



25 March 2004

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**Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
on the Inquiry into New Zealand's Relationship with Tonga**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 nationally organised societies. It has 33 Branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

General Comments

This submission is based on information gleaned from many sources. These include Wanganui members of the Pan-Pacific South-East Asian Women's Association, Radio New Zealand interviews and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZ Aid), which is a semi-autonomous agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As well NCWNZ Branches provided a breadth of information from members who had worked in the Kingdom of Tonga or who had made in-depth studies of that nation's history and sociology.

Specific Comments

Input into this submission sought from all NCWNZ members and branches and its ten specialist Standing Committees, was by way of request for comment in the March 2004 issue of the NCWNZ monthly newsletter, The Circular. This submission is based on the responses to that request for comment on the three areas of concern noted:

**1. Official development assistance from New Zealand is about \$2.3 million p.a.
a. Is this enough?**

The overall consensus was that current official level of resources is enough but that none should be given, if at all, as actual cash, and should not be given at the expense of other Pacific nations whose political structures are more democratic than those in Tonga.

b. How should such aid be spent?

The Wanganui PPSEAWA summed up the general opinion of the NCWNZ Branches, saying that aid should be given in the form of technical assistance related to agriculture, horticulture, health and education. This view reflects the aims of NZ Aid but some individual suggestions are worth noting here because they illustrate a concept familiar to students of development economics, that of 'appropriate technology', i.e. technology that makes the most of existing infrastructures and skills and is not too dependent on expensive imports.

One example is the need to train Tongan youth in simple mechanics for vehicle and farm implement maintenance. In the area of education, another idea is for more students to attend the University of the South Pacific, rather than come to New Zealand. The implication was that students studying nearer to home would be more likely to return to Tonga, and give their own people the benefits of their tertiary qualifications. It was noted that NZ Aid has policies already in



place regarding sending students to Fiji and Vanuatu but the perception is that more needs to be done in this area.

However aid moneys are spent, whether by official government agencies or NGO's, members were generally concerned as to how this would be monitored. This is an aspect that NCWNZ strongly advises the Inquiry to address, especially in the light of the prevalent rumours of corruption.

2. Trade. Tonga is heavily dependent on Japanese and US markets. Should we import more of Tonga's agricultural produce - especially tree-crops like cocoa, bananas, copra?

NCWNZ believes that Tongan trade is far too dependent upon Japanese and United States' markets. To meet the requirements of Japan's consumers, much land is being cleared to grow melons and similar perishables. An OXFAM spokesman described on Radio NZ how these crops are sprayed frequently and almost indiscriminately before exporting them. NCWNZ is very concerned about the effects on both women of child-bearing age and children who may handle these crops. It is noted of course that bio-security is of paramount importance in agricultural trade everywhere - but at what price? NCWNZ recommends that there be more emphasis on tree-crops and two-tier farming where animals and trees can be co-productive.

Bio-security risks could be minimised by food processing such as canning, freeze drying, prepared meals. There are opportunities for local industries, especially small businesses where women excel. It is recognised however that New Zealand's first allegiance, when it comes to Pacific trade, should be to the Cook Islands and Western Samoa.

Dependence on trade with the United States could be reduced if Tonga's reliance on oil for nearly all its energy could be minimised. NCWNZ is pleased to see that NZAID is planning solar electrification for Tonga. It is hoped that this will be supplemented by the installation of windmills. Members would not like to see increased local energy generation appropriated by corporate interests for their own profits.

Tonga's tropical climate gives it a comparative advantage for the production of and trade in specialised goods and services. NCWNZ believes that this advantage must be harnessed for the benefit of the Tongan people at least as much as for her trading partners. Trade theory is predicated on the mutual benefits afforded participants. In today's world such is all too rarely the case.

3. Tonga is an hereditary monarchy where the King also appoints the executive. Does New Zealand have the right to demand more democracy for Tonga?

Governance in Tonga has become a sensitive subject. Restrictions on the Tongan news media have evoked much comment in that of New Zealand. NCWNZ members stated that although Tonga does not have nearly the level of political democracy they may deem desirable, they noted that it is largely thanks to New Zealand's influence in the nineteenth century that Tonga is not only a united Pacific state but is also a sovereign state.

History shows that missionaries and later, lawyers, based in New Zealand and Australia shaped Tonga's Constitution. As one of the Whangarei members pointed out, 'the first code of law said that **selling land to a foreigner was prohibited**, which meant that the Imperial powers had less interest in interfering in Tongan Affairs.' She also noted that the Constitution made all land belong to the King, his own position being secured by the appointment or at least recognition of 'noble' families with hereditary rights.

Members noted that the result was a marriage between the adoption of a formal constitution and traditional hierarchical social patterns. Whether a more modern democracy evolves from this structure could be a matter of time.



"We can help but not control", observed one contributor - yet, said another, "Developmental assistance is the decision of the New Zealand Government and not a 'right' that Tonga should expect".

NCWNZ regards the proposed Economic and Public Sector Reform Programme with the setting up of a Public Commission as a positive sign of change. Members noted that top public service positions tend to be commanded by people with links to the Tongan monarchy, but see that as not unusual in a developing nation. However, NCWNZ advises caution over the proposal to corporatise the Tonga Post Office. Members believe that corporatisation does not necessarily bring economic or social benefits, especially if debt equities are offered on the open money markets, often a fast track means of foreign control.

Summary

NCWNZ recognises the significance of this Inquiry to the Pacific nations as a whole. Aid using appropriate technology is seen as the best way of spending the aid dollar. Members welcome more trade but on equitable terms. As for both Government and NGO aid to Tonga, the key word is 'transparency'.

NCWNZ appreciates the opportunity to share its views.

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Economics Standing Committee