Dear Chief, Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch

DRAFT GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS


The Commission agrees with the view of the independent expert, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, that the guiding principles could become a tool to help States and other actors operationalise existing human rights obligations for persons living in extreme poverty.

While the guidelines relate to extreme poverty and human rights, they are relevant to all State parties and national human rights institutions in our domestic, regional and international work. Specific issues highlighted in the principles that are pertinent to the New Zealand Human Rights Commission’s current domestic work programme include:

- the need for disaggregated poverty data and public policy commitments to reducing child poverty (paragraph 54)
- the impact of structural inequalities in reinforcing intergenerational poverty (para 21)
- promoting awareness-raising measures to eliminate negative stigma against persons living in extreme poverty [and] fostering respect for [their] rights and dignity (para 44).

The New Zealand Human Rights Commission strongly supports the focus in paragraph 54 on the need for comprehensive data collection systems that provide disaggregated data highlighting the specific attributes of extreme poverty within each country.
Furthermore the Commission supports the guiding principles’ focus on children, given they comprise the majority of those living in extreme poverty. The Commission has recently selected a number of key societal impact measures to assess the level of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in New Zealand. One of these five measures is a decrease in the extent of child poverty. The Commission hopes to work with government agencies on monitoring New Zealand’s performance against agreed measures of relative and absolute income poverty and deprivation.

It is concerning that often groups most vulnerable to poverty, such as the homeless, are excluded from formal data collection processes. In addition, States parties may not currently collect sufficient quantitative data about some key variables.

New Zealand’s recent Review of Human Rights 2010 identified severe limitations in the availability of data in relation to disabled people and sexual and gender minorities. The Commission’s work has highlighted high levels of both under-employment and employment discrimination against disabled and transgender people. Yet too often data limitations prevent adequate analysis of legal and policy responses required to respect, protect and fulfil human rights for these marginalised groups.

The guiding principles offer an opportunity to highlight the need for comprehensive data that shines a light on those groups vulnerable to extreme poverty. The Commission welcomes the independent expert’s emphasis on a human rights approach which empowers people living in extreme poverty and recognises them as “subjects with rights, and as potential agents for change”.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide some brief comments in support of these important draft guiding principles.

Yours sincerely

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Te Amokapua

cc  Katharina Rose
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