

## **The New York CEDAW Experience**

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Dunedin, Auckland, North Shore, Christchurch and Wellington Branches of Graduate Women were some of the 138 diverse women's groups who contributed to *Women Experiencing Discrimination the Aotearoa New Zealand Non Governmental Organisations Report* facilitated by the National Council of Women of New Zealand.

I was selected with Beryl Anderson, the Immediate Past President of NCWNZ and current Convener of the NCWNZ Parliamentary Watch Committee, to present the Report to the CEDAW Committee in New York.

I was fortunate to have been one of the presenters of the last Report and it was perhaps this experience that led to my further selection.

I became most involved in the process prior to New York in terms of preparation of our oral presentation which, in the extremely limited time available, set out for the monitoring committee the key issues that the contributors to the NGO Report considered were currently facing New Zealand women. Overwhelmingly, the outstanding issue was *violence in all its forms*.

Other issues included stereotyping; the gender pay gap, especially in the private sector; women's participation in decision making, particularly on boards in the private sector; and the undervaluing of motherhood and caregiving.

Financially, women suffer due to serious deficiencies in child support; repayment of student loans (which is impacting on child bearing and home ownership); the concern that Kiwi Saver may not benefit women as much as men. These in particular led to our demand for gender analysis of **all** Government policy.

While we spent over a week in New York, the focus was not on the oral presentation but on meeting and talking with the CEDAW Committee experts. Lobbying these women (and one Dutchman) and answering their probing questions was a positive experience and personal challenge. I can assure you that they had read the report, and from time to time specifically referred to it when asking questions of the NGOs and the Minister.

The Government presentation is akin to a Ph D oral or Court of Appeal grilling for a whole day, but possibly even harder, as sometimes 12-15 questions were asked at a time. The Minister, joined in the afternoon by the Chief Executive of Women's Affairs, generally gave fulsome responses to questions, but at the end of the day some appeared to have been omitted, probably due to time constraints and the overwhelming number of questions.

Following the Government presentation, Beryl and I prepared over two pages of comment on the presentation, which we circulated to the experts the following day. These comments drew the experts' attention to issues that we did not believe had been covered, or in the case of a couple of questions, such as the Government stance on school donations, where the NGO and Government positions were quite different.

From a personal perspective, it was again a privilege and a personally rewarding and challenging opportunity to pit oneself against such knowledgeable experts. It was also really stimulating to be working at such a high policy level. (And this time I did manage to see the Statue of Liberty).