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A Social Focus for Women Internationally

Today, on International Women's Day, NCWNZ is releasing the first of four consultation documents that will be used to gather feedback from women in New Zealand on the Government's performance against the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

"I can think of no better way to celebrate International Women's Day than by releasing a consultation document which will support women's work on CEDAW. Certainly the first of its ilk in New Zealand, and a tool we will in the long-term be making available to other women's organisations around the world," says Elizabeth Bang, NCWNZ National President.

Anne Else and Alison Carew, the editors of the previous NGO report to the CEDAW Committee, put the original idea for a consultation document forward. NCWNZ opted to undertake the work in-house the first time around.

"It won't be perfect this time around, but following debrief with stakeholders at the conclusion of the consultation period, we hope to give women's organisations a tool that they too can use to move their situations forward," says Elizabeth Bang. "Following some fine-tuning, we will send the template to the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP), the body mandated by the United Nations to provide advocacy advice and tools for NGO engagement in CEDAW."

IWRAP is already using some tools and mechanisms from NCWNZ for educating other NGOs on how to effectively engage in CEDAW.

"Our fact-sheets, which we used last time around when reporting to CEDAW, were requested by IWRAP as best practise models," says Elizabeth Bang.

NCWNZ developed fact-sheets that updated key issues raised in the NGO report 2007 and provided further questions the CEDAW Committee could use when questioning the Government. One particular fact-sheet dealt with the "Male-backlash" which supported the introductory climate change report, crafted by Anne Else.

The climate change report analysed and quantified media-bias in reporting of women's news, and identified the types of pressures women were dealing with in their operating and living environment. The fact-sheet gave rise to recommendation 23 which called for:

"23. The Committee calls upon the State party to implement a national campaign on the importance of equality between women and men in a democratic society, to increase understanding of the meaning and content of the substantive equality of women and to eliminate negative stereotypes associated with men's and women's traditional roles in the family and in society at large, in accordance with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention. The Committee also recommends that the State party encourage the media to project non-stereotypical and positive images of women, including minority women,

and promote the value of gender equality for society as a whole, including through further measures to sensitize members of the press, television and other media on gender equality issues. The Committee requests that the State party report on measures taken and their impact in its next report.”

“We want to make a difference to women around the world. Often organisations such as NCWNZ are questioned about our legitimacy to raise New Zealand women’s issues with the CEDAW committee, given we do not experience the level of suffering of developing countries for example,” says Elizabeth Bang.

“Our response to critics is this; we attained the vote first, we were the first to have a woman-mayor in the British empire, and we still measure in the top five countries for women’s progress. Without our insight and discussion on problems women in New Zealand face, then solutions to these problems would not be made available to those countries which near the same level we have reached. We provide the snapshot of what lies ahead and we help to smooth out their paths – it is no different from the help New Zealand women provided to British and American women, when they sought suffrage.”

The first NGO consultation document entitled Module One is now available on the NCWNZ website at <http://ncwnz.org.nz/ngo-consultation-module-one/>.

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