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Submission on the Universal Periodic Review

Background Information

Rural Women New Zealand was established in 1925 by women who wanted better social and economic conditions for rural communities. Since then, Rural Women New Zealand has been committed to connecting with the rural community and providing an authoritative voice on rural health services, education, technology, rural business, environment and social issues.

Rural Women New Zealand is committed to supporting the empowerment of women and children within rural communities.

Rural Women New Zealand works to advance the social and economic well-being particularly of communities outside the main urban areas of New Zealand and welcomes the opportunity to speak on behalf of its members in order to promote human rights throughout New Zealand.

Rural Women New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to provide insight on potential areas of review and believes that it is an excellent chance to address human rights issues in rural communities of New Zealand.

Introductory Executive Summary

In order to gather information for this submission, Rural Women New Zealand reached out to the members to see what they believed the primary human rights issues currently are in New Zealand and how they intersect with our mission of growing dynamic communities. In this submission we will discuss topics including violence against women and girls, migrant workers, victim support services, rural health, economic equality, rights for disabled persons, issues for the older generation and gender equity.

Inaccessibility to the same resources as urban counterparts, as well as geographic isolation, were reoccurring issues observed in this research.

Rural Women New Zealand urges the Human Rights Council to ensure the state party takes action on the matters laid out in this submission.

General Comments

1. Domestic Violence

- 1.1. New Zealand's Domestic Violence Act 1995 aims to reduce and prevent domestic violence, however it does not make any comment on the additional issues faced by women and children in New Zealand's rural communities.
- 1.2. Geographic isolation prevents families in need from accessing help and support services. Additionally, limited access to vital technology, poor connectivity and social pressure are all factors that make it more difficult to seek and receive support in rural communities.
- 1.3. Although there are support services available for victims, many members noted that these services were far from their localities, ranging anywhere from 40 minutes to two hours' drive away.

Recommendations:

- 1.4. *In order to prevent more cases of violence against rural women and children, New Zealand must provide additional services to rural communities to help overcome the added obstacles that families in these areas face.*
- 1.5. *New Zealand must deliver on its commitment to increase access to high-speed broadband by 2022 and ensure that cellular coverage is available to at least 80% of New Zealand's geography by 2022.*
- 1.6. *New Zealand must facilitate a broader support network within rural communities so that there are safe places for women and children to connect and support each other.*

2. Rural Health

- 2.1. Rural Women New Zealand members identified that the primary concern when assessing rural health is the geographic isolation and greater distance to health services.
- 2.2. Rural communities are diverse; while some households are close to hospitals and services, some need to travel two hours to the nearest secondary hospital.
- 2.3. Access to services such as maternity care, children with health issues, and ongoing treatments such as chemotherapy is challenging with some rural patients needing to travel up to 2.5 hours to receive the services they require including emergency healthcare.
- 2.4. In rare instances, air ambulance services such as by helicopter are available, however, these services are being reduced.
- 2.5. Rural Women New Zealand applauds the use of mobile health services to deliver services such as mammograms, however, these units can still be one hour's drive for some rural households.
- 2.6. Additionally, if families don't have easily accessible transport to health services, ailments can potentially go unnoticed. Apart from the issue of distance, rural communities are especially vulnerable if the service they need is not available at all in the area such as with mental health.

Recommendations:

- 2.7. *New Zealand must ensure that the Mental Health Inquiry recommendations include consideration for rural communities given that many farmers are subject to depression due to isolation, adverse events on the farm, or cash flow issues.*

- 2.8. *New Zealand must address the geographical maldistribution between midwives in urban and rural areas to ensure that all expectant mothers have equal access to the care that they need.*
- 2.9. *New Zealand must support the provision of health centres closer to rural communities.*
- 2.10. *New Zealand must not see tele-health services as a substitute for face-to-face health services for rural communities.*

3. Disabled Persons

- 3.1. New Zealanders with disabilities face many obstacles, and these hardships can be especially difficult to deal with when placed in a rural setting.
- 3.2. Lack of appropriate transport and access to rural schools were the most pressing issues regarding people with disabilities.

Recommendation:

- 3.3. *New Zealand must facilitate the provision of easily accessible transport options for those with disabilities to access employment, education, and health services in rural communities.*

4. Older Persons

- 4.1. The older generation of New Zealanders residing in our rural communities are more vulnerable than their urban counterparts due to geographic isolation.
- 4.2. Loneliness and depression is common amongst older persons in our rural communities which is exacerbated by geographic isolation and they are therefore prevented from accessing important medical and social attention. This is especially the case where their age or health prevents them from keeping their independence through such things as drivers licences.
- 4.3. There is a significant lack of local rest homes for senior citizens, and subsequently a lack of health services and workers in rural aged care.
- 4.4. If no rest homes exist in the local rural community, elderly must either leave the community to access the care they need or a family member becomes responsible for their care. Both options create a burden on rural families that is not as commonly seen in urban communities.
- 4.5. 'Ageing in place' is favoured in government policies however, this option is only available to rural older persons if there is adequate support to enable to stay in their own homes as they age.

Recommendation:

- 4.6. *New Zealand must make aged care and aged care services more readily accessible to rural communities.*

5. Migrant Women

- 5.1. Migrant women who come to New Zealand as rural workers or as a member of farm work families, are subject to additional challenges such as overcoming language barriers, residency status and earning a fair wage when doing farm work.

Recommendations:

- 5.2. *New Zealand must set up English language learning support and community networks for migrant workers.*

- 5.3. *New Zealand must take into account the intersectionality of migrant women and the challenges of living in rural New Zealand, particularly when it comes to language, culture and personal safety.*

6. Gender Equity

- 6.1. Rural Women New Zealand has a firm stance on promoting gender equity in rural communities.
- 6.2. The empowerment of rural women and girls is extremely important and a cornerstone of the Agreed Outcomes of the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
- 6.3. Gender inequity and human rights issues are still prevalent in New Zealand's rural communities.
- 6.4. Rural women are disadvantaged because they are subject to additional challenges of geographical isolation, inability to access support services and poor internet access.
- 6.5. Rural women are at risk from experiencing harassment, abuse and violence on their farms because they have limited access to support due to geographic isolation, limited cellular coverage and limited internet access.
- 6.6. Pay and employment is also a primary concern for many rural women who believe that the Government can improve on closing the wage gap between men and women.
- 6.7. Many women living rurally can't access paid employment due to distance, and often work on the farm is unpaid or underpaid.
- 6.8. If similar work is available to rural women it is often not paid at the same rate as it would be if in an urban centre.
- 6.9. Significant progress is still to be made on increasing the numbers of women involved in rural businesses and rural and provincial governments.
- 6.10. Only one out of sixteen million-dollar earning CEOs in New Zealand's agriculture business is a woman.
- 6.11. One out of fifteen chairs in New Zealand's agriculture business is a woman.
- 6.12. The average percentage of women board members in New Zealand's agriculture business is 20.5%.
- 6.13. In the thirty-one provincial districts researched, eight districts have women mayors, four districts have women chief executives, and the average percentage of women councillors is only 31%.
- 6.14. In rural districts, only four out of the twenty-six districts have women mayors, six had women chief executives, and the average percentage of women councillors was 38%.

Recommendations:

- 6.15. *New Zealand must increase the number of women leaders and decision-makers in the rural sector.*
- 6.16. *New Zealand must ensure equal pay for work of equal value and facilitate employment opportunities for rural women.*

Concluding Recommendations:

7. **New Zealand must ensure reasonable and fair access to all services and a reduction in inequalities for women and rural families.**
8. **New Zealand needs to undertake rural impact analyses at every stage of policy development and/or service delivery plans.**
9. **New Zealand needs to commit to gender impact analyses on all policy development and factor in the intersectionality of gender with rural living.**
10. **New Zealand should promote access to transport, healthcare, education and technology for rural communities which is comparable to towns and cities.**

Yours sincerely



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