

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



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54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

**High Level General Debate
on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of
the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

Statement

by

NEW ZEALAND

**Hon. Pansy Wong
Minister of Women's Affairs**

Monday 1 March 2010

Check against delivery

Tena koutou katoa

Chair

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, New Zealand reaffirms our enduring commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We celebrate today the progress we have made since that momentous meeting in Beijing.

Chair, as we declared at Beijing fifteen years ago, the empowerment of women and girls is essential to the achievement of development, peace and security and human rights in all our regions. The Beijing Declaration remains an essential tool.

Over the past fifteen years, New Zealand has made steady advances in the improvement of women's lives and choices. The major progress has been in access to education and employment at all levels. In the current economic climate, no country can afford to under-utilise women's skills and talents. That is why a key focus for us is increasing the number of women in leadership and governance positions.

I also consider it vital for New Zealand to play its part in promoting the rights of women and girls internationally. Last year, together with Colombia, New Zealand presented a resolution in the Human Rights Council that, for the first time, recognised maternal mortality as a human rights issue. We are pleased to be supporting the resolution by the United States at the Commission this year on maternal mortality.

Chair, it is a source of profound concern to my government that each day, at least 1,500 women die due to complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth. For every woman that dies, twenty more women suffer from serious pregnancy related injuries and disease. By any standard, this is a human catastrophe. We must redouble our efforts to improve access to health services for all women and girls, with a focus on emergency obstetric care, family planning, and skilled birth attendance.

Discrimination against women remains the major barrier to the empowerment of women and girls. New Zealand is a long-standing party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This Convention has now achieved near universal status. We call on those few non-State Parties to join without further delay.

Some women face greater discrimination than others. Since the 10th anniversary of Beijing, we have celebrated the adoption and entry into force of

the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As the former Chair of the Convention negotiations, we call on all States to ratify this Convention, which includes a specific provision on women and disabilities.

Chair, we deeply regret that we have not made greater progress in combating violence against women. In New Zealand, one in five women will be subjected to violence in their lifetime, compared to one in twenty men. We are also well aware that the real incidence of violence against women is far worse than is reported in official statistics.

I reaffirm my government's commitment to ending this violence. We have introduced on the spot protection orders by police and are working to address the reasons behind under-reporting of violence and to better support survivors of violence. Our marketing campaign – called It's Not Ok– is an example of how we are working towards bringing violence out into the open.

Our challenge is to be much more upfront in reporting on violence against women, even where this may produce worse statistics and an even greater problem to confront. It will only be through knowing the full extent of the problem before us that we can have a real chance of addressing the causes of violence against women and stopping the perpetrators in their tracks.

Chair, in determining the path ahead, we look to the United Nations to provide a stronger, more co-ordinated approach to the empowerment of women and girls. New Zealand therefore fully supports the establishment of the new UN gender entity and we call on the Secretary-General to appoint the new Under-Secretary General on Gender without delay.

I look forward to a rich exchange of views both in the interactive debates and in the margins of this meeting. I would also like to welcome and associate New Zealand with the statement made by the Honourable Minister from Samoa on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

By working together towards improving outcomes for women and girls, we are working towards improving outcomes for all people.