



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12-23 March 2018

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 Association of Presbyterian Women of Aoteaora, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand have Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission is New Zealand's national human rights institution who monitor and advise on human rights issues. Rural Women New Zealand was established in 1925 and provide an authoritative voice on rural health services, education, rural environment and social issues in New Zealand.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a joint written submission to the United Nation's on the thematic issues to be considered at CSW62.

The statement will specifically comment on the isolation of rural women and lack of access to services including broadband and mobile coverage, and the lack of women in leadership roles in agri-business.

## **Overview**

New Zealand's economy has always been dominated by the rural sector, namely agriculture, with primary export products being wool, lamb and dairy products. In the 1980's when farming subsidies were removed, tourism became New Zealand's largest export industry, with dairy closely following. Forestry, Horticulture and Viticulture are also important export industries for New Zealand.

Women's contribution to the rural economy has not been fully acknowledged or appreciated in New Zealand. Rural women are not visible in leadership positions in the agri-business sector. Issues of isolation, lack of access to services and technology for rural women are major issues that need addressing in New Zealand.

A significant proportion of the Maori population live in the Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Northland regions according to Statistics New Zealand's Census 2013 data. These regions of New Zealand are largely rural. Northland and the Bay of Plenty have the highest rates of unemployment in New Zealand according to the 2016 Household Labour Force Survey, and are areas of high deprivation. Maori women in these areas will be disproportionately affected by issues of isolation, lack of services, and a lack of access to technology and services.

## **Rural Women in Leadership roles**

Women have not achieved equality in leadership within any strata of New Zealand society. Women made up 31 per cent of MP's in parliament after the 2014 election. It has risen to 38 per cent in the recent 2017 general election. They hold 19 per cent of senior management positions in business and 22 per cent of Directors on boards according to the New Zealand Census of Women on Boards 2017.

There is low representation of women in leadership roles in agri-business and rural sector. Some examples of this are - Federated Farmers National Council elected their first woman President in their 118-year history in June 2017. Their Board however consists of nine people, eight of whom are male. Their Chief Executive is also a male, although there are many women on their senior leadership team.

Fonterra, is New Zealand's largest company employing 22,000 people with a total revenue of \$22 billion per year. Fonterra is a Dairy Co-operative owned and supplied by 10,700 farmer shareholders in New Zealand. The company has 12 people on their Board of Directors of whom two are women. Their senior management team has six people of whom five are men including the CEO.

Some of the barriers to women obtaining directorships and senior leadership roles in rural businesses include not having the time to leave their family and farming duties, a bias against women within the businesses, and women not having confidence they have the skills to offer in these roles according to Rural Women New Zealand.

It is harder for Rural Women to contribute to Board meetings remotely if they do not have good access to Broadband and mobile phone coverage.

### **Access to Services/Issues of Isolation**

New Zealand's rural population is estimated to be 620,000 people, which is equivalent to New Zealand's second largest city. Margaret Pittaway, a board member of Rural Women New Zealand points out that despite this, rural people struggle to get the equivalent services that the rest of the New Zealand population expects. Access to health services for residents in rural areas is a key concern.

There is no accurate definition of what constitutes "rural" for the purpose of measuring this population group in New Zealand. The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand state in their Rural Health Roadmap 2017, "Data about rural populations must be captured across government in order to bridge the gap in knowledge and to ensure equitable outcomes."

Rural women often travel long distances to access maternity services from urban centres, and are required to drive their children and elderly relatives into urban towns for medical and dental treatment. This means they are unable to access critical care within reasonable timeframes, especially in times of emergency.

Older women in rural areas struggle to access home help and District Nursing Services due to the travel times for service providers.

In 2007, the Ministry of Health in New Zealand published Urban-Rural Health Comparisons: Key results of the 2002/03 New Zealand Health Survey. The findings in this survey confirm the concerns about lack of access to services in rural areas.

The study notes that rural females were significantly less likely to have visited a general practitioner (GP) in the last year compared to urban females.

Rural practices are often hard to staff with a 25 per cent vacancy rate at any one time. This impacts on the ability of rural people to access primary medical and mental health services.

Compounding difficulties in accessing health services is a lack of reliable high speed broad band coverage in rural areas in New Zealand, and a lack of mobile phone coverage in some areas. Health consultations increasingly take place via Skype but this is not possible for people who do not have access to Broadband.

The Rural Health Alliance New Zealand have requested the government to ensure that all rural medical facilities are connected to fiber-internet speed by 2019. They have also requested the government provide 99 per cent of the population with more than 50 Mbps of internet by 2020 rather than 2025. In response to this, the New Zealand government announced in August 2017 a \$270 million communications infrastructure package. The Ministry for Primary Industries states on their website this will improve access to broadband to more than 70,000 rural households and businesses.

### **Family Violence**

Family violence is one of New Zealand's top human rights issues. According to a study by Janet Fanslow and Elizabeth Robinson, Violence against Women in New Zealand: Prevalence and health consequences, New Zealand Medical Journal 117 (2004) 33-39 per cent of New Zealand women experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The prevalence of family violence is much higher in rural areas with 39 per cent of women being victims of violence compared to 33 per cent of women in urban areas.

There are complexities for women living on farms contemplating leaving an abusive relationship. Farms are often family-owned under a family trust. Women working on farms worry how they will survive financially with their children if they leave. Jo, working at the Whanganui Women's Refuge stated that women worry about depriving their children of their inheritance when they leave the farm.

Access to family violence services in remote areas is also an issue. There may be no refuges within a close distance and no friends or family to go to when women suffer from family violence in rural areas. Women's Refuge advised that they assisted 1059 women in isolated areas in 2015/2016.

The ability to call the Police in mobile black spots is also an issue for women dealing with family violence in rural areas. Rural police stations are often unmanned. This means that there are times when there is no help available for rural women who are victims of violence, according to Rural Women New Zealand (24 May 2017).

### **Education**

The lack of access to effective internet impacts on the ability of rural girls and women to access education.

Correspondence schools are online and are hard to access for those without access to high speed internet.

Access to correspondence school gives those who live rurally the option of quality distance learning which helps keep both children and adults remain living rurally yet still getting quality education. In this digital age, those with no internet, on dial up, or on expensive satellite are often disadvantaged when it comes to learning, according to the Rural Women New Zealand.

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