

Resolution E-6b Prevention of Forced Marriages

Tena Koutou Katoa

(greetings and best wishes)

Ko Hellen Swales

Article 1. – UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

As an organisation we can influence and shape the world we live in. We have a responsibility to advocate and ensure that **ALL** women and children, have the opportunity to choose their own destinies, and this is surely the legacy we want to leave them.

Paving the way on such a controversial topic as forced marriages means we are ready to address and advocate, on what some would perceive, as the untouchable.

Reports have been commissioned by a number of countries on the issue of forced marriages, for example, from Canada "*The Incidence of forced marriage in Ontario*" which concludes:

"Victims of FM are particularly vulnerable due to age, lack of economic power, immigration status, and issues of shame and fear. In recognition, Canada must reconsider its lack of action on the issue of FM and implement in full the recommendations of this report."

A similar study in Europe drew the same conclusions.

At the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2014, in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, it was noted that, violence against women and girls, and early forced marriages are still a matter of critical concern.

A direct Quote:

"The commission recognizes that unless **ALL** dimensions of gender inequality are addressed the empowerment of women and the realisation of Human Rights for women and girls will not and cannot be achieved."

In my country, we know from our own members, that young women are often taken on holiday overseas, forced into an arranged marriage, or if they refuse, returned to a life of abuse and violence.

Instances of murder, suicide, mutilation and rape are becoming more common. There are horrific stories being told by heroic women who have the courage to stand up and be heard. **Not** an easy thing to do when you are, at times, going against the elders of your culture. Left feeling outcast, where do they turn for support?

Empowerment and education are enabling these women and girls to speak out. We must therefore, continue **our** journey to enable and support **their** freedom of choice. This is what underpins every person's basic human right.

I urge you with all my heart to support this resolution.

Nga mihi mo tenei whanga mai BPW

(Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of NZ Aotearoa BPW)