

NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS



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51ST SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, WITH A FOCUS ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS

STATEMENT BY

NEW ZEALAND

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Tena koutou katoa. Nga mihi mahana ki a tatou

Madame Chair

On many occasions, New Zealand has reaffirmed the commitments we made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. We do so again here today, with renewed and energetic commitment. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women together remain the blueprint for making real improvements in the lives of women and their families and communities around the world.

We also take the opportunity to welcome the important work undertaken by the United Nations on eliminating violence against women and children on many occasions. The recent report by Independent Expert, Professor Sergio Pinheiro, on Violence Against Children carries a strong message: “no violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable”. The report is a wake-up call; a timely reminder that more must be done globally to reduce violence; and a reminder that none of us can rest on our laurels.

New Zealand is no exception to this maxim. We recognise that violence is a critical and complex issue in New Zealand, and we have taken steps to respond comprehensively, as has been so clearly recommended by the recent UN reports on both violence against children and women. We are working hard to transform the way our families, communities and society think and to address the underlying social and economic conditions associated with violence.

New Zealand welcomes the opportunity at this meeting to focus our attention on the elimination of violence against girls, who are often the most vulnerable to violence. In any country, girls continue to make up most of the victims of sexual violence, from incest and sexual abuse to female genital mutilation and early and enforced marriage. Their basic human rights must be protected, including through empowering girls and giving them the skills and means to help protect themselves. Our experience also shows that we must work alongside and support families, where violence against girls most often occurs. Ultimately, governments must exercise leadership at the very highest level.

For its part, New Zealand has established a Minister-led Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families, led by seven Ministers. This taskforce is currently overseeing the launch of a nationwide campaign to change attitudes and behaviour in respect of family violence. An Early Years Programme focuses on timely intervention in support of vulnerable young children and a Working for Families financial package is targeted at reducing family poverty. New Zealand has also changed its care and guardianship legislation to make the interests of children paramount, and to allow for recognition of a greater range of parenting roles and family arrangements.

At the end of this month, New Zealand, and a significant number of other countries, will gather in New York to sign a new Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first comprehensive human rights treaty since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. This treaty includes specific provisions on the rights of the child and the rights of women and will be a milestone in helping protect the rights of girls with disabilities, including their right to be free from violence. No girls can be forgotten in our efforts to eliminate violence, and we call upon all States to sign and ratify this Convention as soon as possible.

Madame Chair, in order to move forward, we must face our challenges and work together to share our experiences and focus on implementation. The programme is an exciting one and we welcome the promotion of the new working methods of this Commission. The recent UN reports on violence against children and violence against women will also provide us with invaluable guidance in our discussions, and we trust this will lead to a new momentum to eliminating violence, especially against girls. This issue must remain at the forefront of the UN human rights, development and security agenda.

In addressing the challenges that face us, we acknowledge and welcome the important contribution of civil society; of girls themselves, and their representatives. Madame Chair – it has been said so often, but it cannot be said often enough. Our children are our future. Let us not just say it any more, let us demonstrate in a way that leaves no doubt, that we believe it to be so. Let us all find ways of ensuring that children are given the future they deserve.

Thank you