

**Statement to 39th Session of the UN CEDAW Committee  
from Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) Inc.**

Madame Chairperson

Pacific Women's Watch (New Zealand) speaks on behalf of women from a diversity of cultures and those women suffering discrimination who might not otherwise have their voices heard, particularly refugee and migrant women.

We have found a common pattern of discrimination, regardless of ethnicity.

This pattern persists in a denial of human rights across poverty in childhood in a lifelong trajectory of inadequate food and housing, poor health, low levels of literacy, lack of well-paid employment and unrelentingly high levels of violence and abuse.

We speak on 3 issues:

**1. The human rights face of inadequate housing related to low income:**

Rising house prices mean many cannot own a home. Rental accommodation is temporary, expensive and unsafe. Overcrowding is a stressor leading to violence. Transience prevents the formation of stable communities and best outcomes for children's education.

**We request the CEDAW Committee to recommend** a review of the favourable tax status for residential property:

that steps are taken to ensure all girls leave school with qualifications;

and that government raises its funding contribution for refuge accommodation from the current level of 40 – 50 percent.

## **2. Economic empowerment is a myth for many women.**

The gender pay gap has hardly changed in the last ten years now, standing at about 86-87 percent of men's. Women in poverty are marginalised through illiteracy from well-paid full-time jobs. That puts at risk their savings for retirement. In 1999, 44 percent of women were unable to save for retirement and 60 percent in 2004.

**We request the CEDAW Committee to recommend** special measures to close the gender pay gap.

## **3. Special issues of discrimination for refugee and migrant women**

Migrant and refugee women face oppression, violence and discrimination traditionally endorsed through their culture, society and religious beliefs. Practices such as dowry, forced marriages, under-age marriages and threats of honour killing are in violation of basic human rights and of Articles 1, 2, 5 and 16 under CEDAW. Such violation needs to be condemned and banned through appropriate Government legislation and policies with NGOs and civil society monitoring their implementation.

**We request the CEDAW Committee to recommend to** the government to develop and implement appropriate legislation and law-enforcement mechanisms to prevent oppression of migrant and refugee women, arising out of their cultural practices and religious beliefs.