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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.



Statement

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

In terms of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women New Zealand has made only a small amount of progress since adopting the eight Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Issues critical to the development and empowerment of women and girls remain stalled. These include the continuing burden of sexual violence and abuse endured by women and girls; impoverishment of families where one in four children of New Zealand are still living in poverty, leading to a lifetime of denial of their human rights, especially for girl children; the gender pay gap between women and men, which in 2013 is slowly widening; minimal progress towards attaining higher management and decision-making roles for women; unresolved discriminatory workplace issues; and the health and welfare of elderly women, women and girls with disabilities, and migrant women.

Specific time-bound targets and measureable indicators, which are cornerstones of the Millennium Development Goals, are currently not sufficiently visible in New Zealand. A constructive set of indicators developed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and published in October 2008 has not been applied or promoted widely. A five-year National Action Plan for New Zealand Women elaborated in 2004 came to an end in 2009. A new plan has not subsequently been developed. Non-governmental organizations did, however, successfully bring the issue of the lack of a new national action plan for women with specific time-bound targets and measureable indicators to their reporting for the seventh periodic review of the progress by the Government of New Zealand on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW/C/NZL/7](#)) in July 2012. The concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted "with concern that the State party has not introduced a new national plan of action for women to replace the one which ended in 2009" (see [CEDAW/C/NZL/CO/7](#), para. 17). The Committee also noted that the Ministry of Women's Affairs lacks adequate resources for many of its tasks. Without adequate funding, the Ministry is unable to play a comprehensive role in ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals are fully achieved.

For full, complete implementation of the eight Millennium Development Goals to be realized, they must be seen as a whole. While women and girls continue to be denied the full gender equality called for under Goal 3, the other seven goals cannot be realized. Goals 1, 4, 5 and 6 sit alongside Goal 3 in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, when the overall well-being of women and girls is considered through the lens of intersectionality.

Multiple and intersectional inequalities and marginalization are visible in New Zealand's increasingly diverse population. In its national reporting for the five-yearly reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) encourages New Zealand women at the edges of society who often suffer the most discrimination, to make their voices heard through specially designed discussion forums and a questionnaire on the everyday lives of women and children. The questionnaire entitled "How are we doing? New Zealand women together" provides data from a sample taken at the last three five-year review intervals to provide a longitudinal measure of women's well-being. The

results highlighted in particular the difficulty women have in saving for retirement. The impacts of lower savings on elderly women determine their poor quality of life in older age.

The particular discrimination suffered by the rich diversity of women and girls in Auckland, where a high proportion of Maori, Pacific, Asian and migrant women and girls live, were a focus of our concerns in reporting progress on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Barriers of language, inadequate income, lack of employment opportunities and access to recreation and social interaction are all ongoing issues. A petition that Pacific Woman's Watch (New Zealand) took to the New Zealand Parliament's House of Representatives in November 2009 on the subject of forced and underage marriage has not yet been recognized as a priority for new legislation to prevent the practice.

It is critical that acceleration in progress on outstanding impediments to the full empowerment of New Zealand women and girls under the Millennium Development Goals be achieved. The establishment of a select committee on human rights would greatly enhance systematic Parliamentary oversight and strengthen accountability on human rights matters, particularly gender equality. Setting up such a select committee was called for in the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in July 2012 (*ibid.*, para. 10).

The continuing high levels of gender-based domestic and sexual violence suffered by New Zealand women and girls are particularly worrying. This unabated scourge impacts the lives of many. The agreed conclusions from the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York in March 2013 stated that ending violence against women and girls must be a priority, not an option for achieving human rights, social cohesion and sustainable development. These are the pillars that will take New Zealand society forward in a country known internationally for its achievement of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms regardless of gender. The establishment of multisectoral services for survivors of violence, including health care, psychological support and counselling, as well as the need to protect the right to sexual and reproductive health must be the priorities. Millennium Development Goal 3 will not be well implemented until these priorities are achieved.

A recommendation in our organization's submission for the second universal periodic review of the progress of the Government of New Zealand on human rights due in early 2014 strongly condemned violence and asked the Government to place machineries for the advancement of women at the highest possible level. We also called for increased investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Currently there is no mechanism of redress for women and girls who have suffered ongoing discrimination. Access to domestic remedies is severely restricted. Attaining redress within the principle of the denial of human rights, particularly human rights related to gender equality, limits the implementation of principles enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. New Zealand women and girls are denied a mechanism for complaints under our current human rights legislation wherever and whenever there are inconsistencies within legislation that is not aligned across all services nor with international instruments to which New Zealand is signatory. For example, the sexual harassment clause in the employment law requires women to complain to a

manager and complete other processes, but under human rights legislation women are not required to follow these steps when making a human rights complaint. The only means of redress may be to take an unresolved complaint under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Disabled women and girls are particularly concerned about the failure of the Government of New Zealand to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which would provide a link to the international level. The issues of recognition before the law, access to justice and training, respect for the disabled and exploitation through violence and abuse are just some of the concerns that demand a mechanism for direct action within the Convention. Again, a parliamentary select committee on human rights would provide a platform for going forward.

New Zealand must make further progress on Millennium Development Goal 4, as it relates to the well-being of the girl child. The human rights of the girl child are often ignored. Many girls endure the effects of childhood illnesses due to being within families suffering poverty. Houses are often damp, cold and overcrowded, ideal conditions for the spread of meningococcal illness, rheumatic fever and chronic respiratory infections. The Government is providing the resources for immunization against meningococcal illness and rheumatic fever but this does not confront the fundamental causes of poverty and poor housing.

Children of beneficiary parents are losing ground under the new welfare reforms. A study by the Child Poverty Action Group on benefit sanctions found that children of beneficiaries are now subject to a set of rules that other children are not required to meet. The changed rules risk creating a disadvantaged class of children whose activities are unjustly restricted for reasons beyond their control. One measure calls for children to be compulsorily enrolled in early childhood education from the age of three, but high-quality early childhood education in poorer areas is lacking, creating a gap in implementing Millennium Development Goal 4 and placing the needs of children second to the Government's focus on moving parents off benefits and into the workforce.

Despite efforts by the Government, agencies and non-governmental organizations, genuine progress for women and girls has proved to be very elusive. Women continue to be underrepresented in higher management and positions of responsibility. Advancing the status of women and girls through action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals has not been fully effective in combating poverty, hunger, preventable childhood illnesses and the effects of financial insecurity.