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**ENVIRONMENTAL REFUGEES DESERVE RECOGNITION**

In its oral submission on the Immigration Bill, the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) voiced concern about the status of environmental refugees needing to enter the country.

NCWNZ was concerned that briefing papers to the government advised against granting refugee status to environmental refugees.

In September 2006, NCWNZ were successful in having the International Council of Women (ICW) adopt policy that calls upon all its members to urge their governments to review immigration conditions and procedures to accommodate potential environmental refugees. Members were also requested to urge their governments to plan for ways in which environmental refugees may be integrated into other localities, with input from those communities affected.

“Approximately 25 million people worldwide are displaced because of war, persecution or natural disasters and because of these circumstances the government needs to rethink its policy on environmental refugees,” said NCWNZ National President Christine Low.

The recommendations that NCWNZ put forward to the select committee were:

- Prepare legislation to address the issue of environmental refugees under the Immigration Act via the current consultation on this Immigration Bill.
- That the definition of refugees not be limited to the out of date Convention on the Status of Refugees.
- That New Zealand supports the redrafting of the Convention on the Status of Refugees.
- That New Zealand considers recalculating the current immigration quota schemes to provide greater time for integrating refugees or migrants into New Zealand life.

“It is NCWNZ’s desire that New Zealand show global leadership in this area, especially in the context of climate change and the predicted impact on low lying areas in the Pacific region,” concluded Christine Low.

ENDS

Further Information:

Christine Low, National President

Ph: 03 357 8887 or 021 065 5565

National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ)

PO Box 12 117

Wellington

Email: [ncwnz@ihug.co.nz](mailto:ncwnz@ihug.co.nz)

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