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COOK ISLANDS GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE UNITED NATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING *PLATFORM FOR ACTION*

Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

National Policy on Women.

The Cook Islands Government endorsed the 1995 National Policy on Women to signal its commitment towards ensuring that issues of equality, development and peace are addressed for all women in the Cook Islands under five areas prioritized for implementation:

- Women in Economic Development;
- Women in Social Development;
- Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women;
- Women and Leadership and Decision making; and
- Women and Natural Resources (the Environment).

The *Division of Women's Affairs* will oversee the implementation of the Policy in co-operation with the *Cook Islands National Council of Women*. Together, they will plan, appraise, implement, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Policy in regular consultation with the public and private sectors and community organisations.

In addition, the Cook Islands Government adopted the 1996 -2000 'National Plan of Action' to achieve the goals and objectives of the National Policy on women, based on the BPA.

Impact of Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The Cook Islands became party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women through New Zealand, which signed the Convention on 17 July 1980 and ratified it on 10 January 1985. At the time, the Government of the Cook Islands made a number of reservations to the Convention: in relation to article 11(2)(b) which relates to maternity leave and articles 2(f) and 5(a), "to the extent that the customs governing the inheritance of certain Cook Islands chief titles may be inconsistent with those provisions." In addition the Government also reserved the right not to apply the provisions of the Convention in so far as they are inconsistent with policies relating to recruitment into or service in the Armed Forces (in situations involving armed combat) and law enforcement forces "in situations involving violence or threat of violence."

In becoming party to the Convention, the Cook Islands affirmed its commitment to improve the situation of women in the Cook Islands. Translated the CEDAW Articles into the Cook Islands Maori language and widely disseminated them throughout the islands.

The Cook Islands completed its initial and subsequent reports covering the period up until 30 June 2005, entitled '*Government of the Cook Islands, State Party Report on CEDAW – December 2005*', this was submitted to the CEDAW Committee, and the first dialogue between

Achieve equitable remuneration scale and career advancement in all sectors
Increase the number of businesses owned or co-owned by women

Millennium Development Goal

The Cook Islands Millennium Development Goals National Report 2005, reveal that in terms of national aggregates, the Cook Islands have already achieved two of the MDG's: Goal 4 on Reducing Infant Mortality and Goal 5 on Maternal Health, with the exceptions of Goal 7 and Goal 9, it is recorded that the Cook Islands is capable of achieving most of the other MDG's by the year 2015.

The Cook Islands MDG's status at a glance in particular under Goal 3: *Promote Gender Equality and Empower women*, it was reported that this goal will

iii) Gender sensitization training of law enforcement officials.

In 2008 a training workshop was conducted by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with NGO Punanga Tauturu Inc. for all law enforcement officials including judicial officers, Justice of the Peace, lawyers and prosecutors, so as to establish firmly in the country a legal culture supportive of women's equality and non-discrimination.

iv) Education Master Plan 2008-2013

The Ministry of Education launched the Education Master Plan (2008 – 2013) *Education for all*; it stipulates the greater opportunities, strengthening and access within the Education sector for all, including women and girls.

v) Reproductive Health Policy 2008

The Ministry of Health adopted a National Policy on Reproductive Health 2008, as well as a National Strategic Plan to guide the implementation of the policy. This was a result of various consultation meetings with Stakeholders including Gender & Development Division and Women Organisations. The policy stipulates under *Outcome 3: Gender equality is advanced and women and girls are empowered to enable them to exercise their reproductive rights and to be free of discrimination and violence, through more effective policies and strengthened community interventions.*

vi) National Policy and Priority Strategies for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections (February 2009)

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the National AIDS Committee adopted the HIV/AIDS Policy which stipulates that as a principal strategy under the heading of *Prevention, Treatment and Care - STI prevention and control services will address the needs of both males and females.*

In addition, the Cook Islands HIV Implementation Plan 2009 addresses the issue of HIV transmission thru *Parent/Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT)* in accordance to the following preventative strategies:0.999 0 0 1 139.68 496.8 Tm [() TJ ET Q q BT /F2

empowerment stipulates *improve the position of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable of those with disabilities, particularly women and girls.*

Partnerships – NGO & CSO, private sector and other stakeholders

The Cook Islands National Council of Women was established in 1984 and has pioneered many of the advances for women, including supporting and working with Government to develop the National Policy on Women (1995-2000).

Other organisations have also grown, around specific issues, for example Punanga Tauturu Inc provides counselling and assistance for victims of domestic violence as well as conduct legal literacy training for law enforcement officials as well as the general public.

Formal agreement - Memorandum of Understanding

The Ministry of Internal Affairs signed on the 17th July 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Council of Women, to achieve the following mission goals:

- work towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in line with the CEDAW convention
- serve as a voice and advocate nationally and globally for important governance, development, cultural, religious, and environment issues that affect the lives of our women and their families
- promote gender awareness, planning and analysis in order to support ongoing efforts to improve the status of women

Engagement of men and boys in the promotion of gender equality.

Since 2002, a team of identified Gender Trainers was established within the Gender and Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the purpose of conducting gender analysis training targeting Government Ministries and Agencies, Heads of Ministries and Managers to tailor the integration of gender issues at the policy and planning levels within specific Government Ministries. The team comprises of more men than women who are passionate in this training. Today the team advocates and promotes gender issues within their own Ministries: Education, Government Policy & Planning Office, Crown-law Office and Religious Advisory Council. A unique feature of the team is the adoption of the budding-system where when a request for training is filed gender trainer's pair up (one man and one woman) to conduct the training.

Major obstacles encountered in all critical areas can be categorized as follows:

a) *Geography*

The scattered nature of our islands across 1,942,500 sq km (750,000 sq miles) of the Pacific Ocean makes the delivery of basic economic, communication and social services very costly and a significant challenge to promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

b) *Institutional capacity*

Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-

Priority gap identified

The Girl Child

Part three: Institutional development

a) National mechanisms

A special Government unit focussing on women development has existed since 1993. Today, the Gender and Development Division sits within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and has two staff, a Gender Snr Programme/Research Officer including a Director. The Division's budget provisions covers for personnel and operational costs only, therefore it relies heavily on Donor Agencies for funding of Programmes, Projects and Technical Assistances in order to achieve its outputs. Since 2007, the overarching vision of the Division is: *'women share with men significant leadership roles in Government, in business, and in the community. Women also have opportunity and choices to use their skills, knowledge and experience, and to be equitably remunerated for it'*. The Division has an annual work programme and works closely with other Government Ministries and Agencies, Women's Organisations and women in the Outer Islands.

At the Outer Islands level, there are *Women Development Officers (WDO)* employed on fulltime as well as part time basis administered by each Island Administrations. The Women Development Officers are responsible to the Island Secretary and have a range of functions including being the focal point for information and contact about issues of concern on women and to raise awareness of island and national matters in response to the concern. The officers also provide advisory services and technical assistance to women groups on their respective islands; work with the Island Women Council to ensure the progress of women and develop annual work programmes, including training programmes for small businesses involving handicrafts.

b) Focal points – working groups

The "*Pathways to Development*" report approved by Cabinet the formulation of the following Working Group to guide the implementation of the Reports recommendations in conjunction with the Law Reform Committee based at the Crown Law Office and the group comprised of the Head of Ministries and Agencies from: *Crown law Office, Ministry of Education, Health, Justice, Internal Affairs, Office of the Prime Minister, Office of the Minister of Islands Administration (OMIA), and the Department of Police*

The Gender and Development Division is to provide secretarial services to the working group.

Cabinet approved the "*CEDAW Law Reform Programme*", and further approved the scoping work to be undertaken on a review of relevant parts of family law and review of some parts of the Constitution being undertaken as well as preliminary research being undertaken on whether civil legal aid and victim assistance should be explored. The foregoing work to be monitored by the Working Group of selected Heads of Ministries which has already been established by Cabinet in relation to CEDAW legislative consistency.

e) Monitoring mechanisms

The monitoring mechanisms established to measure progress in the promotion of gender equality is coordinated by the Gender and Development Division in partnership with the National Council of Women. The practice is that within specific programmes, projects and workplans core sets of indicators are developed and used to monitor the progress against objectives and outcomes.

These key indicators are continually refined and additional indicators are selected as they are developed to enhance the monitoring process. Avenues used to monitor progress are through consultation meetings, forums and bi-annual conferences with Government Ministries and Agencies, NGO's, Civil Societies and Private Sectors.

f) Indicators – data and statistics

As indicated in this report, lack of sex-disaggregated data is a barrier to the promotion of gender equality. The areas where data is

Part Four: Remaining challenges and actions to address them

Further actions and initiatives

There is a need to intensify our efforts towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. This will require, amongst other things the following:

- a) The review of the 1995 National Policy on Women, and the formulation and adoption of a National Policy on Gender and Empowerment of Women in the near future.
- b) To develop the national machinery's capacity to coordinate the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors and levels of government, including through the use of gender-responsive budgeting processes.
- c) The implementation of the CEDAW Law Reform Programme 2008/09.
- d) Introducing Temporary Special Measures to increase women's participation in parliament in preparation to the upcoming 2010 General Elect¹⁰

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Government of the Cook Islands, State Party Report on CEDAW, December 2005,

Te Kaveinga Nui: Pathway for sustainable development in the Cook Islands – National Sustainable Development Plan 2007 – 2010 Report, Central Planning and Policy Office (Office