



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
5 December 2021

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

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

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 peoples who now reside in and call New Zealand home. Actions to address climate change and accompanying environmental risks must ensure equality for all women and girls with sustainable equity underpinning all government actions.

Climate change and the accompanying issues of environmental change and disasters have been very apparent in New Zealand over the last year. Rural and urban communities have faced drought, floods, earthquakes and tsunami threats. All this overshadowed by Covid-19. While Covid-19 has in some respects diverted attention away from climate change and environmental issues it has also raised and highlighted issues around preparedness and structures for coping with and managing disasters.

Official preparedness and advice for disasters is very focused on households having sufficient water, food and an emergency plan. This official plan is largely effective for the majority who are able to plan ahead and maintain household supplies. However, this official advice fails to take into account gender or ethnicity, the messages overlook and rarely reach the marginalised and vulnerable. When there are floods, fires or earthquakes emergency services swing into action to supply food, water and shelter. But it is often found that the facilities designated as emergency accommodation such as schools or community halls are limited in what they can provide. New Zealand cities, towns and rural communities have Marae (traditional centres for Māori) which are well set up to provide accommodation and meals. Increasingly Marae are being used in emergency situations to provide shelter and support for communities. Women are at the forefront in organising and managing activities.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters and events such as pandemics. In New Zealand these effects are experienced even more keenly by Māori and Pacific women, migrant women, women with disabilities, women from the rainbow community and sole parents (predominantly women). The impact of disasters or pandemics on women and girls compared to men are seen in health with more severe impact in both physical and mental health, an increased risk of gender-based violence, increased caring responsibilities and a greater loss of income. The pandemic has highlighted the inequities in society and the high levels of distress experienced by women and children, especially those in the marginalised communities. Disabled women, Māori and Pacific women and women from other marginalised communities who suffer pay inequality and related poverty, frequently with decreased income at this time, experienced increased food insecurity as a result of the pandemic. Many families had to resort to foodbanks to put food on the table. The lockdowns which were used as a tool to contain the viral spread resulted in increased family and gender-based violence. Women's refuges also noted an increase in cases when lockdowns ended. Not all women have access to a phone or online facility so were unable to have assistance during the lockdown period. In times of disaster usual access to services and supplies is disrupted. For women these are significant; routine screening such as breast screening was stopped delaying diagnosis for a number of women. Maternity care was limited with women having to give birth without partner or family support.

Period poverty is a significant factor for many women and girls. A number of girls access free period products at schools. School closures not only resulted in girls not being able to obtain period products but for families relying on school meal programmes food insecurity was a major concern.

Women's economic empowerment is impacted by disasters, environmental and climate change. This last year in New Zealand has faced drought, severe floods, wild fires and a pandemic. These have significant economic implications across the community but women are particularly affected. As noted in the Covid-19 pandemic front line workers are predominately women. In New Zealand 84.9% of health workers and 80.7% checkout operators are women. Recovery usually focusses on construction and related activities. In New Zealand 14.4% of the construction workforce are women and 24.5% of the electricity, gas and water services are women. The Ministry for Women highlighted these issues to government and recommended that more women be encouraged to enter these professions. The Ministry also recommended highlighting the contribution of unpaid work which is largely undertaken by women.

Women's economic empowerment and the gender pay gap continue to challenge us. The number of women in the public service and in senior roles is commendable with numbers at senior levels at 50%. However, the private sector is behind with only 28% of board members are women. Of great concern is the pay gap. Over all the gender pay gap in New Zealand is 9%. However, the ethnic differences cause alarm. A Māori woman earns only 76% of that of a European man, while a Pacific woman earns 73%. Civil Society, Unions and the Human Rights Commission are conducting campaigns to address these inequities.

As part of the recovery from the pandemic the government is promoting women, especially Māori and Pacific, to undertake work in higher paid professions such as construction and energy. To assist training is being provided at technical institutes free of fees and with incentives to employers to take on apprentices.

Climate change is of concern throughout the Pacific. New Zealand has experienced severe drought and major floods over this last year. Even the biggest city, Auckland, has faced water shortages and usage restrictions due to drought and other cities have experienced flooding. However, the rural sector is the most directly impacted by drought, floods and wild fires. Poor connectivity and isolation often result in rural areas being overlooked in planning and when disaster strikes getting resources to them can be difficult and slow. Rural women are at the forefront of these events. It is interesting to note that a government document relating to disaster risk reduction highlights the disproportional effects of disasters on women and girls and yet little seems to be changing to address these inequities.

Over all the Covid-19 pandemic is a disaster that has greatly affected many women and children. It has highlighted the inequalities in society and gives opportunities to reassess ways to address the challenges of climate change in the light of this experience. New Zealand's approach to disaster risk reduction and environment and climate change must be sustainable and recognise the particular needs and roles of women and girls especially the needs of the marginalised, Māori, Pacific and migrant women, women with disabilities and women from the Rainbow community, while ensuring economic empowerment of all.

The intersection of the two themes highlights the importance of ensuring all women and girls are not left behind as work opportunities change and evolve with the effects of climate change and disasters. Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) urges the Commission to promote equality for all and especially the marginalised, Indigenous and migrant women, women with disabilities and those from the rainbow community. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 and empowerment of all women and girls will require all to work together for sustainable solutions to the challenges of the changing world.
