership being the current Prime Minister Jacinda Adern. The leader of the Opposition Party is Judith Collins. We have another female Indigenous Maori co-leader, of a minor party, in government with Marama Davidson. The female Members of Parliament have attained a historic 38% in overall representation. This percentage of female representation surpasses the threshold of the 30% target committed to under the Beijing Platform for Action and rises against the Sustainable Development Goal target 5.5. The high New Zealand's female government representation stands in stark contrast to the Asia Pacific and the wider Pacific regions. We acknowledge that the pathway for women in politics is fraught with unconscious biases, abuse in terms of gender, race, sexuality, physiological violence in forms of insults based on physical appearance, gender stereotyping, towards women in leadership roles and whilst mainstream media, social media posts and online bullying normalising this behaviour of abuse of public figure and dismissing sexism in the political field has devastating consequences on quality and diversity of the face of democracy.

In the 25 years since the signing of the Beijing Platform, women still remain underrepresented in political roles at the local community level and at local

government level. The number of women in local government is 42% with 20 women as sitting Mayors out of a possible 78. Women in Parliament represent 38% the highest number New Zealand has ever had since women were first allowed to stand for parliament. We still have some way to go to reach 50/50 by 2030. Women on boards is even more depressing with only 24% of women as board directors in New Zealand's private sector but the government state sector has almost achieved 50% as they are sitting on 49% as at the yearend 2019. Indigenous women in Maori tribal and Maori owned organisations are now counted and recorded in the overall female board representation statistics.

For decades, Member States have been entering into agreements, adopting, and designing laws and policies on gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence against women to be consistent with the international human rights laws. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. We call on governments to effectively implement gender equality disaggregated data as a means to transform societies for the benefit of all through better policies and programmes. This includes applying a gender equality perspective in the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies. Data and indicators should be collected nationally, regionally, and globally in order to measure gender gaps and consequently adjust development programmes to rectify inequalities and to ensure women's empowerment. At a minimum, data disaggregated on the basis of age, sex, geography, income, disability, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity and other factors relevant to monitoring inequalities (including multiple inequalities experienced by women and girls) should be available to inform of the progress toward 2030.

The global pandemic COVID-19 offers an opportunity for a gender equal world and women should be part of all decision making and policy framing. The paradox of COVID-19 is the 70% of women workers in industrial and low wage economy jobs were the most impacted by COVID-19 job losses but the 70% of women workers in health and unpaid care economy held the highest representation of health care and saving the pandemic victims. Interestingly an attempt by a female Minister in June 2020 to introduce a gender lens to bids from ministers to get more funding in the Budget was thwarted by Treasury officials. The proposed gender lens pilot-essentially assessing what the spending would mean for women meant agencies and government departments would be required to put their Budget bids through the gender lens. The Treasury rationale for the decline was that adding additional analytical requirements has little impact on bids. As noted earlier without gender equality, in all its forms, merely prolongs the disadvantage to women and girls.

The cycles of lockdowns and restrictions imposed on the population led to hugely increased spikes of gender based and intimate partner violence. In many domestic violence settings, the mask came to represent the silencing of the female victim and conversely offered protection to the abuser. Domestic violence is now frequently described as the 'shadow epidemic' to the COVID-19 pandemic such is the related surge in usage of women's safety homes and women's refuges. Again the backdrop of COVID-19 forced the agencies to place women and their children into motel accommodation. New and strengthened domestic violence and sexual harassment laws were introduced in New Zealand in 2018 with research and evidence yet to be gathered to determine the success of these new laws. To date the outlook remains grim as almost five years on from alleged misconduct charges against women employees at a top legal firm the alleged perpetrator is still a registered and practising barrister. Meanwhile other lawyers who have misappropriated funds have been struck of the roll.

Recommendations

We call States to prioritise, promote and publicize that United Nations CSW65 as the work of the world, the work of humanity and the work of women.

We call States to hold fast to and accelerate the commitments made at Beijing 25+ to overcome any 'roll back' on women's progress going forward during these COVID-19 pandemic times.

We call States to undertake urgent and immediate actions to eliminate the culture of inequality, the culture of violence and the culture of gender bias against women and girls.

We call on civil society to advocate at all levels to enable women to influence political, economic and social decisions, processes and systems and work towards seeking accountability from elected representatives on their commitment to gender concerns.
