



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

55th Commission on the Status of Women New York, March 2011

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1. Introduction

The priority theme of the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in New York 22nd February – 4th March, 2011 was ‘access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work’. During the session, 3,500 delegates from UN member nations and over 450 non-government organisations from around the world attended a total of 160 events held in the United Nations centre.

These events consisted of the Commission’s formal session during which statements from government delegations were received and action on the draft proposals discussed, and side events, which were panel discussions usually hosted by one government mission with several invited speakers from government and/or NGO experts on a topic. Hundreds more parallel events, organised by a wide range of non-government organisations, were also held in nearby meeting places.

IFUW was represented by a high-level 20-member delegation, all experts in key areas directly linked to the CSW themes. The delegation was headed by IFUW President Marianne Haslegrave. At least one member of the IFUW delegation attended all of the formal meetings of the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

2. IFUW priorities and strategies

Prior to the commencement of the session, and in accordance with the CSW protocols, IFUW submitted* a written statement outlining its position on the theme. IFUW focused particularly on the following aspects of the theme:

- a. the importance of secondary school education for girls particularly in developing countries;
- b. the importance of getting girls to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

IFUW delegates attended as many of the side events as possible each day, using these opportunities to participate in discussion and raise the organisation’s profile. Delegates were also encouraged to attend parallel events organised by other NGOs.

*co-signed by a the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, International Council of Women, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, International Union for Fraternal Relations Among Races and Peoples, Pan Pacific and South East Asian Women's Association, Women's Federation for World Peace International, and the Worldwide Organization for Women

3. NGO Consultation Day

The 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women began unofficially on February 21, 2011 with Consultation Day for participating non-government organisations. Five hundred women and a few men from around the globe gathered to organize strategies to be used in the coming days to advocate for the rights of women and girls in relation to education, training and employment. Ms Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was the keynote speaker. Workshops on the Commission's priority theme were held and the key outcomes from each workshop, known as the *Expectations* were included in the Commission's Outcome Report.

Expectations arising from the planning day were that the Commission would identify gaps in the education of women and girls, including education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and propose action that would lead to equal access to education and to full and decent employment.

4. Official CSW Programme

February 22: The opening General Assembly of the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women began with a welcome that provided excitement and promise. The welcoming address was given by the newly appointed Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Ms Michelle Bachelet. She went on to say that the lack of equality between women and men and discrimination against women impede progress in development, peace and security, and the realization of human rights. Under her guidance, UN Women will focus on five thematic priorities than can show measurable results:

1. Expanding Women's Voice
2. Ending Violence against Women
3. Strengthening Peace Participation
4. Enhancing Economic Empowerment
5. Gender Equality in Budgeting

Following Ms Bachelet's address, the remained of the first meeting of dealt with the election of officers (Item 1), the adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (Item 2). Item 3 was a general discussion reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.

Two parallel high-level round table discussions took place later in the afternoon. These round table discussions addressed the access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including strategies for promoting women's equal access to full employment and decent work. Speakers included ministers, deputy-ministers and high level representatives of NGOs including the ILO and Plan International. IFUW was the official NGO respondent for one of the two high-level round tables and was represented on the podium by Professor Joy Carter, Vice-Chancellor of the of Winchester and a member of the British Federation of University Graduates. Joy received the largest round of applause when she pulled out a newspaper published the day earlier in the UK that included a full page add that read, "*We women are kidding ourselves, it is still a men's world.*" Joy pointed out three things that are needed at the present time.

1. Role models are needed at every stage in a person's education from elementary school to graduate and post graduate education.

2. There is a need for research on why women drop out of the scientific, engineering and math fields. We need to drill all the way down.
3. There is a need for quality child care for families.

February 23: Formal meetings on the second day of the session began with Panel 1; an interactive discussion in which technical experts identified key policy initiatives needed to accelerate the implementation of commitments. Panelists also highlighted the importance of science and technology for economic growth and the overall development of nations. Women's full participation in the production of science and technology was recognised as both an economic imperative and an issue of social justice. Panel 2, which addressed the same topic, was held in the afternoon.

February 24: General discussion of Item 3 the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly continued throughout the morning with many national delegates delivering their statements. In the afternoon, the Panel for 2012 announced the theme for the 56th Session of CSW: The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. General discussion of Item 3 continued in the second afternoon session from 15:00-18:00.

In the evening, UN Women, the new UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, celebrated its launch. Ms Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile has been appointed to lead the new organisation which replaces the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. The event brought political leaders, extraordinary women leaders, media personalities and celebrities including Nicole Kidman, Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and Shakira in music and celebration.

February 25: Panel 3 evaluated progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child". The panel was followed by a joint meeting of representatives of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Statistical Commission to exchange views on issues of common interest. Informal consultation on the agreed conclusions began later that evening.

February 28: Discussion of Item 3 concluded with the remaining national delegates delivering their statements. During the three open discussion sessions approximately 50 country delegations' made presentations. Almost all country delegations aligned themselves with statements already delivered by the representatives of their groups: the EU, Group 77 and China, the Africa Group and South African Development Community. In the same way, all the country delegations supported the establishment of UN Women. Developed countries indicated progress in the area of girls' access to secondary/tertiary education in science and technology, but had to admit that men continue to outnumber women in these areas. The number of women graduates employed in STEM has also increased but men still dominate.

The country reports tended to focus on positive developments: unresolved issues or new emerging challenges were not addressed. Problems still in need of attention include violence, early marriage and unwanted pregnancy that restrict or disrupt girls' education and employment. Although initiatives in eliminating violence against girls and women were also addressed as a heading in the presentations, the linkages between the two areas were not made.

A number of NGOs and Caucuses presented oral statements on behalf of their organizations during this session. These entities representing millions of women worldwide took a far more challenging line of argument and stressed the following points:

- Women and girls must be treated with respect and dignity. They must live in a safe environment and have access to equal opportunities in education and the work force. Their voices must be heard and their needs met. They need to achieve leadership positions. Governments and the civil society need to provide support, assistance and mentorship so that they can achieve these goals.
- Ownership of land and access to clean water, adequate food and affordable, reliable energy must be available without gender bias.
- Girls and women must be taught that education is a basic human right and they need mechanisms to access this right.
- Governments and communities must take a stand to prevent women and girls from being used as weapons of war and for trafficking. Laws must be introduced and upheld against these human rights violations.
- Boys and men need to be educated not to emulate stereotypes of masculine behaviour which glorify all types of violence including against women and girls.
- Large numbers of women are illiterate; very poor and rural women who are often isolated and have no access to education are particularly vulnerable.
- Schools must be safe and the journey to school must also be safe.
- There is a high dropout rate of girls in secondary schools in many countries for cultural and other reasons that limit girls' access to tertiary education and pursuit of careers outside the home.
- Women in STEM disciplines need assistance including work study programs, mentoring by professional women and funding.
- Education needs adequate funding for operating costs; teachers' salaries need to be sufficient to attract and retain quality staff.

Informal consultations on the agreed conclusions began in a parallel session during the morning as the general discussion concluded and continued in the afternoon.

March 1: Panel 4 considered emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men with a focus on sustainable development. Blerina Zoto attended on behalf of IFUW. In the afternoon, Panel 5 addressed the elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and the empowerment of women (CSW resolution 54/5). Marianne Haslegrave attended on behalf of IFUW. March 1 was also the deadline for the submission of draft proposals contributing to the agreed conclusions.

March 2: Closed meetings were held throughout the morning to consider the report of the Working Group on Communications (Item 4). These were followed by informal consultations on the agreed conclusions. IFUW delegates worked with their national delegates and country mission staff to incorporate IFUW principles into the draft resolutions.

March 3: The morning session followed-up the Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions (Item 5). Draft proposals were introduced to all delegates and informal consultations continued.

March 4: On the final day of the 55th Session, the Commission set a provisional agenda for the 56th session (Item 6); closed proceedings and opened the 56th session for the sole purpose of electing the Chair and other Members of the Bureau. The final day's meeting should have included adoption of the draft report (Item 7); however the Commission could not get agreement on the conclusions until 23:30. This is a rare occurrence and is further evidence of the hardening of opposition to gender equality among some national governments. The Commission on the Status of Women reconvened on 14th March to accept to final version of the agreed conclusions.

5. IFUW supported events

During the session a number of events are hosted by UN member states and UN entities. These events run parallel to the formal meetings of the Commission. On **28 February**, IFUW co-hosted a parallel event with UNESCO. It was a panel discussion on secondary education for girls: "*Advancing Girls Secondary Education: Obstacles and Opportunities*". The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, gave the opening address. Speakers included Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA; Abulkalam Abdul Momen, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the UN; Gill Greer, Director General, International Planned Parenthood Federation; Rebecca Winthrop, Director, Centre for Universal Education, Brookings Institute and Ya Marie Jah, student and advocate from Sierra Leone. Marianne Haslegrave, President of IFUW gave the closing address. She stressed to role for civil society and for non-government organisations like the IFUW in lobbying governments to ensure financial fairness in regard to women and presented copies of the *Multi-faceted Right to Education* to the panel members, explaining that the IFUW working group on advocacy had produced the book to assist their own national affiliates and other non-government organisations engaged in the campaign for girls' education.



IFUW member Sonya Hstman spoke at a second parallel event: "*Sharing Knowledge - Joining Forces - Gaining Power: Mentoring as a Tool to Empower NGO Women at the UN CSW*". This event was sponsored by the Austrian Federal Minister for Women and Civil Service and co-organized with Women in Development Europe and the International Alliance of Women. Speakers included Julia Gnther (WIDE) as facilitator, Marie-Claudine Mukamabano (Mentor for orphans in Rwanda) and Daniela Reiter, who is the founder of the mentoring project "genderize!" at the National Youth Council of Austria. Sonya Hstman (IFUW) who presented the "European Mentor Programme". It was said that mentoring is a tool to encourage networking in order to join forces and to become stronger as women— regardless of age, country of origin or social background and that it is important to promote an intergenerational dialogue. A lively discussion followed the panellists' statements and everybody agreed that mentoring is vital, especially at the CSW, to encourage and facilitate participation in a more effective way.

February 23: *"The Cutting Edge: Technology and its impact on Work, Wealth and Women's Leadership"*. This event was co-sponsored with The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Women's World Banking, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, National Council of Women, AAUW, Soka Gakkai International, Women Graduates-USA. It addressed the momentous changes in the developing world due to the rapid influx of technology, how change is affecting work,



finances and culture, and where the education of women and girls needs to develop to provide leadership in the future. Technology can be used to provide work, wealth and women's leadership and Women's World Banking can provide micro financing to assist women achieve autonomy. Women's World Banking has 39 members in 28 countries. It is important to insure that the women own the savings account and are the only ones who can get the loans and have access to the money.

February 24: *6th International Helvi Sipilä Seminar, "She Says YES to Education, South-North Dialogue"* Co-organized by the Finnish Federation of University Women, the National Council of Women of Finland, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations NYTKIS, the YWCA of Finland and the UN Women Finland National Committee

March 1: *"Girl Power: Voices Without Borders"* – IFUW was one of the sponsors of this creative theater piece written and performed by the Project Girl Performance Collective. It addressed social, political and cultural issues related to the priority theme of CSW55.

March 3 *"The IFUW Four Centers Address the Priority Theme (Geneva, New York, Paris (UNESCO) and Vienna): "Accessing and Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology"*, was presented. Speakers were IFUW delegate Cornelia Boldyreff, Saralyn Mark, Medical Advisor to NASA for ten years. Moderator was Anne Nègre, IFUW Vice President. Manjit Dosanji (Coordinator of Technology Transfer Network and Biomedical Applications in the Education and Technology Transfer Division of CERN and also IFUW representative to UN in Geneva), was unable to attend and her paper was delivered by Saralyn Mark and Anne Nègre.

7. Parallel events attended by members of the delegation

23 February: *Women in science and technology: the role of parliaments*. This event was organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Speakers discussed the benefits of using ICT in Parliament to strengthen and modernize the parliamentary processes. Social networking media including Twitter and Facebook can also be used to allow parliamentarians to stay connected with constituents. ICT is valuable because it disseminates information quickly. This high level panel was helpful in showing delegates how

technology could be used for capacity building in the political arena. Women's networks need to consider how they can use technology to become more effective.

Empowering Girls: Education and Technology. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Plan International, United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. UNICEF's Director of Programmes, Mr. Nicholas Alipui, started the session by saying that, based on the MDG summit in 2010, the progress achieved to date indicates that achieving the goals is quite feasible. There are financial constraints but if all came together for a last push it would be achievable. The panel consisted of representatives from UNGEI partners: Plan International, CISCO Systems (private sector) and UNICEF. Panelists noted that boys have a preference for studying science in both developing and developed countries. Since preference for subjects are determined well before secondary education, intervention to change attitudes needs to occur at an early age. Technological development is increasing the divide not only between boys and girls but also between different groups of girls with girls who do not attend school falling behind. There is a need to get more girls into school, implement a meaningful curriculum and support girls to continue with secondary education.

Quality education for girls leads to decent jobs for women. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labour Organization (ILO). Panelists emphasised the importance of developing employment opportunities to encourage girls and women to complete their education. Education also needs to be aware of employment trends and opportunities.

24 February: *Access to Education = Access to Employment* hosted by the Mission of New Zealand. The moderator was The Hon Kate Ellis, Minister for the Status of Women, Australia. Speakers from Kirabati and New Zealand discussed the importance of providing education that would lead to decent employment especially among Indigenous and Pacifica women in an environment that is already affected by climate change.

Girls' Voices - Promises Made: a review of CSW 51, hosted by the Mission of Ireland and featuring speakers from Ireland and Zambia. Very few governments have reached the targets set; this session examined the reasons and presented reports on progress to date in Zambia and Ireland.

Making Gender Statistics Meaningful on the Ground. Organized by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), UN Women. The availability of gender statistics was the topic for this early morning session. IFUW is lobbying the need for detailed statistics on girls and women in education, particularly at the tertiary level from undergraduate to professorial and Head of Departmental levels including what happens to women when they leave university.

25 February: *Gender statistics: Challenges and new directions.* This session, held jointly by CSW and the UN Statistical Commission was a dialogue between representatives of national statistics offices and national mechanisms for gender equality to discuss the state of gender statistics. Some countries have gender statistics staff or units, but many have no gender specific office; sometimes, the gender equality unit or women's unit has shared responsibility for gender statistics. Coverage of the gender statistics programme needs consideration: regular production of gender statistics, with regular review of adequacy of gender statistics to ensure that needed gender statistics to support policy formation are available and where not, that specific survey data is obtained. Several recommendations were made; most importantly that the UN Statistical Commission should take a leadership role to get back to the pre-Beijing statistics production.

7. Other side events attended by members of the delegation

Delegates participated in a wide range of side events each day. Some of the more interesting were the following:

- *Women and Children's Rights: Making the Connection at UNICEF House.* The panellists discussed issues related to promoting human rights of adolescent girls; elimination of child marriage and HIV/AIDS introduced by the moderator, who also posed the question of whether we were doing enough in human rights of girls and women. The need to do more, obtain support, join funds and effort, make linkages was stressed.
- *Global Women's Parliament.* This event was sponsored by South Asia Women's Watch, National Alliance of Women – India. It reported on the culmination of five years of planning by the National Alliance of Women in India. The goal was to have a nationwide parallel parliament made up of women leaders from all over India. It began with having meetings in each of the 27 states to identify women leaders, who were then trained in parliamentary skills including how to develop policy, write bills and develop action plans. The Parliament was held November 2-5, 2009. The organisers also challenged the women of the world to begin planning for a Global Women's Parliament in 2015. New Zealand proposed a Pacific Regional Parliament to resolve conflicts in the area; the US stressed that women must be able to imagine the change in order to change the world; in Kyrgyzstan they are implementing a comprehensive, pro-active five-year plan to identify women leaders; Sri Lanka is educating women leaders about the structure of government.
- *Launch of the 2011 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report - The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education.* The report was launched at Columbia University. Speakers included Irina Bokova, Director-General, UNESCO, Michelle Bachelet Under-Secretary-General, UN Women, Mary Robinson, President of the Mary Robinson Foundation- Climate Justice, Jeffery Sachs, Director, The Earth Institute, Columbia University, Graça Machel author of the UN report on the impact of armed conflict on children and Michäelle Jean, UNESCO special Envoy for Haiti.

8. Reflections and recommendations

The 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women was a bewildering experience for many of the IFUW delegates who had not attended previously, although some of the more experienced members found the session less hectic and complicated than it had been in previous years. Access to some of the meeting rooms within the UN was restricted owing to the Security Council discussions on Libya and space was hard to come by while the main building is undergoing renovation. Popular events were crowded and it was often hard to find room.

Delegates who had been to CSW previously also noted that some of the speeches made by national delegates were revisiting issues that had been accepted some years ago. In particular the Holy See's speech rang alarm bells and they adopted a position that was much more rigid than previously during the informal consultations on the agreed conclusions: wording that had been agreed since Beijing was now being questioned. Likewise the speech given by the wife of the Turkish President described the growing acceptance of the veil as a victory for women's rights.

Several delegates commented on the difficulty they experienced in locating and identifying other IFUW delegates. Suggested ways of overcoming this included:

- A daily briefing held at a regular meeting place that could be used to discuss strategy and important events: the Australian delegates met at 18:00 each evening at the Hilton Hotel which enabled them to discuss the day's events and make plans for the following day. This was raised as a priority more than once; it was felt that we should be more welcoming and inclusive to delegates who have travelled very long distances to attend and may also be finding it difficult to communicate easily in a language that is not their own. We need to be careful not to give delegates the impression that there is an inner circle to which they have not been admitted.
- Scheduling of 2-4 social events that would delegates to get to know each other. These could be linked to the daily briefing sessions, but they should be arranged in advance and listed in the calendar/schedule so that delegates can make plane accordingly. Suggestions include a dinner, breakfast meeting and weekend excursion to a place of interest in or near the city.
- The adoption of a distinctive badge or item of clothing similar to the bandannas worn by the ILO delegates
- Preparation of a guide for IFUW delegates that clearly explains the distinctions between formal sessions, parallel events and side events in English, other relevant languages including French and Spanish, outlines CSW protocol about participation and speaking and sets out IFUW's plan of action for the session. Much of this information is available on the website, but a concise form that is made available to delegates as soon as they are invited would be an asset.