Amnesty International welcomes New Zealand’s engagement with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and notes that it responded favourably to a number of recommendations made by other states during its first review in May 2009, including recommendations related to the elimination of violence against women, child abuse and equality and non-discrimination. Amnesty International notes however, that many of New Zealand’s responses were unclear as to the extent to which they supported certain recommendations, making it difficult to ascertain what level of commitment New Zealand made to implement these recommendations.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
New Zealand continues to have high rates of violence against women with a 2011 UN Women report finding that 30% of women in New Zealand experienced physical violence from intimate partners between 2000 and 2010. These figures are even more concerning as many cases go unreported.

While Amnesty International welcomes the government’s pledge to take action through supporting the UN Women's Initiative, ‘COMMIT’, to end violence against women and girls, there are few government-sponsored initiatives which focus solely on domestic violence or violence against women. Instead, government initiatives around family violence have been implemented which do not always appropriately address the issue of domestic violence. For example, within the Family Court there have been instances where women have been forced to attend couple counselling with their abusers. A further example is highlighted by the government’s proposed Family Court Proceedings Reform Bill. While the Bill does exclude cases of domestic violence from mandatory mediation or family dispute resolution, research has shown that victims of domestic violence do not always disclose such information, and may therefore have to take part in initiatives that are inappropriate for addressing domestic violence.

In addition, while initiatives such as Police Safety Orders, under which an alleged violent person may be removed from the home for up to five days, are welcomed, these do not adequately address the root causes of such violence and provide only short-term safety arrangements for those at risk.

UN Women also reported that 12% of women experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner between 2000 and 2010. In view of this, it is concerning that the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence was disbanded in 2009 after only two years of operation. The Taskforce's 2009 report provided 71 recommendations for the prevention of and response to sexual violence. However, four years on, many of these recommendations have not been implemented, including the implementation of the National Sexual Violence Prevention Plan and annual monitoring of levels of progress.

CHILD ABUSE
Levels of child abuse in New Zealand remain alarmingly high with 11,466 substantiated reports of child abuse to the Child Youth and Family service between 1 July and 31 December 2012; up from 10,734 the previous year.
In response to this, the government released a White Paper in October 2012 setting out a comprehensive strategy involving data collection, indicators, targets, and accountability in relation to child abuse. A Children’s Action Plan was also released by the government.

While Amnesty International welcomes these steps, it remains concerned that the government has taken a narrow focus to addressing child abuse and not looked at the relationship between child abuse and contributing factors such as domestic violence, and poverty.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Health, education, employment and income inequalities persist at alarming levels in New Zealand, with the highest nationally recorded level of income inequality among the general population recorded in 2011. Inequalities disproportionately affect Māori and Pacific populations and the New Zealand Human Rights Commission has raised institutional bias (structural discrimination) as a contributing factor to these inequalities.

Following recommendations by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2012 to address institutional bias in the delivery of public services, Iwi (Tribes) and the police have developed an innovative strategy aimed at reducing victimisation among Māori. It is regrettable, however, that similar strategies to address institutional bias are yet to be developed across all public service sectors, including health, education and justice.

These inequalities extend to civil and political rights where for example, Māori continue to be over-represented within the criminal justice system. Māori comprise 50 percent of the total prison population, but only 15% of the general population. In 2011, the Ministry of Justice refused to acknowledge and address any possible institutional bias in this regard.

THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

International human rights instruments

New Zealand has not ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons; the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families; the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

In addition, New Zealand retains three reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is still considering whether to opt into the individual complaints process under Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Parliamentary processes

Since 2008, the Human Rights Commission has recorded over 70 Bills which passed through at least one stage of legislative urgency. As a result, on certain occasions Amnesty International and other organisations have been unable to put forward submissions on legislation which had significant human rights implications because of the insufficient time allowed for civil society input. The Public Health and Disability Amendment Act (No 2) is one such Act which was passed under urgency on 17 May 2013. This Act has deeply concerning human rights implications in terms of access to an effective remedy in that it prevents people from bringing unlawful discrimination complaints about a family care policy to the Human Rights Commission or the domestic courts.

A human rights select committee would strengthen parliamentary processes and ensure that appropriate consideration is given to human rights in the passage of new legislation. While section 7 of the Bill of Rights Act 1990 (BORA) requires the Attorney-General to report any human rights inconsistencies at the introduction of the...
Bill, there are no procedures to ensure that the Member of Parliament introducing the Bill respond to the Attorney-General’s report and no further update from the Member of Parliament is required before the final reading of the Bill.

There is also no requirement for the concluding observations from UN treaty bodies to be tabled in Parliament.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION ON THE GROUND

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES


In June 2013, the government enacted the Immigration Amendment Bill providing for the mass detention of asylum seekers under a group warrant if they arrive in a group of thirty or more. Under this law, asylum seekers may be detained for an indefinite period of time in violation of international human rights and refugee law. Initially a group warrant will allow detention for up to six months, with the warrant able to be renewed successively every 28 days.

The claimed purpose of the legislation is to provide an efficient processing system in the event of a mass arrival of asylum seekers and to deter people smuggling. This is despite research indicating that community-based processing systems are an effective27 and efficient28 method and the fact that the Crimes Act already prohibits people smuggling.29

Amnesty International,30 and a number of other organisations, including UNHCR,31 the New Zealand Law Society,32 and the New Zealand Human Rights Commission,33 have raised concerns about the language of the Bill referring to asylum seekers as ‘illegal migrants’, the fact that there is no explicit presumption against detention, the detrimental impact of detention on the mental health of asylum seekers,34 and the risk of breaching the right not to be arbitrarily detained.35

Other provisions in the Act apply to all asylum seekers and remove existing protections and freedoms.36 It includes power to suspend the processing of asylum claims (increasing the risk of arbitrary detention), limits access to judicial review and removes the obligation on the Immigration Protection Tribunal to provide an oral hearing to subsequent asylum claims (infringing on the right to a fair trial).37

Policy changes were also announced alongside the Act which require asylum seekers who come as part of a mass arrival to re-apply for refugee status after three years and place limits on the rights to family reunification, breaching the right to respect and protect family life,38 the right to be free from discrimination39 and the right not to be penalised on account of illegal entry or presence.40 At the writing of this submission, the status of these proposed policy changes is unclear.

Australia and New Zealand have announced a deal in which New Zealand will resettle 150 of Australia’s processed refugees on an annual basis as part of the 750 refugees it takes within the UNHCR quota system in exchange for the option of sending asylum seekers arriving in New Zealand to refugee detention centres in the Pacific, should there be a mass arrival of asylum seekers in New Zealand.41 Amnesty International is deeply concerned by this announcement as Australia’s offshore processing system and conditions at Nauru and Manus Island refugee detention facilities do not meet international law and standards, and have been heavily criticised including by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.42

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

New Zealand ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1978. As a party to this Covenant, New Zealand has an international obligation to progressively realise the rights contained in the Covenant by all appropriate means, including the adoption of legislative measures.43
Despite this, economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) are not fully protected in domestic legislation alongside civil and political rights in New Zealand’s Bill of Rights Act 1990. Without explicit protection within domestic law, there are no adequate remedies for a breach of ESCR, nor is there an obligation on New Zealand to consider ESCR in laws, policy and practice. The courts have found that ESCR are not subject to judicial review, as “[w]hether New Zealand has fulfilled its international obligations is a matter on which it may be judged in international forums but not in this Court.”

The Human Rights Commission has limited powers to investigate and resolve complaints of certain types of discrimination through alternative dispute resolution; it should also have the powers to investigate and resolve complaints relating to the breach of ESCR.

New Zealand has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to ICESCR, which would provide additional remedies through international forums.

In 2012, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern about the continued failure of New Zealand to fully incorporate the ICESCR into its domestic legal order. It urged New Zealand to include these rights in the 1990 Bill of Rights and to ensure that draft laws, regulations and policies are compatible with ESCR and make additional efforts to raise awareness of ESCR among parliamentarians and policy makers.

CHILD POVERTY
The Ministry of Social Development has found that up to 270,000 children (up to 25% of all children) live in relative poverty. These children have difficulty accessing rights to adequate housing, healthcare, food and education. The lack of an official measure of child poverty in New Zealand, the lack of co-ordination between policies and the failure to establish a national action plan for reducing child poverty levels has been raised as a concern by the Human Rights Commission and other organisations.

Amnesty International welcomes the creation of the Expert Advisory Group on Child Poverty by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and the government’s acceptance of some of the recommendations contained in its report, Solutions to Child Poverty. The report focuses on promoting paid employment, however there is some concern that it fails to adequately recognise the responsibility of government to provide a minimum standard of living for those who may be unable to provide for themselves. As such, the government’s initiatives lack a clear, rights-based approach to addressing child poverty that centres on the best interests of the child, and that recognise child poverty as a multi-faceted problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY THE STATE UNDER REVIEW

Amnesty International calls on the government of New Zealand to:

UPR follow-up

- Establish initiatives with a specific focus on tackling domestic violence and which address the root causes of violence against women;
- Develop a comprehensive system of recording and analysing data on violence against women, with data disaggregated by sex, type of violence, relationship of perpetrator to the victim and ethnicity, and to monitor the effectiveness of legislation, policy and practice relating to all forms of violence against women;
- Reinstate the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence and implement the recommendations in its 2009 report;
- Take a holistic approach to tackling child abuse by incorporating policies which recognise the wider contributing factors to child abuse, including domestic violence and child poverty, and ensuring these relationships are addressed in the Children’s Action Plan;
• Develop strategies across all public service delivery sectors, including health, education and justice, to identify and address institutional bias against Māori and Pacific people.

**Normative and institutional framework**

• Ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families;

• Remove the three reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

• Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including opting in to its inquiry and inter-state mechanisms;

• Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure;

• Opt into the individual complaints process under Article 14 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

**Parliamentary processes**

• Ensure that there are open and transparent consultations with civil society on proposed legislation which may impact on rights and freedoms, including by developing clear guidelines that limit the circumstances in which a bill may be passed urgently;

• Establish a parliamentary human rights select committee to conduct comprehensive human rights analysis of both primary and secondary legislation in line with domestic and international human rights laws and standards, and to publicly report its findings;

• Require the Attorney-General to table reports on the consistency of legislation with the Bill of Rights Act 1990 and international human rights law and standards on a bill’s third reading as well as its introduction;

• Require the Member of Parliament responsible for submitting a bill to respond publicly to reports from the Attorney-General that provisions in a bill are inconsistent with the Bill of Rights Act 1990;

• Table all concluding observations from UN treaty bodies in Parliament for debate.

**Protection of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees**

• Ensure that adequate safeguards are put in place to ensure that the Immigration Amendment Act 2013 is interpreted so as not to breach New Zealand’s domestic and international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention;

• Ensure that any policy changes associated with the Immigration Amendment Act 2013 do not breach domestic and international obligations;

• Prohibit the transfer of asylum seekers to detention centres in third countries which do not meet international human rights standards, including those that have not ratified the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and have no existing laws or procedures to assess asylum seeker claims immediately;

• Increase the number of refugees resettled through the UN quota system from 750 to 1000 per annum.

**Economic, social and cultural rights**

• Incorporate economic, social and cultural rights into the Bill of Rights Act 1990;

• Take steps so that the competent authorities review draft laws, regulations and policies to ensure their compatibility with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

• Provide for effective and enforceable legal remedies on economic, social and cultural rights;
• Extend the Human Rights Commission’s alternative dispute mandate to resolve disputes in relation to economic, social and cultural rights;

• Make additional efforts to raise awareness of economic, social and cultural rights among parliamentarians and policy-makers.

**Child poverty**

• Adopt a rights-based approach to child poverty by:
  
  • Explicitly incorporating children’s rights into domestic legislation;
  
  • Ensuring any new initiatives to tackle child poverty take a rights-based and child-centred approach;
  
  • Initiating a child budgeting exercise to specify strategic allocations to implement children’s rights, track this implementation, monitor results and evaluate impact;
  
  • Developing and implementing a holistic national action plan for reducing child poverty.

END NOTES


9 Since 1 July 2010, the police are able to issue Police Safety Orders (PSO’s). Further information on PSO’s is available at http://www.police.govt.nz/safety/home/domesticviolence.html#police-safety-order


12 Child Youth and Family is a service of the Ministry of Social Development that works to promote and protect the safety and wellbeing of children and families. More information available at: http://www.cyf.govt.nz/about-us/who-we-are-what-we-do/index.html


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17 Poverty has been found to be a key risk factor in child abuse. For a discussion, see Child Poverty Action Group (June 2013), Child Abuse: What role does poverty play?, available at http://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/Publications/130610%20CPAG%20Child%20Abuse%20Report%201%20June%202013.pdf


19 For example, 50% of poor children in New Zealand come from Maori or Pacific Island backgrounds. See report on Household Incomes in New Zealand at endnote 19 above.


24 New Zealand has made three reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first of these holds that children whose parents do not have a legal right to be in New Zealand are not entitled to education, health and welfare benefits. The second is that the Government reserves the right not to legislate further or to take additional measures as may be envisaged in article 32 (2) as it considers that the rights of the child provided for in article 32 (1) are adequately protected by its existing law. The last is a reservation of article 37(c) in circumstances where the shortage of suitable facilities makes the mixing of juveniles and adults unavoidable; and further reserves the right not to apply article 37 (c) where the interests of other juveniles in an establishment require the removal of a particular juvenile offender or where mixing is considered to be of benefit to the persons concerned regarding age mixing in prisons.

25 See Annex 6 of the submission of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission for this list.

26 New Zealand Public Health and Disability Amendment Bill (No 2) available at http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2013/0118/latest/whole.html 30. For background, in 2012 the New Zealand Court of Appeal affirmed that the policy of not paying family carers to provide disability support services to disabled family members constituted unjustifiable discrimination on the basis of family status. In direct response to this decision the Government passed the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Amendment Act (No 2) under urgency on 17 May 2013. The Act effectively ousts the jurisdiction of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission to assess cases for discrimination around the Act and removes any potential domestic remedy for unlawful discrimination relating to family care policy.
27 The International Detention Coalition & the La Trobe Refugee Research Centre, There are Alternatives: A Handbook for preventing unnecessary immigration detention. Available at http://ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/Events/IDC.pdf

28 The International Detention Coalition has found that a cost saving of 93% was noted in Canada and 69% in Australia on alternatives to detention compared to detention costs, see http://idcoalition.org/cap/handbook/capfindings/

29 Under section 98C of the Crimes Act 1961, it is an offence to knowingly arrange for an unauthorised migrant to enter New Zealand for material benefit (with a maximum penalty of twenty years imprisonment and/or $20,000 fine). Section 98C of the Crimes Act 1961 is available at http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1961/0043/latest/DLM328720.html

30 For more information regarding these concerns, see Amnesty International’s submission on the Immigration Amendment (Mass Arrivals) Bill (8 June 2012), available at http://www.amnesty.org.nz/files/120608%20Submission%20Immigration%20Amendment%20Bill.pdf


35 Article 9, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), article 9, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and section 23, NZBORA. Also see article 31(2), 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.


38 Article 16, UDHR

39 Article 7, UDHR and section 19, NZBORA

40 Article 31, 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees


45 Lawson v Housing New Zealand [1997] 2 NZLR 474 (HC) at [488] and [498] per William J.

46 New Zealand’s alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can be used in relation to the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in section 21 of the Human Rights Act 1993. A list of these is available here http://www.hrc.co.nz/enquiries-and-complaints-guide/what-can-i-complain-about


