

# Opening Statement

## Introduction

E aku rangatira, tēnā koutou katoa, ka nui te honore ki te mihi, ki a koutou i tēnei rā whakahirahira.	Distinguished persons, it is a great honour to greet you all at this important event today.
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Madam Chair, members of the Committee, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to present New Zealand's eighth periodic report under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

My name is Jan Logie and I am the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Justice with responsibility for Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues, in the New Zealand Government. It is an honour to lead New Zealand's delegation on behalf of the Honourable Julie-Ann Genter, Minister for Women. I am joined today by Jillian Dempster, New Zealand's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, and Renee Graham, Chief Executive of the Ministry for Women and Michelle Hippolite, Chief Executive of Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Maori Development. Also present are officials from our:

- Ministry for Women (Lis Cowey, Hannah Gray)
- Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Māori Development
- Ministry of Justice (Michael Gill)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Rachael Pringle)

I would also like to acknowledge the individuals and organisations from civil society who have shared their experiences with the Committee. These groups make an important contribution to advancing women's empowerment in New Zealand and represent the voice of the New Zealand community. It is crucial for the Government to work with the community and learn from their expertise if we are to make gains in some of the issues faced by women and girls in New Zealand. I am very pleased to see some of these representatives here today including the New Zealand Human Rights Commission.

## Recognition of the Convention

The Government recognises the critical role of the Convention in the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. I look forward to having an open and frank discussion with the Committee and learning from the Committee's expertise and knowledge. Your expertise can only enhance our ability to eliminate gender inequality in our society and deliver positive outcomes for women and girls in New Zealand.

## **Context**

New Zealand is a proudly multicultural country. We have over 200 ethnic groups who speak over 160 languages, and one in four people are born overseas.

New Zealand is founded on the relationship between Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand and the Crown. In 1840 New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed, formalising this enduring relationship. The Treaty provides a framework for the Government to promote, protect and respect indigenous rights.

In the past, the Government has not always respected the Treaty, and Māori have been denied the opportunity to participate meaningfully in Government decision making. This has resulted in poorer outcomes for Māori, and especially for Māori women and girls. The Government has established a new Crown / Māori relations portfolio to address this, which I will talk more about later.

New Zealand has a strong history of protecting and promoting human rights both at home and internationally. We have a particularly proud history of promoting the rights of women. This year it is 125 years since women fought for their right to vote, and we were first in the world to do this. While we acknowledge this historic achievement and celebrate it, we must not be complacent as there is still much to do to build an inclusive and fair society for all of our women and girls.

## **Changes since the report was published**

Since we submitted our eighth periodic report in 2016, there has been significant change in the direction of our country.

Following the General Election in September 2017, the New Zealand Labour Party formed a coalition Government with the New Zealand First Party and with the support of my party, the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand. This election marked a change in direction for New Zealand that is reflected in the Government's priorities for women.

This Government has established my position as Parliamentary Under-Secretary with responsibility for domestic and sexual violence issues. This is the first time we have had a dedicated person in Government focused on family and sexual violence. This shows the concerted effort the Government is making to end domestic and sexual violence once and for all in our society.

The Green Party is proud to hold the positions of Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Women and Undersecretary for family and sexual violence (along with other portfolios). We know that women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens of climate change, especially in situations of poverty. Holding these portfolios demonstrates the inextricable link between the changing environment and the wellbeing of women.

I am proud to say that our Government also represents a symbolic shift for women in New Zealand. There are 46 women Members of Parliament, 38 percent – the highest level ever –

with 13 of them being Māori women. We also have women in the roles of Prime Minister, Governor-General and Chief Justice – and not for the first time. Our Prime Minister, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, last month made headlines around the world as the second only sitting head of government to give birth in office. Our Minister for Women, Hon Julie Anne Genter, who I'm representing, is unable to be here today as she is also due to give birth next month.

And our Government not only represents a *symbolic* shift for women. We are determined to make a *real* difference to the lives of women and girls in New Zealand. And we know that to do this requires transformative change. We are a compassionate government focused on wellbeing, and building closer partnerships with Māori. I will use this opening statement to outline some of the Government's current priorities when it comes to improving the lives of women and girls in New Zealand. These include:

- a commitment to improving wellbeing
- reducing poverty and reforming welfare
- ensuring women and girls are free from violence and
- closing the gender pay gap

### **Commitment to wellbeing**

The Government is committed to the wellbeing of New Zealanders and creating a fair society. This means lifting families out of poverty and building meaningful relationships between Māori and the Crown.

We are determined that all New Zealanders, and especially women and girls, have access to the high quality public services they need and deserve – such as health, education and housing. Some groups of women, including Māori and Pacific women, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and gender diverse women, are among those that continue to have poorer outcomes. This is not acceptable and this Government is committed to working with and for these communities to ensure a fair and inclusive society for all.

As I mentioned earlier, this Government has established a Crown/Māori relations portfolio to foster a healthier relationship between the Crown and Māori. We want to improve the way government departments engage with Māori and respond to issues for Māori and find new and different opportunities for more active partnership between the Crown and Māori. It is of particular and special importance to me to work closely with Māori as we work to eliminate gender-based violence.

Next year we will be the first nation in the world to deliver a "Wellbeing Budget" where we will report our progress against a range of measures that highlight the health and wellbeing of our people, our environment and our community. The Wellbeing Budget represents an important step towards embedding the wellbeing of the people into New Zealand's public policy.

## **Poverty and welfare reform**

Another aspect of our commitment to wellbeing is our focus on addressing poverty and welfare reform. Currently, between 150,000 and 210,000 children are living in poverty or hardship, with around 80,000 in severe hardship. This means children and their families are living without the basics they need to be healthy. This is not good enough.

Poverty afflicts too many mothers and their children in New Zealand. Through the Child Poverty Reduction Bill, the Government has set out how we will hold ourselves accountable for reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing. We want New Zealand to be the best place in the world to raise children, and be a child.

Many families are stigmatised and trapped in poverty because of our welfare system. The majority of people on the sole parent benefit are women and of the people living in poverty, those on welfare are in the deepest poverty.

We are going to overhaul the welfare system to ensure it is accessible and fair for all New Zealanders. There are immediate changes we need to make, but we also need to take a long term view and ensure the whole system is working effectively and compassionately. The Government has established a Welfare Expert Advisory Group to support this overhaul. Members come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experience, including but not limited to Māori, Pacific, persons with disabilities, and young people.

## **Ensuring women and girls are free from violence**

We are also taking steps to ensure women and girls are free from violence. Family and sexual violence are linked to many of the most destructive and apparently intractable social issues facing New Zealand. Family violence is the largest driver of violent crime in New Zealand.

Current data shows that one in three women experience physical, emotional and or sexual violence from a partner in their lifetime. Women are twice as likely as men to suffer partner abuse. Women are more likely to be killed. Women living with a disability, young women, Māori women, queer and trans women experience higher rates of violence but are also more likely to be re-traumatised by our current systems. We know that organisations that support women are really stretched to meet the demands on them.

Our system is failing to prevent violence and the needs of women and girls are not being met because of a fragmented response system. We have commenced work to transform the system. This includes a focus on primary prevention, early intervention, integrated responses and new approaches to service delivery.

An effective family and sexual violence system requires sustained leadership and coordination. For this reason, we are establishing a new dedicated body to lead a whole-of-government response and provide a single point of accountability for ensuring the family and sexual violence prevention and response system is delivering effectively.

To address some of the immediate issues in our current system, the Government recently increased funding for frontline services by \$76 million to ensure women trying to escape a violent situation can access the support they need, where and when they need it.

Work is also underway to ensure that when women report sexual violence to the Police, and participate in a criminal prosecution, the criminal justice system does not compound the harm they have already suffered.

The Government is committed to the development of Māori centric models of service provision that provide for the specific needs of Māori women and includes participation of families, sub tribes, tribes and the wider community. Recent work has involved designing a risk and needs assessment process in partnership with Māori and increasing the number of Māori centric services funded by Government.

Gender-based violence is an issue that impacts all of society, including those of diverse genders. Trans women are among those most likely to be re-victimised by current systems. The Government recognises the importance of fully engaging men and boys, as agents and beneficiaries of change, and as strategic partners and allies in the elimination of gender-based violence.

We acknowledge the complexity of these issues. Action is required across Government and in communities. There is no quick fix but we are determined to take action and ensure that our women and girls can thrive, reach their full potential and live free from violence.

### **Closing the gender pay gap and addressing pay equity**

Closing the gap and addressing pay equity are important steps towards women's full economic empowerment. New Zealand can and should be a world leader in ending women being paid less. In September 2017, New Zealand's gender pay gap was 9.4 percent. While this gap has been trending downwards, it has stalled in the last decade and the gender pay gap is much higher for Māori and Pacific women at 18 percent and 21 percent respectively.

Our Government is dedicated to eliminating the gender pay gap. We will start by closing the gender pay gap within the core public service (currently 12.5 percent) with significant progress in the current parliamentary term and ensuring that the wider public and private sectors are on a similar pathway. We are also building and promoting evidence on the gender pay gap, including analysis of its causes throughout the career and life cycles of women and girls.

We will continue to raise the minimum wage by a third by 2021. This year we raised the minimum wage by 75 cents to \$16.50 an hour. By 2021 we will raise the minimum wage to \$20 an hour. This will benefit over 164,000 Kiwi workers, many of whom are women in low-skilled work. Around 60 percent of minimum wage workers aged 16 to 64 are women.

A landmark New Zealand Court of Appeal decision in 2014 determined that our equal pay legislation includes equal pay for work of equal value and changed the way the Equal Pay Act 1972 was understood. A \$2 billion pay settlement in 2017 resulted in a pay-rise for more

than 55,000 low paid, mainly female, care and support workers. The Government announced on 22 June 2018 that it is extending the settlement to include mental health and addiction support workers who are predominantly women. The \$173.5 million settlement extension will ensure that around 5,000 mental health and addiction support workers will receive the same pay rates as care and support workers.

The Government has worked with employer and employee representatives, including unions, in a tripartite Joint Working Group on Pay Equity Principles, to develop principles to guide pay equity settlements. A suite of amendments to employment relations legislation will bring greater fairness to the workplace. These changes will increase protections for workers, especially low-paid workers, many of whom are women, including Māori and Pacific women. The changes will strengthen the role of collective bargaining in the workplace to ensure fair wages and conditions.

It is envisioned that these changes will rebuild the foundation for fairness in the workplace for women.

## Conclusion

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, to conclude I would like to restate the continuing commitment of the New Zealand Government to the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity.

The Government is determined to make much stronger progress on eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, and looks forward to further recommendations from the Committee to assist us with this challenge.

We acknowledge that we continue to face domestic challenges and more needs to be done to ensure women's human rights are upheld. We are seeking to address these challenges with vigour and in partnership with our communities. We look forward to engaging with the Committee, to listen and learn, and to continue to work to eliminate inequality and promote the rights of women and girls in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Nō reirá, kāti mō tēnei wā.	Therefore, that is enough for now.
Kei a koutou te wā.	The time (to speak) is with you.
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.	Greetings, greetings, greetings to us all.