

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



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The 55th Session to the Commission on the Status of Women

National Statement by New Zealand

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Tena koutou Tena koutou Tena koutou katoa

Chair,

I bring warm greetings to you, and to all the participants in this conference, from New Zealand's Minister of Women's Affairs, the Honourable Hekia Parata. I also welcome and endorse the statement made by the Minister from Kiribati on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum.

I'd like to convey our appreciation for the sympathy and support New Zealand has received following our devastating earthquake this week.

We are here because we want positive and faster change. We must lift the bar on our expectations of ourselves and each other. We must work together to find more effective ways forward. We also must shed those practices and policies that are not achieving the progress we want.

Working at the frontier of gender equality is not always comfortable – but we must all be there, as challengers and change agents. While change is inevitable, it can often feel glacial. Regardless, we must have optimism and determination that gender inequality will become a curious fossil in our history. Ensuring ongoing momentum, across generations, is critical to our work. And I believe we can support each other to achieve this.

Consistent with our strong support for UN Women, New Zealand endorses the five priorities in the First 100 Days Action Plan. We wish Michelle Bachelet and her team all the best for their challenging tasks ahead.

New Zealand reaffirms its unwavering support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. There remains, however, much more to be done. The Millennium Development Goals relating to gender equality, such as maternal health, have made the least progress. Yet ending poverty is much more possible when women are empowered.

New Zealand continues to be an active State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Our seventh periodic report, submitted last year, presents a picture of mixed results.

When our forebearers achieved suffrage for all New Zealand women in 1893, they probably envisaged that 118 years later we would have achieved full equality in outcomes.

We are proud that New Zealand girls and women are consistently achieving at high levels of education. In fact, there are more women under the age of 50 years that have a bachelors degree or higher than men under the age of 50. So we now have a generation of women who are better qualified than their brothers.

Our experience is that improved educational outcomes are a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving equality in employment and economic independence. Women's labour market participation rates and relative pay levels have increased as a result of higher qualifications, but the impact is not as great as we'd expect. We still have a pay gap – at just under 11 per cent – and our labour market is still characterised by both vertical and horizontal occupational segregation.

In addition, outcomes for some groups of women are notably poorer than for others, including for Maori – New Zealand's indigenous population, despite recent and rapid improvements in Maori women's educational outcomes.

The economic value of women's skills contributes positively to productivity. For women, economic independence also provides a protective factor from violence. It is not a guarantee but it increases the chances of women's basic human right to be safe.

New Zealand continues to work to rid ourselves of the barbaric practices of family violence, sexual violence and child abuse. We have a sound legislative framework, responsive Police, a nationwide network of women's refuges and high profile social marketing to change attitudes. Despite the last two decades of effort, one in three New Zealand women still experience at least one episode of domestic violence in their lifetimes.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs has been operating as a standalone agency in New Zealand for 25 years. In our experiences, some of the factors that support progress on gender equality are:

- strong and visible leadership
- accurate gender desegregated data
- accountability – both domestically and internationally, and
- an effective civil society.

Chair, we look forward to continuing to share experiences and gaining new insights into how we can all advance towards the goal of women's equality.

No reira, tēnā koutou katoa.

