



New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Inc

Whakaminenga Wahine o Aotearoa kua whiwhi Tohu

P O Box 6566

Dunedin North, Dunedin, New Zealand

15 December 2009

1.

Submission in support of a petition in the name of Jane Prichard, Pacific Women's Watch, New Zealand, on cultural under-age marriages in New Zealand.

To the Justice and Electoral Select Committee.

Introduction

This submission is from the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Inc.,
PO Box 6566,
Dunedin North

Dr Dorothy Page, President
Contact: (03) 455 3488
Dr Linda Robertson, Public Affairs Convener

The Federation of Graduate Women was founded in 1921 and represents more than 700 women in branches throughout New Zealand.

We do not wish to appear before the committee to speak to the submission.

The Petition

The petition of Jane Prichard and 46 other signatories asks the House of Representatives to examine the practice of cultural marriages to under-age females and to initiate legislation that will effectively intervene in the prevention of abuse of human rights arising out of such marriages in New Zealand.

The petition arose from information given to a forum arranged by Pacific Women's Watch (NZ) in Auckland on 21 November 2009, entitled 'Young Women of Tomorrow – Changes and Challenges'. A Somali girl described her experience of being married, in New Zealand, at age fourteen. She explained that such marriages were not uncommon and often involved dowry abuse and abuse of migrant women.

NZFGW's Reasons for Supporting this Petition

The New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women is committed to the advancement of women through education and to the well-being of all women.

As an affiliate of the International Federation of University Women NZFGW adheres to its Policy and Action Document:

Its **Purpose** includes:

- the development of lifelong learning for women and girls
- promotion of the status of women and girls
- international co-operation and full human rights for all

Its **Resolutions** support legislative means at all levels to promote human rights and call on governments, inter alia, to work for the abolition of violence against women in families, and against the disadvantaged.

They call on governments to support the rights and well-being of the child, especially the girl child.

The petition is entirely compatible with these statements of policy and calls to action.

In summary:

2.

NZFGW opposes cultural under-age marriage because it is a clear violation of human rights.

Marriage with a female under the age of consent is against the law in New Zealand and thus involves girls who are legal minors in unlawful conduct.

It interrupts their education and thus their chance of advancement in society.

It places vulnerable girls at serious risk of abuse.

It exposes them to the danger of pregnancy at a very young age.

Recommendation

We ask the committee to urge the House of Representatives to take action in this matter: to investigate the practice of cultural under-age marriage in New Zealand and to initiate legislation that will intervene effectively to end the abuse of human rights involved in such marriages.

Dr Dorothy Page,
President, NZFGW