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Human Rights Day

December 10 marks the adoption and proclamation, in 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But 61 years on, the fight against discrimination towards women remains a primary objective for the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ).

“The theme of Human Rights Day 2009 is non-discrimination – this is particularly relevant for women who have faced, and continue to face, discrimination in many aspects of their lives,” says Elizabeth Bang, NCWNZ National President.

“One of the most widespread violations of human rights is violence against women and girls, which results in physical, sexual, and psychological harm or suffering. Violence is the biggest cause of injury and death to women worldwide.”

Violence against women is rampant in New Zealand, especially domestic violence and sexual abuse. During the last *16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence* NCWNZ ran an online forum on the issue of domestic violence. The results show that domestic violence has touched the lives of almost all respondents.

This Human Rights Day, NCWNZ is sending the message that eliminating violence towards women must become a priority. The measures needed are numerous and include prevention, protection, prosecution and compensation.

“The current situation in New Zealand is not satisfactory; not only are women denied their right to live free from violence, they are further prevented from claiming their economic, social and political rights through lack of assistance and support for victims of violence,” says Elizabeth Bang.

“The recent changes to ACC guidelines for sexual abuse victims have resulted in less women having access to counselling, despite the fact that violence against women is increasing. This is unacceptable and shows a lack of commitment to ending discrimination towards women.”

Violence against women has been recognised internationally as a grave human rights concern. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, established to strengthen and complement the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, affirms that violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women and impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that countries have a responsibility to ensure “that women subjected to violence and, where appropriate, their children have specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.”

“Freedom from discrimination is one of the basic premises of international human rights law, yet the NZ Government continues to cut back on social services, facilities and programmes that support victims of violence and sexual abuse, most of whom are women,” concludes Elizabeth Bang.

Further Information:

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