



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

54th Commission on the Status of Women New York, March 2010

Shaila Mistry,

Member WG-USA and Moderator of IFUW Next Generation Network

Being a delegate to the 54th Session on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an extraordinary privilege. The CSW provides an opportunity to experience our society through the highly charged lens of a global perspective of current efforts and initiatives across the 191 member states. The CSW is a crash course in understanding the big picture of how nations come together to discuss and plan policy that ultimately becomes a moral and ethical standard for all countries to ratify and adopt.

This year CSW was particularly special as it commemorated the 15 years of hard work since the Beijing Platform of Action (BPFA) was created. Almost 4000 woman attended the CSW. They all brought their experiences to the table, showing their country's advances, supporting each other's ideas, offering resources and mentoring, wanting to learn and exchange ideas - all keen to speed up the process of change. They were all united without barriers of culture or language, age, race or religion, determined to make the world a better place.

IFUW at the CSW

IFUW is privileged to be part of shaping the leadership in this mammoth body congregation. This year IFUW was represented by 22 official delegates from around the world. Their key experiences have been incorporated in the report entitled "IFUW Delegates at CSW: A compilation of impressions and highlights".



IFUW organized two panels as part of the parallel event programme. **Networking Centres on Gender in Higher Education**, was chaired by Professor Randell and attended by 60 participants from around the world. Professor Randell summarized the progress being made by CGCD at KIE in Rwanda and the work being done by gender centers in seven other African countries. Afterwards five speakers shared their experiences of Networking Centre's (see website for the list of speakers).

The second event, organized by the Finnish Federation of University Women, was the 5th International Helvi Sipilä Seminar called "**Yes to Power**". It was to honor the renowned Finnish Minister's work and the work of women with the UN, CSW and their bodies, and in other international and national women's

International Federation of University Women

Fédération Internationale des Femmes Diplômées des Universités

10, rue du Lac, CH-1207 Geneva, Switzerland; Tel: (+41 22) 731 23 80; Fax: (+41 22) 738 04 40

E-mail: ifuw@ifuw.org Website: <http://www.ifuw.org>

organizations. The seminar was chaired by Leena-Maija Lauren, of the Finnish Federation of University Women (FFUW) and attended by 50 CSW participants. The main focus was on the need for intergenerational leadership and membership of women's organizations.

Speakers included Minister Stefan Wallin, Minister of Culture and Sport, responsible for Gender Equality in Finland, who summarized the extraordinary progress being made on women's issues in Finland. Their latest success was related to achieving the quota of at least 40 percent for women on boards in the government and private sectors.



In addition to the two panels, the IFUW team has been very active on a number of key UN projects including The Working Group on Girls. IFUW also worked closely with key organizations such as UNICEF to shape, formulate and influence the work connected to the girl child.

CSW UN Assembly sittings

The opening remarks included comments from Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues, who gave a brief overview of the current state of gender parity across the globe.

Afterwards the country reports from the 181 member countries were presented by high level national representatives. Over all, the economically stronger countries have seen better progress while the developing countries are still struggling to make some inroads. It is interesting how what may seem a small gain by the western hemisphere, in fact represents a huge milestone of progress in another and vice versa. Therefore, perspectives of progress involve both a cultural macro and micro understanding of impact of each achievement.

Unlike previous years, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, gave his inaugural speech at the celebration of the International Women's day. He was very encouraging and supportive of women issues. He mentioned that as a father to daughters, he completely agreed that women must have the same possibilities as men.

Gender Architecture Reform (GEAR)

NGOs across the globe have worked tirelessly to formulate and advance the campaign on the UN Gender Architecture Reform (GEAR) which supports the forming of a new women's entity within the UN.

At the inaugural opening ceremony on International Woman's day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called on governments to take action to create this new entity without further delay. On March 4, the UN was filled with a sea of enthusiastic women carrying "GEAR UP NOW!" signs and a similar sign was hung on the balcony on the day of his speech as part of the UN official observance of this day.

CSW 2010 focused on advancing the GEAR campaign through both civil society and governmental support and bring full pressure for the formation of the new entity. The GEAR Campaign's greatest concern is not whether the entity will be created but WHAT will be created. NGOs have been very vocal on this matter and in packed parallel events (since 2006) have formulated and outlined proposals for the

entity. The goal is to have all the steps of the informal discussion on the System Wide Coherence SWC resolution written and presented in the General Assembly (GA) session ending June 2010 and to have the final approval by September (the end of the GA).

Overall gains and challenges across the globe

When addressing the CSW, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton described the 19th century as the time of the struggle for freedom from slavery, the 20th century as a surge for freedom from totalitarianism, and the 21st century where major inroads will be gained on women's rights. Within this perspective we can say that a lot of gains have been made in every field of education, economics, politics, health and community. Women's rights and dignity have advanced in many respects.

On an optimistic note, the presentation of the country reports clearly showed many advances for women. Yet the gains are still miniscule when considered it against the goals that are yet to be reached, like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the BPFA.

The following is a brief overview of the different subjects that were discussed, showing their progress and the challenges. The most impressive factor is the effort that is being exercised across the globe at all levels by so many towards gender parity and the amelioration of women condition and environment.

CEDAW: Thirty years after its creation, CEDAW has reached almost universal ratification with 186 countries signing the declaration. Exceptions still include the US. Secretary Clinton stated that CEDAW is a priority for President Obama and his administration. NGO's and the women's movement in the US have worked long and hard and are gratified to know that they are getting closer to US ratification. This support was later confirmed by the US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, at US Mission briefings.

Economic independence: Changes at governmental level through legislation have improved accessibility and opportunities for women. Government, corporations and small employers are in general required by law to put policies in place that recognize gender equality in their employment and advancement to higher ranks. Models of micro finance have extended options of economic independence to new aspirants of micro entrepreneurs. Once again, there is a change in mindset recognizing the role of women's economic contribution to the family, community and economy. There is also a growing respect at the UN, CSW and NGO level for women in the private sector, particularly entrepreneurs, for their direct contribution in creating jobs and raising the dignity of women.

Education: Statistics from a broad range of nations and across primary and secondary school levels show that more girls and women are entering into education. There is a growing shift of perspective which recognizes the value of educating girls and women. The gains are particularly significant in India, China and many African states. At university level, in the Americas and Europe, women have in some cases surpassed men in several fields, including science and technology. In countries such as India and China, we are seeing that more and more women are entering non-traditional fields such as engineering. This is also reflected in the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce, particularly at professional level.

Violence against Women: Never has there been more effort by governments, educational and world organizations, and individuals to decrease and prevent violence against women. This fact was brought up in all country reports and at the high-level and NGO-level discussions. Despite all these efforts, it was obvious that violence against women continues to be pandemic.

Trafficking continues to grow, particularly in the light of global economic recession where women are sold as commodities. The use of the internet has enabled such practices to flourish with more vigor. In the chilling words of one such perpetrator "Drugs and bullets can be used only once but a women can be used over and over ". Trafficking remains the third most lucrative illegal activity.

Rape as an instrument of war continues in horrific proportions. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in certain countries and cultures continues to prevail causing serious health issues for young girls, often

resulting in permanent health damage and even death. Widows and displaced women were identified to be a growing population as we witness more war stricken parts of the globe. However, greater attention was shown this year to this hidden group that is lost in the blur of socio cultural mores.

Women on the labour market: Women in the labour market takes on a new meaning when viewed within the context of formal and informal markets in the developing nations. On a visit to one such nation Secretary Clinton was informed that “women’s labour does not count”. Why? Simply because they are not visible on the balance sheet of the companies or the economy.

Climate change: Gender implications of climate change was a recurring theme in this year’s CSW. It is an eye opener to understand that women plant the seeds, water the crops, harvest the produce, package the food, earn for the family, cook the food and raise the population that will maintain and lead the land. Yet, they are considered to be ‘non-contributory’. All of these contributions are increasingly harder as the ravages of climate change take their toll. Millions of women are affected by it in their daily lives.

High-level panels

High-level panels required a higher level clearance and attendance was possible only with special tickets. These panels were held at the ECOSOC level and were a unique opportunity to witness presentations by senior government officials. Presentations were theme related and generally more open and discursive in sharing of current and emerging issues in each county. This year the very relevant theme on Women in Parliament was discussed.

Women in Parliament:

Parliaments have a very significant role in enforcing gender equality and women rights, particularly as a model platform for women in high decision making positions. It was reported that there are more women in high legislative and decision making positions than ever before, particularly as parliamentarians. This



enables them to have a voice in policy making. But, despite the progress made, of the 189 countries researched worldwide, women made up only 18.8% of the parliament – a small growth from 11.8 % previously. Fifteen years after Beijing and the goals and target of the Special ECOSOC meeting, progress has been slow.

A major stumbling block to increased participation is the mindset that currently prevails concerning the participation of women in Parliament. It is the belief that other goals of achievement have to be reached before the gender equality issue can be addressed i.e. economic development has to be accomplished first before women claim gender parity.

Different methodologies were adopted by different nation states in achieving gender parity in their own parliaments. These included: a) adoption of quota systems; b) increased political accessibility; c) availability of women candidates; d) change in belief that male is the natural leader and shift in norms having women on the team at high levels

Conclusions

Much progress has been made over the years through the determined efforts of Member States and the United Nations, in partnership with NGOs. However, it was universally agreed by all countries that neither the Millennium Development Goals nor the Beijing Platform for Action goals have been met. The implementation of the commitments made to women at world conferences, through treaty obligations and at international gatherings is far from being fully achieved, especially when these promises are laid out in national and local settings. Yet all countries recognized the considerable efforts and attention that women's issues have received.

Below is a summary that enumerates the goals that have not been met:

- Violence against women remains pan endemic
- Women are not included in peace building discussions
- Education of women at all levels needs exponential improvement
- MDG 5: least progress on improving maternal health
- Climate change has caused havoc on women
- Women's work is hidden in the informal economy and in some countries the informal economy is expanding faster than the formal one
- Women are under-represented in higher levels of decision making in corporate structures, governments and education
- Economic crisis has created many disproportionate effects on girls

What are the factors that have hindered progress of women's issues?:

- Woman continue to be under represented in decision making process
- Women continue to bear a large burden on unpaid work in the informal economy
- Pursuit of the Beijing agenda has progressed with little involvement of men
- Lack of substantive legal frameworks
- Gender stereotyping leading to occupation segregation
- Lack of changes in recruitment systems
- Insufficient responsibility by parliamentarians

To make a difference, we need to work with a multi-prong approach. As IFUW members, as an ECOSOC organization, as members of other NGOs and as community and civil advocates, we can do a great deal. Each one of us can make a difference at different levels and we have seen that at the CSW. We have to work at the grass root level to touch people's lives and we must also work at the decision making level. We can join efforts and work at thematic level and at issue level.

IFUW members are urged to raise awareness on women's issues locally and globally. We thank you for your work in trying to make the world a better place for all our sisters.



*Shaila Mistry, Member WG-USA
Moderator Next Generation*