

UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

39TH SESSION

INITIAL REPORT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

by

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Introduction

Distinguished Chiefly and ...

KARAKIA (TRADITION)

*Te Atua nui saruru ki henua
E Kui Moana e, uru mai
Akatautea mai
Seihia mai to sei rauru
Parehia mai to pare maka
Akavahinematua mai
Teia o mihanga
Teia o turuturu
Teia o hono, e tangi akaroroko atu nei
Kite kava o to hiahia*

Translation:

KO AI TATOU (WHO WE ARE)

Madam Chair,

I am greatly honoured to represent the Cook Islands here. By appearing before you and the Committee to make the inaugural presentation on the efforts of the Cook Islands to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in our country and for all Cook Islands women is so far the highlight of my political career. At this

I know that we will go much, much further

I also acknowledge the presence of Mrs Vaine Wichman, Ms Ann Taruia and Ms Kairangi Samuel. They represent Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) in the Cook Islands. The fact that there are two men in the delegation is a twist of fate and not a deliberate act to block women from making the presentation on behalf of the Cook Islands. For me I so happen to be the Minister that resubmitted the

CEDAW Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

against ignorance won the day and here I am. The other man in our team happens to be the Head of the Ministry that will forge through bureaucracy and obstacles

These outer islands are less developed and are divided into the Northern Cook Islands and the Southern islands. More than 40,000 Cook Islanders live in New

TE VAKA MOANA (OUR CANOE JOURNEY)

Cook Islands Constitution

are treated fairly and equally. That belief is based on its laws, history and traditions, and its perception of the world. I believe they hold this view with respect to women. It is a view that is however taken for granted. I will elaborate on this later. But the following examples can attest to boosting that view:

When the Cook Islands attained self-government from New Zealand in 1965, a woman was appointed to the position of Speaker of Parliament.

Islands is indeed a very communal society. That is, social relations exist and thrive because of the kinship connections of Cook Islanders.

understood by Cook Islanders that there is greater strength and effectiveness in

Where to from here?

I made the point

women are treated equally and fairly in the Cook Islands. But if we for instance, as a way to approach the matter, contextualize the place of women and their role in various Cook Islands villages and organizations, we will see a very different picture.

For example, many Cook Islands

In relating the foregoing, I am conscious that given our relatively long association since 1985 with CEDAW, that there might well be an expectation that the Cook Islands should be much further advanced than we are in our national efforts to

- adopted the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy in 1985;
- participated in the Conference that formulated the Nairobi Strategy;
- consented to New Zealand acceding to CEDAW on our behalf in 1985; and
- Hosted the third Pacific Islands Regional Conference on Women also in

- ✓ Women and Leadership and Decision making; and
- ✓ Women and Natural Resources (the Environment).
- Adopted a 'Plan of Action' to achieve the goals and objectives of the Policy, based on the BPA.
- Translated both documents into the Cook Islands Maori language and widely disseminated them throughout the islands.

Sadly, 1995 also heralded in the worst economic recession in the Cook Islands' history.

has ever experienced since self-government. By 1997, the government service was reduced to less than half the number of public servants and the promising uncourse

funds to bring two representatives from each of our Outer Islands to Rarotonga for that Conference.

AKAMOUANGA E TE TOPIRIANGA (Accession to CEDAW)

Madam Chair

Your Committee's equitable approach towards its participating countries, combined with our increasing understanding of the provisions of the Convention itself, has contributed towards encouraging my Government to accede to CEDAW in our own right. As you know, that process was completed last year.

CEDAW Reservations

Further, my government's enhanced understanding of CEDAW and its relevance to the situation in our country, coupled with our recognition of the evolving nature of our society led my government, as recently as last week, to lodge our instrument

~~for the withdrawal of our instrument of accession to CEDAW.~~

In respect of the armed services _____

currently serving in a peace mission in Solomon Islands. We also have Cook
Islands women serving as soldiers in the _____

1. The Land Court, established in 1902, recognized women's rights to own land and property in equal measure to men. Consistent with the evolving community attitudes towards traditional chiefly titles, the Court also recognized women's rights to such titles

6. Government's budget continues to accord the highest priority towards providing equitable access to health and education services.

including those in the Outer Islands. Some of the Millenium Development Goals have already been attained by our country such as free universal school enrolment for all children up to the age of 15 coupled with a high literacy rate as well as low child and maternity mortality rates.

7. The first woman (not a Cook Islander but a New Zealander) to be a Judge in the High Court was appointed this year. A number of Cook Islands women hold the position of Justices of the Peace – they preside over legal matters over disputes in land ownership for example. Or they take pleadings in criminal matters.

8. The theme for the most recent biennial Conference on Women held in April was: "Me and my rights" who focused on women's rights and empowerment.

10. Early this year, a Law Reform Committee was formed to spearhead the nation's law reform process. This will facilitate the CEDAW-related legislative reforms that have already been identified through a study undertaken two years ago.

undertaken two years ago

- The definition of discrimination (as contained in the Convention) to be incorporated into domestic legislation.

Special measures to be identified in order to increase the participation of

In conclusion, we welcome this opportunity for commencing dialogue with you and the members of this Committee. We now have a glimmering of and understanding about the numerous shortcomings of our Initial Report and look

~~forward to the assistance of the distinguished members of this Committee to~~

~~1~~

guide us in addressing such shortcomings. More importantly, we look forward to your guidance during this dialogue as to the options available to us in seeking to accelerate the pace in which we can implement and comply with the requirements of the Convention.

As you would have read we have used the metaphor of a *vaka* (canoe) during this

