COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 61
THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
March 13 to 24, 2017

Personal Notes
Hally Siddons
Graduate Women International Delegate
March 12 to 20
2017
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I was fortunate to have been one of a 20-strong delegation from Graduate Women International to the United Nations NGO Commission on the Status of Women – CSW61 in New York. We were ably led by our GWI President, Geeta Desai and were a mix of most interesting and inspiring members from Australia, Canada, the Congo, Egypt, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, and the USA. It was an exciting and invigorating time as we discussed global issues among ourselves and with many others from around the world. Our days and evenings were packed with multiple events at the United Nations, side events, parallel sessions off site, and special invitations to Permanent Missions.

CSW is a global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. As its priority theme this year the Commission addressed “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”. Also this year CSW continued to evaluate the challenges and achievements in implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. And as an emerging issue, CSW61 included the “Empowerment of indigenous women.”

The priority theme was an opportunity for all to unite for a common purpose - gender equality by 2030. If this is to be achieved, we must create an action-oriented plan that challenges individuals, NGOs, and local and national governments to ensure human rights for all women, and to develop gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Session after session confirmed the current vulnerability of women and girls, the violence against them, and too often the inequalities at home and in their workplace. Trafficking has become a huge issue. Looking ahead for the benefit of all society, we must keep the rights of women and girls at the forefront, remove the gender gap at work, ensure their access to technology, to land ownership, to finance, to higher and continuing education, and to positions of leadership in both public and private sectors and at organizational, labour and peace negotiations.

GWI is one of many NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC that prepared a written statement on the priority theme. The GWI paper focused primarily on the issues surrounding the empowerment of refugee
and migrant women and girls, a theme that would prove to be the focus of many presentations and discussions throughout our days at the UN.

Tragically the event was set in the environment of a growing nationalism in the world. A single empty chair was placed at the front of most venues to remind those present of those women who were not, because they were denied visas to attend CSW this year or were just too concerned to come. We were aware too of the curtailing of space for NGOs and the threatened huge funding cut to the United Nations, the only hope for so my women across our globe.

While the gravity of the global situation weighed heavily upon us, not all times were serious! I so enjoyed the camaraderie of our GWI group, and friendship at both the CFUW Dinner, and the joint GWI Women Graduates-USA luncheon. Canada welcomed Canadians warmly at its Reception at the Canadian Mission, and I felt indeed privileged to also be invited to the Reception at the Afghanistan Mission in honour of Dr. Sima Samar, and H.E. Delbar Nazari, the Minister of Women’s Affairs of Afghanistan. A highlight of the week was a lunch I had with Dr. Samar as she continues her courageous work in Afghanistan but always grateful for the efforts of University Women Helping Afghan Women, CFUW-Ottawa, in raising awareness and scholarships for her girls at the Gawharshad Institute in Kabul.

It was indeed timely to visit New York City and to once again experience its vitality. There is constant bustle and building everywhere to remind us that the creative and hard work of its founders, many of whom were refugees and immigrants, continues without stop. The energy of the city spills over to the UN which creates its own energy as world citizens come together to listen to and help each other. Of special delight this year was the generous offer of Geeta, our GWI President and delegation leader to share a ticket to the Opening Session with Secretary General Guterres and later Ministerial meetings, so that more of us might better understand how the whole CSW event works and the Concluding Statement evolves.

My report that follows covers detail of each of the sessions I attended. Sadly few had handouts this year and so names and positions of the speakers are often missing but hopefully the gist of the session is apparent. Repetition will represent repetition among the speakers but I encourage you to read on!

Hally Siddons, Delegate to CSW61 Graduate Women International
Consultation Day opened with a performance of music of several different cultures by the United Nations Singers.

Music from Many Nations to Open our Programme

WELCOME MESSAGES AND CONVERSATIONS

1. Susan O’Malley, CSW Chair
Chair O’Malley welcomed us to CSW61 and wished us all the best with the important work we had to do.
2. **Conversation with Phumzile Miambo-Ngcuka**, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women.

   **H.E. Ambassador Antonio de Agular Patriota**, Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women

   **Bandana Rana:**
   Moderator

   ![Phumzile Miambo-Ngcuka, H.E. Antonio Patriota, Bandana Rana](image)

   **Question #1**

   Against the backdrop of inward looking politicians, shrinking spaces and growing phobias, how can we strengthen the feminist movement?

   **Phumzile Miambo-Nguka:** against the backlash and inward looking phobias we have to organize to overcome these barriers. We have to optimize on what we have. Giving up is not an option. We have to expand our base and work with other groups. We need to encourage leaders to lead from the front.

   **H.E. Ambassador Antonio de Agular Patriota:** We must implement instruments we already have.

3. **Keynote Address: Dr. Mabel Bianco.**

   From Argentina, Dr. Bianco is a crusader for women’s rights in Latin America and in the world. She has implemented policies to save women’s lives, particularly regarding breast cancer, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive rights. Her work has built a stronger feminist movement in Latin America. It is cross-sectional, spanning medicine, public health, policy formation, feminist network building, and UN gender reform. Women have been killed under her watch because they have been defending human rights. She urged us not to forget the 39 girls killed recently in Guatemala. There should be no more women killed for defending their rights.
A great way to fight for our rights is to say what we need. We need to tell our governments and our society. We should say this is what we need to do because we agreed for it at the UN.

We need the private sector to understand women’s rights including in the labour force. We need comprehensive sex education for our youth. We need to change peoples minds and to respect each other. We need to allow people to choose. We fight for equality. We speak for justice.

10:30 to 10:40  Poetry Reading: Canadian poet, Rupi Kour.

We are strengthened by multi nationalism. We must uphold our rationalism and humanitarian ways to place the individual at the centre. We must build alliances to uphold rationalism and humanism and work across borders with like-minded leaders.

We must place the individual at the centre. We must defeat narrow attitudes, discrimination and xenophobia.

Some of her poems reflected the deep emotions and profound challenges felt by refugees and immigrants and experienced by her and her parents. While they are grateful to be accepted by their new country, refugees and immigrants understandably feel a profound sense of loss for home.

10:40 – 12:10   Women’s Rights and Gender Equity in the Changing World of Work

Panelists:

Radhika Batakrishnan
Faculty Director, Centre for Global Leadership, Rutgers University

Julianna Richter
Chief Operating Officer, Edelman

Elizabeth Tang
General Secretary, International Domestic Workers Federation

Esther Mwaura
Founder and Executive Director, GROOTS/Kenya

Respondent Lakshmi Purl
Assistant Secretary-General of the UN and Deputy Executive Director UN Women

Moderator: Kevin Cassidy: Office for the UN
Question #2: How do you change perceptions and attitudes and ensure you provide equal pay for equal value?

Society has to live up to women. A strong fair public education will provide the students with a chance.

Question #3: What is the relation between violence in the home and violence in the workplace?

Dr. Mandella was quoted, “when good women do nothing they are part of the conspiracy.”

Violence is a universal problem. We need vigilance, laws and accountability. Violence will not disappear. We need to work more closely together.

We need to take back home plans to implement. We need to work more closely together to ensure implementation and we need to accelerate implementation.

Women are living in poverty. Kenya is a prime example. We need economic empowerment and the opportunity to release the potential. Eighty per cent of the agricultural food in Africa is produced by women, yet this is not recognized. Women need more control of the land. However, going forward both rural life and agriculture are an opportunity and potential for women. Women need control of the land.

Juliana works in the private sector and tries to change behaviour at work. She works in a company of few women and white only. She was concerned about taking time off for her pregnancy leave but her boss was supportive and so she was fortunate. She was then able to become a good mentor for others who followed. In hiring it is important to bring women in at the right level. In many organizations and in training there is an unconscious bias that is alive and well. Although much work is top down there are mentorship programmes in some places to help.

The 2016 Oxfam Report was quoted. Eight individuals had half the wealth of half the world’s population. In a short decade this number had gone form 388 to 62 to 8.

What is the state of the economy? GM made more money financing finances for purchasing to buy cars than the cars themselves.

What if we had an economy where human rights were the purpose?
We need to recognize women’s unpaid work.

There are sixty-seven million domestic workers in the world. Many countries have domestic workers that are not considered workers. Alliances are important as we move forward. We have to help domestic workers enjoy basic rights as workers and women.

We have to use the framework: we have to hold on to the gains we have made as we are facing pushback. We need to consolidate these gains and elaborate on what they mean.

**Lunch:** On own at restaurant of our choice. I had arranged lunch for 6 at Bella Blu.

**Break Out Groups:**

1. Ending All Forms of Forced Labour (Modern-Day Slavery, Early Marriage, Trafficking)
2. Envisioning a Feminist Internet
3. Creating Equalities of Work (Equal Pay, Upgrading Domestic and Formerly Unpaid Work)
4. Mitigating Heightened Instabilities: How Climate, Conflict and Migration Impact work
5. Tackling Gender Violence at Home and in the Workplace

I chose to attend #4. The issues of migrant women are staggering and many are at great risk of being trafficked. Yet migration will only increase. It is estimated that 60 million will migrate to Europe in the next decade because they will not have water at home. In so many places trees have been cut down for fuel. A member of the group shared her recent experience in Ethiopia where she was shocked to see no trees. Alternative fuels are desperately needed.

A brief Report Back was scheduled but I did not attend returning instead to my hotel to avoid an issue with transportation and crowds at its conclusion.
MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2017

GWI DELEGATION BREAKFAST MEETING:

Our first full day at CSW began early with a breakfast meeting of our GWI delegation. We met our President and Delegation leader, the GWI Board Members present in New York, the Executive Director from Geneva, and the GWI UN Reps at the UN in New York.

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<td>President and Delegation Leader</td>
<td>Geeta Desai</td>
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<tr>
<td>VP Legal and Governance</td>
<td>Rae Duff</td>
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<td>VP Membership</td>
<td>Eileen Focke-Bakker</td>
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<tr>
<td>VP Marketing</td>
<td>Louise McLeod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Stacy Dry Lara</td>
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<td>GWI Reps to the UN</td>
<td>Maureen Byrne</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mick Minard</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polly Woodward</td>
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<td>Sophie Turner Zaretsky</td>
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Geeta outlined our plans for the week and took suggestions and questions. The UN Reps shared helpful details. It was also a delight to meet fellow delegates and to chat briefly about our interests and anticipated schedules. But sadly, our time together was all too brief.

GWI Delegates Hally Siddons (Canada), Prof. Eman Karmounty (Egypt), Serap Maktav (Turkey) and Dr. Maria Peenze (South Africa) outside the UN on our way to the Opening
Sharing of a Ticket for the Opening Session:

NGOs receive two tickets for the Opening Session and another two for the Ministerial Meetings. Graduate Women International President, Geeta Desai, kindly offered us one ticket for both the Opening Session and the Ministerial Meetings. We decided to share the Opening Session Ticket so as many of us as possible could experience the event. I was given the time slot of the first hour of the Opening and then passed the ticket on to my Egyptian colleague who did the second hour before passing it on to one of our South African delegates. We were all most grateful to Geeta for her thought and gesture.

OPENING SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 61

The Opening of CSW61 was held in the General Assembly at the United Nations with Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, addressing the Members States for the first time after taking office on January 1, 2017.

Secretary General Antonio Guterres:

Secretary General Guterres made a strong commitment to gender equality and women’s human rights, a universal challenge and one he said that needed to be addressed in all parts of the world and by all stakeholders. This CSW the focus will be the empowerment of women and girls in the world of work.

He said we need to hold those responsible accountable. The Secretary General wanted to share three messages.

1. The first was a message of thanks, a thank you for raising our voices for women, for their dignity and equality around the world. He has seen the difference we have made in every corner of the globe. We make the world a better place for all.

2. In a male dominated world the Secretary General confirmed the empowerment of women must be a key priority. Women have what it takes to succeed but men still dominate, male chauvinism exists and it hurts everyone. We must address this historical injustice that continues to exist today. Empowerment is about breaking
structural barriers. Men still dominate in countries that consider themselves progressive.

He reminded us we are all better off when we open doors of opportunity for women and girls including in the military and in peace talks. Institutions, companies and organizations, including the UN, get better results by every measure when they include competent women, reflecting the gender equality of the people they serve. They are the future. The Secretary General stated that if countries address the gender gap at work, women could generate enough funds to bring success across the 2030 agenda, which was approved by all leaders at the UN in 2015.

Women with better reproductive health and education have better chances in life. They earn better salaries and invest more in the health of their children. These investments help future generations. Empowerment is the best way to prevent other challenges that rise from violent extremism, human rights violations, xenophobia and other threats. Extremists have built their ideologies around the subjugation of women and girls and the denial of their rights. Sexual violence, forced marriage, human trafficking and virtual enslavement are weapons of physical and psychological warfare in today's world. These facts tell us our common values are under threat.

The Secretary General reminded us that women’s rights are human rights and attacks on women are attacks on all of us. This is why we have to respond together.

Addressing women and girl’s reproductive health is vital. Fifteen million girls are forced to marry and many still undergo female genital mutilation. Empowerment will release the potential of so many women and girls and they will lead us to a new future.

3. The third message of Secretary General Guterres was confirmation of his personal support for us every step of the way. He said we needed all men to stand up for women’s empowerment. Our world needs more women leaders and our world needs more men standing up for gender equality. We need a cultural shift in the world and at the UN. We need an action plan and benchmark for women’s equality. At the UN we need to promote competent women and competent men with equality of opportunities. We need more women in uniform and more women in the UN. Research shows that when women participate in the peace process the chance of success goes up by 35% over 15 years. The Secretary General concluded his remarks by reaffirming he stood for the powerful truth that women’s equality works for the world. He urged us to hold the UN to its promises, to keep pushing, to keep inspiring and to keep making a difference.

Ambassador from the Permanent Mission of Zambia to the United Nations:

The Ambassador acknowledged that the CSW would be addressing vital issues. Our work was pivotal to the work of the UN. We are at a crucial juncture when we turn our vision into action. Our road map should continue to inspire.
President of the General Assembly, Peter Thompson:

President Thompson reminded us that we had made great strides but progress has been slow. Gender equality was a goal, not yet a reality. As we look ahead it will be important women can access and use technology – this could be their key to empowerment. Technology could expand access to the economies of the world, could open education, could facilitate women’s employment and could help improve our global environment and reduce violence against women. He hopes sincerely gender equality and sustainable development will be the achievement. The ways of the past will not be the ways to a sustainable future. One day the lack of gender equality will be seen as an absurdity.

Again those who attended were most grateful to Geeta Desai for offering to share among us a ticket to the Opening Session. Others could observe from an overflow room. In the end the statement of the Secretary General was encouraging and we trust motivating for all.

March 13
1:15 – 2:30
Conf. Rm 8
GA Bldg

**WOMEN 20 GERMANY: DIVERSE, RESILIENT AND VIABLE:**

**EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE G20**

The main goal of Women20 (W20) is to promote women’s economic empowerment as an integral part of the G20 process. In a broad dialogue using digital tools, expert meetings and round tables as well as the W20 Summit, W20 joins the global experiences of women’s civil society organizations and women’s entrepreneur associations to implement strong recommendations within G20 negotiations.

Diversity and full participation are essential fostering the resilient, sustainable and viable growth of stable economies and societies. Women’s empowerment is thus fundamental for a prosperous world and essential for economic growth, stable economies and social development.

In 2017, W20 will focus on the following three pillars:

- **Labour market inclusion:**
  Increasing the value of work traditionally done by women

- **Financial Inclusion:**
  Promoting female entrepreneurship and access to finance for women

- **Digital Inclusion:**
  Closing the digital gender divide

In short, women want to move from the side table to the negotiating table.

The presenter wants to see a strong women empowerment focus at the G20. She sees equal rights and equal participation as a requirement of sustainable economies. Gender equality must be on agendas.

A second presenter reminded us we needed to go back home and continue to push.
Continuity is important in the G20 because there is a changing presidency every year but the focus needs to be clear and firm.

Digital technology was once again identified as a way to close the gender divide. It will provide important opportunities for women’s empowerment.

March 13
EX-PRESS
BAR
GA BLDG
3:00 -4:14
EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN AFRICA
THROUGH ICTS: MOBILE APP SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

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<tr>
<td>Irina Bokova</td>
<td>Director-General UNESCO</td>
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<td>His Excellency Fodé</td>
<td>Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the UN</td>
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<td>Sasha Rubel Diamanka</td>
<td>Regional Advisor for Communication and Information</td>
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<td>UNESCO Regional Office for West Africa</td>
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<td>Bitilokho Ndiaye</td>
<td>Technical Advisor on Gender, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of Senegal</td>
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<td>Rokhaya Solange Ndir</td>
<td>Department of Institutional Communication and External Relations Sonatel Orange</td>
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<td>Melissa Sassi</td>
<td>CEO and Founder, MentorNations</td>
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<td>Senior Market Manager Microsoft</td>
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<td>Joanna Bersin</td>
<td>Head of Education, Kano</td>
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<td>Board Member, IAMTHECODE</td>
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The Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Senegal to the United Nations, H.E. Fodé Seck opened the session by sharing work of his country, an exemplary programme to empower women.

Experts from the field then presented segments of the programme to share the Senegal experience.

The next 1 billion new Internet connections will be from mobile devices in the hands of young people in developing countries. Mobile technology has become a medium for youth empowerment, activism and an engine for change. The number of mobile Internet connections is rapidly increasing in developing countries and Smartphones are often the only computer young people in these countries have. This connectivity can have a profound impact on all aspects of their lives, particularly in the world of work, allowing them to create solutions to personal challenges and problems faced in the local community and to eventually reach economic empowerment.

But in the developing countries, up to 43% fewer women have access to Internet than men. Smartphone ownership and local but relevant applications can be a key to women’s
empowerment, shattering their isolation and unleashing their powers. However, enabling them to make these apps can give them an even bigger push as it enriches their skill set, creates job opportunities and gives them a platform in emerging digital economies. Furthermore, mobile Technology could help lift 5.3 million out of illiteracy by 2020.

**UNICCO’s Youth Mobile Initiative** aims to maximize this positive impact by including young people, and particularly young girls, in developing countries in the digital revolution. By providing young girls with basic technical skills and the confidence to develop, promote and sell locally relevant mobile applications, the initiative aims to create employment opportunities and at the same time create solutions in different fields such as agriculture, health and education. These youth-made innovations can contribute to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This side event highlighted best practices in preparing young women in Africa for the changing world of work. The roundtable brought together several stakeholders of the YouthMobile initiative who shared the importance of multi-stakeholder public-private partnerships for the economic empowerment of women in the changing world of work.

“I am the Code” is a programme to focus on SDGs 4 and 5. The aim is for one million girls to have access by 2030.

A small grant for VGIF changed lives.

Economic empowerment cannot be achieved by uneducated women.

**RECEPTION FOR CANADIANS AT THE PERMANENT MISSION OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza

** MONDAY EVENING 7:30 TO 9:00**

The occasion was an opportunity to meet the Canadian Government delegation attending the CSW61 and other Canadians attending with their respective NGOs. Both the Honourable Maryam Monsef (Minister of the Status of Women) and the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Affairs and La Francophonie) attended and mixed among the crowd so that many present might be able to speak with them. It was an opportunity to mingle too with many other NGO members and learn of their work and expectations of the CSW Session.
Scene from my hotel window Tuesday noon.

*Picture on the left:* First Avenue is on the left, the grounds of the UN covered in snow in the centre and the East River just beyond on the right.

*Picture on the right:* First Avenue from top to bottom in the centre of the picture. There is no traffic!

Sadly due to the snowstorm the UN buildings were closed all day Tuesday and sessions off site were cancelled as well (except perhaps for Canada!). Most attendees did not have snow boots and walking on the side walks was treacherous not only because of the uncleared snow and the ice that had formed, but because the falling of ice off the windows of the very tall buildings alongside. It would come crashing many feet to the ground without warning.

Unfortunately Tuesday was the day Canada had scheduled its main Side Events. One of them, *Women’s Economic Empowerment: An Economy that Works for Women* planned to present insights into what government, business and civil society could do to address the persistent wage gap and foster women’s economic growth. The panelists were to have been:

- Hon. Maryam Monsef - Canada’s Minister of the Status of Women
- Caren Brown - Senior Director General, World bank Group
- Gloria Mills - Pres. EPSU Women’s Committee PSI
- Julie Delahanty - Executive Director Oxfam Canada
- Arancha Gonzalez - Chief Executive International Trade Centre
However, not all Canadian events were lost. The Canadian Government delegation to the UN worked very hard to find alternative venues for two of its sessions, one of which I was able to attend at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN in the early evening after the snow had stopped. A few of us joined arms to walk gingerly the three blocks to the event. Not only did Canada have to find a few fill-in speakers because not all the original presenters were able to travel to New York due to the storm, but it had to communicate with possible interested attendees the new venue and try to accommodate the resultant numbers in a much smaller space.

**EMPOWERMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ERADICATE ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Canada, USA, Mexico at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations  
6:30 to 8:00 pm

The event involved a panel of four indigenous women who spoke about the violence against women in their communities and presented recommendations to the Commission on the Status of Women. Canada, a country with a history of abuse against its indigenous women, gave the panelists a venue to continue their work and make their voices heard. Despite the citywide shut down, the Canadian Mission was open and the room was packed with a captivated audience.

**Minister of Status of Women, Maryam Monsef:**

Had it not been for her post secondary education, Hon. Maryam Monsef said she would not have learned about the situation of Canada's indigenous peoples. She then asked for a role
call of the countries and nations present in the room. In addition to Canada, Mexico and the US, many indigenous attendees announced the names of the nations from which they were from. I was struck by the number of nations who called out, several of which I had never heard of myself. The Minister suggested there were a lot of differences in the room but we were united by a legacy passed down to us. “Despite oppression, we really are privileged to be here tonight,” she said. On a personal note she shared that as a woman from Afghanistan, a displaced person, she felt she has had more opportunity in Canada than an indigenous person of the country has had.

Indigenous women, worldwide, suffer disproportionately from violence and abuse. Although the priority theme of this year’s Commission on the Status of Women is the “economic empowerment of women in the changing world of work”, we were reminded that the emerging issue that it is also addressing is the “empowerment of indigenous women” specifically.

Jeanie Dendys:  
Minister of Tourism and Culture for the Yukon and the Tahitan First Nation

Minster Dendys introduced her comments by her description of preparing the room in the afternoon with a juniper mist in order to clean the room before our session began. She reminded us indigenous peoples believe our lands are sacred. When we stand on our land we do it with respect. We want to acknowledge the first people here and that they have come before us.

We then had a prayer and chant led by an indigenous woman from the Yukon.

Minister Dendys continued that because of Canada’s complicated past with indigenous peoples, she wanted to be the minister who would be able to say that we have honoured our indigenous promises.

The Moderator introduced the panel and told us all the presenters were indigenous. These women were very important in helping our countries move forward.

Cherrah Giles, Oklahoma:  
Secretary of the Department of the Community and Human Services for the Muscogee Creek Nation and Board Chair, National Indigenous Review.

“Violence against women is a pervasive, worldwide human rights violation,” she said. “The spectrum of violence from birth to death, destroys our quality of life and our ability to exercise our human rights.”

There is an historical trauma in the US. Her tribe was forced to move from Georgia to Alabama and then on to Oklahoma. She was speaking to end violence against indigenous women. We must end violence and discrimination. Four out of five indigenous women experience violence in their lifetime and their murder rates are ten times the national average. We need to intensify our efforts and to adopt a resolution on violence against indigenous women. She reminded us we need to all take this message back home.
Sandra Laughren: Senior Policy Analyst for the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs in Canada

Sandra was speaking for Minister Dr. Carolyn Bennett who was not able to be present because of the weather.

For more than 150 years indigenous women have been the most vulnerable women in the country. Laughren said that in December 2015, the Government of Canada launched a national inquiry to seek recommendations to address and prevent violence against indigenous women and girls. It will build on work and recommendations already done. The final report will be presented in 2018.

Fracyne Joe, Interim President of Women’s Association of Canada

A 2014 report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police identified at least 1,181 murdered or missing indigenous women and girls in Canada.

It is wrong and insulting to think that any decision about indigenous women is not made by them. A nation cannot exist without the hearts of its women. The speaker was proud to be a Canadian but felt we could do better.

During the course of the session Dendys, and the other Canadian panelists. Sandra Laughren and Francyne Joe, all commented on Canada’s promising new commitment to indigenous issues. Of special note was the fact that last year Canada removed its objector status to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In May, 2016, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs declared, “We are now a full supporter of the declaration, without qualification.”

The Minister from the Yukon, Jeanie Dendys told of a study she had been involved in her community of 500. The community did a thorough report itself to find out what the problems were and learned that 95% of all issues were related to violence. There had been 1176 calls for service (police). The Minister told us of a call she made to the RCMP one evening because of suspicious noise at the back of her house. The RCMP answered her call. Yet she learned a few weeks later another member of the community experienced the same concern outside yet the RCMP did not come (she was nobody, an unknown)

Important Message:
The important message was that as a result of the intensive research in its own community, the community was able to identify and address some of the issues. A community needs to take ownership. This acknowledgement was a turning point for the community. The community shut down some drug houses and took a lot of other measures. As a result,
crime went down by 42% but it took courage for the researchers to do the job and each was at personal risk because for some, the research was not popular. With such women-led, community-listening programming, the Canadian government is finally listening.

**Event Conclusions:**
Among the recommendations, more data and studies area needed regarding violence against indigenous women. In the United States for example, a report by National Violence Against Women Survey, found that American Indians were 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault as compared to all other races. The study, however, was conducted in 2000 and has not been updated.

Giles asked the Commission to intensity its efforts to eliminate violence against indigenous women by adopting a resolution in this regard, and called for an international instrument to address this issue. She said they may be small demands but they are demands because she felt like little had happened yet.

The future will need to involve increased reporting, funding and commitment to put an end to the violence against indigenous women and girls.

“I love Canada. I am so proud to be from this place, and my community,” said Minister Dendys, but we can do better.”

**Question for all to Ponder:**
How can we expand the understanding?
PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NAGANKO: Under-Secretary-General & Executive Director, UN Women

The themes and focus of CSW61 were reviewed.

It was announced that several members were denied entry to the CSW because they could not get visas to the US. CSW will follow through to get an accurate picture. It will be difficult to get names as many are concerned to give their names, but it hopes at least to get numbers.

We were urged to review the Agreed Conclusions to ensure the language is robust and the issues we were concerned about were included. There was concern that there was a need to get a stronger language for education in the document. Graduate Women International had already communicated this. Phumzile replied that others had requested the same and so this would be happening. Support was raised for more awareness for the needs of widows – so many through war, and senior women.
Another concern was expressed regarding the rights to employment while being refugees. The degrees of many refugees are not recognized. This problem is often related to ID as many do not have IDs, especially those who have had to flee from their homes. Without proper ID many women and girls can be lost to trafficking. Going forward we need to ensure every child gets an ID at birth. This will help protect against underage marriage and should keep girls in school longer.

Empowerment of women is closely related not only to education but also to finance. Micro financing is a great asset to rural women or women getting started in their little businesses but then some need to move on. What financing is available for these women?

A strong message came regarding the UN Women budget. It is very small, especially in comparison with the whole UN budget. Member states need to push hard for an increase. This will be very difficult now with the huge budget cut to the UN just announced by the US.

Concern was also expressed regarding safe, legal abortions. This is always a difficult issue but has now become even more difficult. Why do men think they should have control over women’s bodies?

A point was raised for the need for more work, but more “decent” work in all countries.

A final point raised had to do with human rights. The current situation is unsustainable. The UN needs to have a conversation about Human Rights and the risks to activists all over the world. Those in charge of protecting need to be held accountable and need to be pushed. The courage, resilience, resistance, boldness involved by human rights workers is extraordinary. Let us look at CSW as to how it can help on this front.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AND INSECURE AREAS OF AFGHANISTAN (Conference Room 8, GA Bldg, 11:30 to 12:45)**

Hosted by: Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations
Co-hosted by: Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations
UN Entity for Gender Equality & Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
**H.E. Mahmoud Saikal**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, welcomed us to the side event. Women are empowered in some areas of Afghanistan but usually men still administer. In the rural areas insecurity is a huge issue and the environment is often hostile, yet Afghan women look after forty-three per cent of the agricultural industry.

**Background:**

Sixteen years ago, women in Afghanistan were practically invisible in its politics, its economy, and socially. With a new beginning in 2001, after the fall of the Taliban, progress across key socioeconomic indicators became more tangible. Women's rights, development, and participation in society have been at the forefront of international involvement in Afghanistan since that time.

The Government of Afghanistan and the international community have made a series of commitments towards women and girls’ advancement through different national and international conferences, including those in Kabul, Bonn, Tokyo, and most recently, Brussels. The commitments have resulted in noticeable progress for women in urban areas. In rural areas, however, they still face challenges in security, ongoing violence, poverty, lack of access to justice, education, economic opportunities, health services, and suffer from other forms of discrimination.

**Video:** A short video was presented outlining Afghan women's achievements and included singing and dancing of young Afghans in the beautifully bright colours of their national dress. The co-ed Zuhra Orchestra, the youth orchestra was featured, a fascinating mix of traditional and Western instruments and sounds, and was conducted by a young woman. Pictures of the orchestra were of particular interest to me as *University Women Helping Afghan Women* had collected and shipped some music, instruments and music stands to the Orchestra in 2015.

In the video *Mrs. Ghani*, the President’s wife, reminded us that even when the women are silent their contribution is essential. Despite their silence and confinement they are indispensable in society. They need to recognize this and this recognition is their first step in empowerment. Women are strong and resilient problem solvers. They are relentless and are peace brokers. Acknowledging this goes a long way in empowering them. It would help with their empowerment if they used their skills in activities that could take place in their homes to produce extended earnings. Such action would give visibility and weight to their opinion.

**The Moderator, Mr. Philip Alston:** Professor of Law at New York University, School of Law and Co-Chair of the Law School Centre for Human rights and Global Justice
He reported he had seen progress in women’s empowerment in Saudi Arabia where women were working outside the home and earning money. Their effort was significant.

**H.E. Delbar Nazari:** The Minister of Women’s Affairs

H.E. commented on empowering women in rural and insecure areas. There is still a lot of limitation in their access to education, health care and justice. Twenty-six per cent of Afghan women live in these rural areas and their work in agriculture and textiles earn them low wages. Women in the rural areas must not be left behind. Women are powerful agents of change.

**H.E. Ms. Laila Bokhari:** Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

The Deputy Minister acknowledged that funding from her country has assisted in the social and economic development in Afghanistan. She recognized that Afghanistan had made a tremendous effort to address women. There is a continuing need to empower women and especially in the rural areas. To do so the women need more knowledge of their human rights. Sadly more country areas have become more insecure. We need to remember that rural Afghan women have the same rights as Kabul women.

**H.E. Syed Akbaruddin:** Ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations

His Excellency spoke of the India-Afghanistan relationship, a “link of hearts”. He reminded Afghanistan it “had 1.25 billion friends in India.” He referred to the success of countries working together to address issues for women, for example, the Garden of Wealth. It is an agricultural programme conceived, implemented and sustained by women. It was started in Kabul and has moved from garment manufacturing to gardens and environmental regeneration and has now added food processing. It aims to generate economic security among women and involves over 7000 Afghan women.

**Dr. A. H. Monjurul Kabir:** Senior Program Adviser and Chief, Asia-Pacific Section UN Women HQ.

Dr. Kabir spoke of challenges in Afghanistan. There is a high unemployment rate. In rural areas women have difficulty accessing infrastructure programmes. The government is trying to repair any political divide and looking at women’s mobility and migrants.

**Ms. Parwana Paikan:** Deputy Director, Human Rights and Women’s International Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan.

Ms. Paikan spoke of the importance in linking the synergies of the government to CSW and the SGDs. Although the National Action Plan for 1325 has been approved, there is a lack of government resources. The Government has not yet approved a plan or budget for its implementation. There is a considerable gap between men and women’s wages in the labour market and in public decision-making. Integrated coordination is needed among government sectors and also among donors.

**Dr. Sima Samar:** Chair, Afghanistan Human Rights Commission.

Dr. Samar reminded us that conflict has continued for over 30 years. There is still terrorism. The achievements that have been made are remarkable, but Afghanistan,
although grateful for all past contributions, still needs more support from the international community. Afghanistan needs:

- To improve the quality of its education
- More access to healthcare for women, especially to contraception
- More money for women’s education
- To include women in every sector of society including the security forces and the justice department
- More access to justice for the women

Yet Afghanistan continues its efforts and its achievements are an example to the world. Afghanistan is hoping very much to be admitted to the UN Human Rights Council and encourages our governments to support such. Not only would it be an incentive for other countries to follow the progress that can be made, but also a gesture of thanks to so many countries in the international community who have helped along the way.

**H.E. Delbar Nazari**, Minister of Women’s Affairs spoke again to remind us there was still a lot of domestic violence in Afghanistan. There is some counseling as counsellors try to mediate and work with the families. There are women’s protection centres supported by Development funding. Women in these centres need more support to be economically empowered so they can get out of these centres. More success stories are needed to model. Afghanistan now has in place the law dealing with violence against women and it is implemented in all parts of the country. There is an anti-harassment law as well but more resources are needed for implementation. When asked about the physically impaired in her country, H.E. said more help was needed in this area and the Ambassador thanked the questioner for raising his awareness. Indeed it is very important for the rest of the world to continue to stand by Afghanistan. All this is important but nothing can be done if you do not have good leadership.

**Continuing Discussion:**

1. **Violence against women and access to justice:**

The protection of women’s rights faces many challenges in Afghanistan. The Government believes the key to transforming patriarchal values and norms is the prevention of violence against women (VAW) through engagement of men and boys. Recent findings from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) indicate that during the 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2016, 2,621 cases of VAW were reported. Unreported cases are believed to be exponentially higher. The enforcement of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law is one of the major protective legal instruments used to combat violence against women. As previously mentioned, an anti-harassment law recently approved by the Afghan parliament is ready for Presidential approval and subsequent enforcement. However, women still face barriers to accessing justice. Women who have used State Courts are more likely than men to say that the court has treated men and women equally. This is consistent with the common perception that State courts are more protective of women’s rights than the alternative, traditional justice mechanisms.
2. **Peace and Security:**
Afghanistan’s adoption of its National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (NAP 1325), including the implementation and monitoring plan, demonstrates the government’s commitment to involving women in peace building and leadership positions. This includes women in the Afghan National Security Forces, approved according to a recent Asia Foundation survey by 36.6% of Afghans. Although passed almost two years ago, limited progress has been made in its implementation due to a lack of sufficient budget and agreed financing mechanisms to operate the plan, and limited coordination and understanding among the responsible parties.

The government and international community, through a Joint Statement of the Brussels Conference, prioritized women’s rights with a focus on securing finance for the implementation of NAP 1325. CSW60 emphasized strengthening women’s leadership and equal participation in decision making in all areas of the SDGs.

The Afghan government and the international community need to reactivate the Steering Committee of NAP 1325, and design accountability mechanisms to ensure NAP 1325 is implemented and more women are recruited into the ANSF.

3. **Women’s Participation in Public Life:**
The Afghan Government is committed to ensuring the protection of women’s participation in the peace process, and to better engage women leaders and activists. By tradition, Afghanistan is a patriarchal society where women are marginalized from political discourse and participation. However, notable progress has been made in the last 15 years. At the moment Afghanistan has four female ministers, one female governor, five female ambassadors (one to Canada), and one district governor. Twenty-five per cent of provincial and district-level seats are reserved for women. Public awareness of women’s rights is promoted through the Ministry of Hajj, religious leaders, newspapers and television.

4. **Women’s Economic Empowerment:**
Women and girls living in rural areas face significant difficulties in accessing resources and opportunities in agriculture. This undermines their potential as providers, entrepreneurs, and agents of change, and challenges their economic empowerment. Economic empowerment not only helps women become equal members of society but also improves the quality of life of households and communities alike. In December 2016, the government of Afghanistan adopted the National Priority Plan (NPP) on Women’s Economic Empowerment to build the capacity of poor women in order to strengthen the economy of their households, communities, and indeed the entire country.

5. **Healthcare:**
Access to health services has increased significantly in the past decades. Despite advances, challenges remain. Maternal mortality, infant mortality, polio and malnourishment persist and require urgent attention. (One woman dies every 29 minutes in childbirth, 2nd highest maternal mortality rate in the world.) Severe food shortages have resulted in chronic malnourishment among children and many women are iron-deficient. Lack of security has hindered efforts to educate more female health professionals, and prevented them from working or studying in rural areas. The healthcare system needs to be expanded by
investing more in human resources to allow more women access to female health professionals. Also the need to improve nutrition must be more strongly addressed.

6. **Education:**
The number of girls attending school has increased significantly, especially at the primary level. There are modest increases at the secondary and tertiary levels. The expansion of the Government’s network of schools has been commendable. The increase in the number of female teachers is a contributing factor in improved girls’ school attendance, especially in the higher grades.

However, in the rural areas women’s access is still a challenge. Some girls may enroll at the start of the school year, but may not attend regularly due to “traditional roles” in their family and community. Also the threat of attacks on schools by insurgents, shortages of schools, and insufficient infrastructure resulting in long walking distances to school, add to the challenge.

To address these barriers, Afghanistan needs to improve accessibility to and affordability of quality education in rural areas. It needs to provide incentives for teacher training to improve opportunities for girls in the higher grades. It needs to expand educational infrastructure, promote innovative education models, and increase access to adequate facilities and transportation.

**H.E. Mahmoud Saikal**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, concluded the session by asking us to keep focused on Afghanistan including the women and particularly those in the rural areas. Since the fall of the Taliban 16 years ago, Afghanistan has been fighting terrorists in order to improve the lives of the Afghans. It will continue. A collective effort is still needed. If Afghanistan falls, we all fall. As previously stated significant progress has been made but the achievements will be fragile if we do not consolidate. We must:

- Address the root causes of the conflict
- Engage Pakistan. The root is not in Afghanistan.
- Defend our people. They are victims of a war that has been going on for 40 years. Every day Afghanistan loses about 100 people
- Ensure we deliver services including education, health and electricity

Preparing the ECSOC Chamber for the next Side Event on Wednesday afternoon.
ROOT CAUSES OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: KEY ROLE OF THE FAMILY FOR PROTECTION AND PREVENTION
Belarus, Group of Friends of the Family, and Civil Society for the Family
ECOSOC Chamber – Conf. Building 3:00 to 6:00

Mercedes Schlapp
We must openly talk about this. Women and girls are often left helpless through poverty, through loss of the father in war or they may be let down by their families. We give the UN a strong round of applause for its work with the family.

The President of the Economic Social Council:
The family is the firm foundation, the firm shield for women and girls.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Belarus
Human factors pray on our most vulnerable. Nurturing families can reduce vulnerability.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Egypt:
We need to raise awareness of this issue and give it increased attention. Refugees provide fertile ground for human trafficking. There is a key role for education and media to bring awareness to this issue.

Chargé d’Affaires for the Mission of Nigeria:
Some of the reasons for trafficking are unemployment, conflict and wars, famine, and a deep desire for greener pastures.

Special Representative and Coordinator:
We need to raise awareness. We need to empower women and mothers. Violence is one of the root causes of trafficking.

Another speaker talked about the role of the family in preventing trafficking. Sadly trafficking has no boundary. Backpage.com is a child sex trafficking site with easy access for all where sex is sold online like a commodity. We were shown a disturbing clip.

What Trafficking Looks Like:
Child pornography has a face. We heard from some victims. Human trafficking is the fastest growing crime and easiest crime to get away with because of the fear of the unknown for the victim, eg I will kill your mother, your sister etc if you report. Sadly too many people miss the signs – family, teachers, medical workers and counsellors. We have to create more programmes of awareness – what are the signs? We need to look at what programmes are working and what are not. We need to teach that every touch by a stranger is inappropriate. Survivors are going back into the field to help others.

One survivor told the story of her start, “Hey kids, have you seen my dog?” This survivor was the man next door. As a young girl coming home from school, no one ever went to look for her because she never went missing. She was always “just around”, in this victim’s case, in her neighbour’s home. She was 10 years old. Yet every day she was sold to a stranger.
The average age of trafficking is 13 years. There is an insidious nature in trafficking. It originally began in foreign lands but it is in our own lands now.

Informed communities mean informed families. We may miss the signs to intervene. Victims may not accept services when they are first offered because the victim may not feel secure. Pornography is mass prostitution and takes the business from the streets to the screen. We must make our children aware and advocate for human dignity inherent in us all. Stripping is a stepping-stone into prostitution. **Prostitution is modern day slavery.** We need resources to get women out of this. Women need housing and jobs.

A presenter shared her experience with **Commercial Surrogacy:**
Some women use this as a means of getting money. But not all agencies can be trusted. The presenter told of women’s passports being taken away, of others being raped. Renting out a woman’s womb is not a means to her economic empowerment. We need to expose the myth that surrogacy is just a form of work. It too is an international issue and is an international problem. It is risky to the health of the woman and the child both mentally and physiologically. Surrogates may be left with unpaid medical bills and there is no protection for liability.

The last segment of the session focused on **faith of the family.** We must consider the human dignity of the individual person. We must protect religious freedom that gives direction to our life. Our cultural norms give us our inherent dignity. We must protect the family, the core of the society.

**DINNER INVITATION BY THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN**

Several CFUW members, members from Graduate Women International and other NGOs at the CSW61 joined together for a delicious meal, good company and engaging conversation. We were all grateful for the friendship and the opportunity to relax during an otherwise very hectic schedule. Thank you to CFUW for organizing the occasion!
Migration has now become essential to the functioning of the global economy.

The International Trade Union Federation has 180 million workers, 70 million of whom are women. It bargains to secure better rights and working conditions for its members.

In the 1980s there was a debt crisis. Until that time workers had worked abroad and sent remittances home to their families. But taxation, trade deals and debt have changed the situation.

Migrants will travel anywhere to get better opportunities for their families back home. Women are now flowing into this market and especially into care in the Global North.

Why do some leave their countries to work abroad?

- Living conditions at home are horrible
- There may be instability in their home country
- They have no support from their local government
- They work long hours and for low wages

If there were suitable help from their governments and some protection, they would never leave home. A lot of people are being trafficked into jobs, eg the fishery industry. But others are beginning to fight for economic empowerment and economic rights. They fight for suitable working conditions and wages at home so that they will not have to leave their.
countries and families to work abroad. The goal is to empower these people for the long term. Yet, there is a shortage of power in local unions because too often, as soon as they train a worker, he leaves to go abroad for what is considered better work. Some are then asking the UN for protection of their rights if they go abroad.

Yet around the world economic justice and equality do not exist and in many countries there are no women’s voices in the government. It is hard to have a vision when you look at the table and see only men. To achieve equality we all must come together.

Tax is important for women’s rights. A tax policy is crucial for women’s and human rights. The government needs to raise more taxes to support social services. But other kinds of taxes have more impact on the poor. In many countries there is an over-reliance on VAT. It is an easy tax to impose and an easy way to raise money. Yet the VAT tax especially affects women who do the shopping. At the same time there is perceived by some an under taxing of corporations and a cross border tax abuse. In the end tax revenue is not consistent. While rich white men benefit, poor foreign women lose.

In Nigeria, women form a large base of the workers. These include the health sector, municipal workers, and teachers. Many of these workers are migrant workers. Most believe people should migrate out of choice, not local need. There is also an outflow of workers, especially nurses who get better work abroad. Because at home they often face a lack of a safe working environment, heavy work loads, low wages and a lack of social protection for their work. With more and more medical tourism, foreign hospitals are opening and people are coming to Nigeria for cheaper health care. Migrant workers are needed but there is little counseling offered for the challenges they face.

**Migration Policy in the Coming Years:**

*A Global Compact on Safe Orderly Migration* came out of the New York Declaration in September 2016 and is in the works. It will be voluntary and non-binding. Twenty-two issues in migration were discussed. There is a hope to put gender issues and human rights at the forefront of this compact. There is great concern for this compact in the current social and political environment with its xenophobic and racial overtones. Aid is being conditional in stopping migration and in some cases, migrants even leaving home.

**Why is this Chair Empty?**

At the front of many of the lecture rooms was a chair with a sign, “Why is this Chair Empty?” It is symbolic to honour all those women who were not able to get could not get visas to the US or afraid to come.
In concluding, it was agreed more study is needed on why women leave to become migrants and what happens to them when they come. Other issues to remember:

- Many migrants have gone to university back home but cannot find a decent job. They are forced to go to other countries and get menial jobs.
- It is about dignity.
- Racial issues are central in the study of migration.
- Governments need to recognize care work as decent work.
- Not all migrants who come want to stay.
- Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs: Nigeria currently has 20 million children in camps. A UN Convention on IDPs is needed.
- Women need to have options in their choice of work and freedom of protection from violence.

JOINT GWI AND WOMEN GRADUATES-USA LUNCH
1:00 – 2:30
Piccolo Fiore Restaurant
230 East 44th Street between 2nd and 3rd

Several members of the Graduate Women International, the Canadian Federation of University Women, Women-Graduates USA and other NGOs joined for lunch to enjoy good food, conversation and fun. It was most interesting to learn a little more about each of those who attended. Thank you to WG-USA and GWI for organizing the lunch and for the hospitality of all.
5:30 to 7:00 pm

RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF H.E. DELBAR NAZARI, MINISTER OF
WOMEN’S AFFAIRS & DR. SIMA SAMAR, CHAIR, AFGHANISTAN
INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations
633 Third Avenue, 27th Floor

H.E. Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations
The Reception began with a welcome by the ambassador and a showing of a video of young Afghan singers and dancers performing with the Zuhra Orchestra, the youth orchestra University Women Helping Afghan Women has been following a couple of years. In fact it was a delight to see the orchestra that also performed in Davos this year because as mentioned earlier in this report UWHAW had collected music, stands and a few instruments to send over to the students a couple of years ago including my daughter’s flute – I wondered if it were one of the ones I saw being played in the video! Indeed it was lovely to see the joy on the faces of the young Afghans as they performed. Enjoy at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKJueNp4rHg&feature=em-share_video_user

Afghanistan has suffered 40 years of war. Much progress has been made in the last 15 years. The Ambassador reminded us that such gains would have been impossible without the work of some remarkable and courageous Afghan women such as H.E. Nazari and Dr. Samar who have persisted. It has been a difficult country to govern and to inhabit, as one arm must deal with terrorism, and the other, trying to help its people develop.
H.E. Delbar Nazari, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Afghanistan.

Her Excellency said she was proud to talk about the achievements of Afghanistan and the empowerment of its women over the last 15 years. At the beginning women were not present. Now they are in school, in the Cabinet, and in Parliament, as a result of the efforts made by the government.

The Government has announced this week the National Action Plan for implementing nationwide the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security. Afghanistan has base laws on violence against women and they have ratified legislation on anti-harassment against women. They have a Gender Committee chaired by 2nd VP of the country and at the National level have action plans on SDG’s #5 (Gender Equality) and #8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Although there has been great progress in education and health, there are still a lot of areas for improvement. Despite all the threats against them, women have not stepped back. They are still fighting for their country. Women can access justice but there are limitations and challenges. More defense lawyers are needed and more resources. Due to tradition dominant in the country, a lot of women are not allowed to be taught by men. There is a lack of female professors and so Her Excellency fears a fewer number of women may be able to go on in school in the future. This could result too in an increase in forced marriages. There are challenges in the health sector and especially reproductive health. A lot of women do not have access to clinics especially in the rural areas. Achievements have been made not only at the national level but also internationally. Again Afghanistan has managed to arrange for 2 Side Events at CSW despite challenges with visas.

DR. SIMA SAMAR: Chair, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

She reminded us too that Afghanistan has been at war for 40 years. Afghanistan will support the Asia Pacific Forum on Human Rights. Although work still needs to be done on human rights in Afghanistan, one needs to consider its neighbouring countries. There is a goal to abolish torture in the country. The people of Afghanistan do have freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Much has been advanced in these areas, important ingredients in democracy. The promotion and protection of human rights is a shared responsibility. Afghanistan is hoping very much to get membership in the UN Human Rights Council – it would be a big accomplishment to do so for itself but a nice gesture too for all those countries that have helped them in this area.

OBAID KHAN NOORI: Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN.

Obaid has been my contact at the Mission since last year. At the Reception I asked if he knew Deborah Lyons former Ambassador of Canada to Afghanistan and he smiled. He said absolutely and she had done such a superb job as Ambassador. He recalled a story about her health for women in Bamyan who did not have access to clinics in their rural areas, and especially reproductive help. She arranged for 50 local girls, all of whom were poor to come to Kabul for midwifery training over a six-month period. A film was made of their
homes and surroundings and it followed their progress in Kabul until their graduation. Obaid was present at the showing of the video and then could not believe it when as a surprise to those present, a door was opened and the graduates suddenly appeared to join the event. Not only would they be able to go back and help in their communities but also their lives had been changed forever as a result of this one small initiative – a moving example of one step at a time.

I was delighted that Geeta Desai, President of GWI, was able to join me for the event. A lovely reception with delicious Afghan food followed the formal part of the programme.

The event was hosted in the context of CSW. The townhall format was an opportunity for women civil organizations to engage and share their concerns with Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and his senior leadership on topics pertaining to gender equality in the work of the UN. The event was intended to initiate a dialogue and constructive working relationship between women’s civil society and the Office of the Secretary General and was the first of such opportunities.

The Secretary General began by saying he wanted to meet with the women for whom this meeting is all about. He recalled when he was Prime Minister of Portugal not all that long ago his big challenge was the difficulty of getting family violence on the agenda. Women’s Empowerment refers to political, economic and social issues. It is a struggle as it goes against reality. In addition the quality of this empowerment is important too. He did not speak long because he wanted to hear from the women on the floor.

Charlotte Bunch was the first speaker. She presented him with a petition signed by Graduate Women International and more than 900 NGOs and individuals from 85 countries. She noted the outstanding women in high-level positions in his administration and noted
he and they take time to meet with the women on the ground living the realities. She questioned him concerning timing and strategy. How do we advance the agenda especially now when there is such a backlash in society, a shrinking space for NGOs at local levels and reduced funding? A second question concerned help for the women’s rights defenders. How can the UN help and support women facing severe security threats?

A Somali Speaker who said she risked all to come to New York asked the Secretary General how he was going to deal with the many social injustices that existed today.

The Secretary General confirmed countries had a right to defend their own borders but suggested not by discrimination to religion and ethnicity. With the increase in social media, governments are losing control of society and NGOs are threatened. There needs to be a strong campaign that governments need to understand the best way to rule a country is working with its civil society. Governments need to have a clear objective of gender empowerment and this is needed to overcome family violence. These problems exist everywhere, yet we cannot neglect the contribution of half the world’s population. Equality will lead to an increase in global wealth. He will approve Gender Parity across the whole level.

Other speakers referred to a lack of funding for their civil society work.

The Secretary General will appoint a new youth envoy and this time a young woman. Human Rights need to exist in every part of the world. We can only act with instruments we have.

An Iranian woman wanted to share concerns for what was truly happening in Iran. Sixty per cent of the women have university degrees, yet only 5% are employed. She was very concerned about how the inward looking thinking within her country was affecting these women.

1:15-2:30 CZECH REPUBLIC: GENDER AWARENESS AND THE ART
Con Rm A OF GRABBING THE POLITICAL WILL
Conf Bldg A series of speakers gave examples of changes that they were able to put into place. Czech workers also had the support of a team from Norway.

Women’s Health: Systemic changes were made in Czech obstetrics and doctors began to understand the need for more compassion and understanding. Women demonstrated to support rights to abortion. Women’s rights are human rights.

Women’s Rights:
Czech women supported the March on Washington.
Gender Equality and Family Policy:
A key precondition for gender equality is family policy and the reconciliation of family and work life. There are about 20 key changes planned for family policy. These include considerations of childcare facilities, cost, availability, involvement of men and the reconciliation of family and work life.

Gender Pay Gap:
The gap means the family unit has less money to spend. This lack of revenue is bad for business, the country and the economy.

Sharing Knowledge and Experience on Domestic Violence:
The government of Norway supports work of clinical psychologists in this area and they have shared their research with other professionals and policy makers. They have figures now to show their governments the cost of family violence. In Norway the cost of domestic violence for 1 year was $1 billion US for a 5.3 million people. The challenges for professionals to work with such include attitude, culture, tradition and just lack of knowledge of alternatives. Some consider it a private matter, another man said he was educated so it must be all right and others say they experienced violence in their own homes growing up. These psychologists work with media and write textbooks to educate the public and influence policy. They say it is a serious problem in society. Sadly children who are exposed to violence think it is normal and those who are not exposed to violence have no idea what others face. Free material on what is violence and what can we do about it is available in all schools in Norway.

European Institute for Gender Equality: Estonia
A White Ribbon Campaign was launched to engage men. Then politicians were invited to join the campaign. Levels of involvement were created (red level for such and such). Some are really working hard and it appears to be quite successful in raising awareness and bringing results.

Say it as it Is:
A Canadian High School Student talked about a club at her school.
Currently, there are an estimated 4.5 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, the three main countries where Syrian refugees have taken refuge. Women refugees bear the brunt of the displacement. How can NGOs in the region support and empower these women through leadership training and skills development? What have we learned from working with refugees and grassroots in these countries?

*Relief Worldwide* works with refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. The Syrian conflict has been going on for 6 years and is the greatest such crisis since WWII. We don’t hear Syrian women’s voices yet 50% of the refugees are women and girls. Many are suffering sexual violence.

1. **Issues:**
   - Livelihood
   - Gender based violence
   - Education
   - Funding

Almost no opportunities are available for employment in the camps in Lebanon, as the locals do not even have work. If refugee women can manage a job they earn 40% less than
men but often they are the head of families. They fear exploitation and gender-based violence in the workplace. Women are afraid to even leave the camp to seek work because of violence during their travel.

Five hundred thousand children are without schooling. Almost 2/3 of the children suffer from trauma. Some parents are afraid to send their children to school but this will fuel radicalization.

There is a significant gap in the funding promised and the funding delivered.

2. **UN Regional Director for the Arab State Region:**
The lack of permits to work and childcare make employment a challenge. Aid agencies are fighting a losing battle against falling international aid. Agencies are working with a patriarchal society and conflict.

Public space in conflict is limited. Harassment and violence predominate. Finding work in host countries is difficult when unemployment is high just for the locals. We need to look at the notion of dignity. There is cash for work in the camps but this is not the answer. Many of the women are rural women used to working on the land. It is difficult for them to adapt to urban jobs. We need to understand that. Imagine these women possibly being economically independent in Beirut. We need to help these women work on skills to become more adaptable to the scene they are in.

In Jordan some have been working on online marketing that can be used beyond the camp setting. Agencies are working with India to get Smart Phones for $5 and harness the power of technology for learning. To be more marketable the refugee women have to prove they can manage financial transactions and so they have to work their way up from the beginning. In Jordan about 7% of the refugee women are working.

How do these women go beyond survival – food, water and health? We need to give them dignity. Many are becoming breadwinners for their families but are not equipped. To protect their girls, families arrange child marriages. Some people live in the camps for years.

We need a strategy of resilience. This is happening not only in Syria.

Do Syrians have legal rights to work in neighbouring countries? What are the laws? If they are allowed to work, what should be the limitations?

Women and girls are affected differently. What is going to be their coping mechanism? Young girls face double marginalization – young and female. As a coping mechanism Syrian girls are marrying early - the younger the better. Yet men become violent with their families when they become discouraged. Domestic violence is on the rise when you lose your dignity and respect.

Syrian women are very, very strong and powerful.

Sadly more than 2/3 of the projects planned have not been funded.
3. **Report by a Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Lutheran Coalition:**

The children at greatest risk are those children alone and separated. Families have been separated by the onward movement of younger members who travel ahead to find a safe space. They can face child labour, early marriage, sexual and gender based violence, harassment, and withdrawal from school. As mentioned before, early marriage is seen by some as a protective measure.

Domestic abuse rises when families face these pressures. Refugees are facing levels of trauma almost never experienced before. Girls are kept home for their own safety but face isolation. The capacity of host countries to incorporate these numbers has fallen way behind. There is a growing hostility in powerful segments of Western countries. These young girls are going to grow up to be marginalized. We are looking at a huge intergenerational crisis – a humanitarian tragedy and strategic error. There is a rise in xenophobia.

**Discussion that Followed:**

Muslims should not be excluded from working on the solution.

All faith based groups need to cooperate and collaborate.

What is the role of educated women in the camps? UN Women is working with agencies and management in the camps to get women involved.

Mental Health is a neglected area across the board. It is the most underfunded.

In our communities we can help the refugees by just listening. We need to learn and they need to know we care.

What is happening with the Peace Talks?

There are 13 different leaders at the table not counting Assad. This war has become a business.

The speaker saw the brainwashing and results of violence and trauma inflicted by Daesh in Iraq. In these camps of 22,000 there is one psychological counselor.
CSW61 SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF REFUGEE AND MIGRANT WOMEN

Saturday March 18, 10:30 AM, Church Centre for the UN, 10th floor: WG-USA

Dr. Rosette Adera: works to facilitate the inclusion of refugees and other new immigrants into the workforce and academic environments in New Jersey.

Dr. Cyntia Grguric: psychologist and mental health counselor from NYC.

Jeanette Westbrook: Licensed social worker from Louisville, Kentucky who works with refugees to help prepare them to adhere to US laws that impact their path to citizenship.

Martine Tchitchihe: Recent refugee from Cameroon, who is working on a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, shares some of her background and experiences as a newcomer to the US.

Dr. Rossette Adera: “Immigrant Women and Precarious Work”

Rosetette works for the inclusion of immigrants into the work force and academic environments. She herself was an immigrant. Her mother was expecting her at the time of the uprising in Rwanda and they escaped with little warning. She came to the US via Uganda, Kenya and Canada.

The number of women crossing borders to find work now is rising. They are often in precarious positions because of their legal status. Women move from place to place. Life is temporary – there is no such thing as tenure in a job if they can find a job. Women are vulnerable because of:

- Legal status
- Gender
- Education level

There is a lack of a collective voice for them to come together. They are paid below the national women’s wage. As a refugee you pack and run. You don’t have time to collect all your papers if you really did have any. If you require legal representation most of these women cannot afford such. Some owners prefer to hire these women because they have no collective voice and they can pay them less. Therefore they are often very vulnerable because of this immigration status. This leads to increased poverty. The circumstances often affect the refugee’s psyche and sense of self. We see her lack of voice. There is a lot of silencing because if you speak up they can let you go. Indeed when the immigrant status is known this dismissal is very common.
There are stories of where immigrants sign a paper to work 20 hours a week and then they may discover they are being asked to do double but they may have children. It may become a huge issue for them to find and afford childcare but they can't complain or they will probably lose their job. Other women may work long hours with little time to eat ie 5:00 am to midnight. They may be told they will earn $8 an hour but then they can suddenly learn their food, electricity and accommodation may be taken off that figure. Other women refugees may suffer sexual assault

Dr. Cynthia Grguric:

Cynthia deals with mental health and psychological support for refugees. In such work it is important we go beyond our Western lifestyle model, as our clients will be used only to theirs. Support workers need to have an understanding of their client’s culture, religion, education, music and dance. We need to open our minds to different forms of healing.

The stages of migration can go on a very long time. While escape and travel may have been traumatic, there is also a post arrival trauma – how do you get food and housing? During the perilous journeys many of them take they may have to leave their family back home as the trip may be just too dangerous for them or they may decide to come first to find work. Or they may lose some of their family en route due to the many dangers.

There is often then incredible pressure on the refugees. The families back home may expect them to be earning tons of money and then to send it back to them. They do not understand that the refugee is probably earning very little, especially after her own expenses.

There is also a sense of isolation for the refugee. The sense of belonging is so basic and there is a great need for the refugees to find that. They may also feel they are failing their immediate family. They may be so overwhelmed themselves they cannot help and support their families, as they would wish. They are probably disconnected. They may not have email or a cell phone. Culture is our identity but everything refugees have has been ripped out – their food, music, friends, family. They ask, “How am I going to be me when I need to be we?” The experience may affect children profoundly. It is difficult for the kids to fit in at school and often the parents are so busy just surviving they don’t fully think about or understand how all these issues are affecting their children.

Social workers need to be and indeed all who want to help refugees need to be culturally sensitive and to ask questions.

We learned from Fay Weber that Montana has less than 100 refugees. Fay’s community took in 7 but the Governor during the campaign said that the last thing Montana wanted was refugees and certainly not Syrians.
3. **Jeanette Westbrook:**

Louisville, Kentucky is apparently one of the four relocation centres for refugees from around the world. There are 27,000 refugees in Louisville. But there is one issue that is seen by Jeanette as growing and able to block immigrants to US citizenship, that is, driving under the influence, dui. A dui charge is a criminal offense and never goes away. If you are a refugee and you get a dui that is grounds to hold your US citizenship up 5 years. If you get 2 duis you can be deported and today refugees are being deported for just 1. This process is used now as a backdoor to deportation.

In some cases agencies are doing a poor job educating the refugees of such. Some refugees and immigrants have very little experience with alcohol. They may not have drunk much in their home countries or they may have spent 17 years in a refugee camp where they had no experience with alcohol. Upon their arrival in the US they probably did not have extra money to buy alcohol. However, a simple special celebration or offer from an unsuspecting friend or acquaintance may end with this unfortunate result. Sadly that same thing used to socialize and welcome immigrants is used to deport them. Other crimes they may have committed are speeding tickets, parking tickets, or not having insurance.

Sadly there is lack of access to information for refugees such as driving under the influence. Some try to profile them and give them a criminal offense. This is the Number 1 our refugees are being marginalized. Yet you cannot really prove they are being targeted because there is no separate listing of refugees in the DUI data – all DUls are simply lumped together.

4. **Martine Tchitchihe:**

The Cameroons borders Nigeria to the West. As a young girl in Cameroon, Martine was on her way to school one day when she was suddenly picked up and taken away. It was a traumatic experience and she was most grateful to all her friends and acquaintances who helped her along the way. She is now a PhD student in California. She and other such refugees are not aliens; they are just human beings trying to rebuild their lives.

**Discussion to Follow:**

The current refugee problem will be a huge issue for California and especially hit the economy.

Refugees need to be empowered to learn the laws, especially concerning drugs and alcohol; without this knowledge, they are a target for traffickers.

If refugees are picked up and cannot afford a lawyer, they are now signed a legal defender. If they are asked to take the breathalyzer they must or they are announced guilty.

Teachers and medical workers need to become familiar with the culture.
Depression is a practice identified in the West. In some parts of the world including Africa it is not talked about at home. Thus healthcare workers need to identify and work with accordingly. Refugees often have horrendous issues to overcome, we need to give them a little confidence and encouragement and a chance to participate.

Refugees seem to be attracted to work in certain sectors – garden, hospitality, and homecare. However, when it comes to tenure work there is concern for trust.

But as we all know many immigrants are over educated many have incredible resilience and so seek a second degree in their new country if their first one is not recognized.

In concluding one speaker from the floor shared the Australian experience. Refugees are first held in detention in islands off shore. They are then taken on shore and assigned a social worker for the first 6 months and they are also given a language start – 510 hours of English.
CSW61 March 20, 1017

EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

UNICEF House, Danny Kaye Conference Room

1:30 pm to 2:45 pm

This session was jointly organized by the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations and UNICEF.

Ambassador Mahomoud Saikal
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to UN

Shanelle Hall
Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF
Jo Bourne, Associate Director of Education, UNICEF:

We should take pause to celebrate the process Afghanistan since its Back to School Campaign in 2002. According to the latest figures there are now 8.4 million students enrolled in school and 40% are girls. However, we need to understand three million students still remain out of school, mostly girls. In reality these children are mostly in poor rural areas. A new strategic plan and strategy has just been launched on girls’ education.


In Afghanistan we have a thirst for education. Twenty years ago the Taliban took over, 1996 to 2001. They were there for 5 ½ years. Girls including adolescent girls missed the opportunity to become literate and to learn any technical skills to contribute to the development of their country. The impact on Afghanistan has been devastating, especially in areas like doctors and teachers. During the last years we have had the opportunity to try to put back, to try to rebuild. We are most grateful for the support of the international community. In the past 16 years we have made considerable gains but with one hand we are improving the lives of our people, and the other, fighting terrorism.

Our latest figures show 9.3 million students in school out of a population of 30 million. Forty per cent of this number is girls. The numbers have improved but we need to improve quality. We still have a long way to go. But young girls are graduating from schools and universities and are continuing into politics and economics.

The Afghan curriculum is based on national Afghan values and tradition but the government needs to make it more attractive to the younger generations, including girls.
Radicalization and terrorism are the Number One concerns and they are originating outside Afghanistan. There are 17,500 schools in Afghanistan now but 1000 are closed because of insecurity. Many boys and girls are denied access because of this.

When we fail to secure Afghanistan, everything else is affected.

Other problems in education are a lack of infrastructure and a shortage of female teachers. Vocational education is also important.

The National Unity Government of Afghanistan has three priority strategies:

1. To engage the neighbouring country, Pakistan, in addressing the root problems of radicalization, security and girls. Collectively we need to combat the threat of terrorism.
2. We need to ensure we can defend our people and protect our schools. There 320,000 in the security forces now. They are doing very well but the casualty number is high.
3. We need to work to ensure we can deliver services to our people – roads, schools, healthcare, roads and electricity. Girls’ education is a top priority.

Shanelle Hall, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Adolescent education is Afghanistan’s foundation for the future. But poverty and discriminatory social norms can close this opportunity. The cost of education, the distance to travel, and security issues can close this window of opportunity and have very negative effects on the girls. We all know educating girls is not only of benefit to the girls themselves but to their families and to society. Girls that complete their secondary education are more likely to spend their money on their families. Girls’ education also positively affects any peace process.

Important Message: We need to measure the scope of the problem and shape strategies accordingly. UNICEF and the Afghan government are working together on new research.

Increasing the quality of the school also includes better teacher training. A marginalized rural girl is the first to fail in a system that has been failing her. Getting girls into school depends on working in partnerships. What is happening to Afghanistan is an example for adolescent girls the world over. It was referred to by an African in the audience as “the miracle of Afghanistan”. Afghanistan’s success is noted and applauded.

Mr. Assadullah Muhaqqique, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Afghanistan:
His work is involved in improving the empowerment of women in Afghanistan. Now some statistics:

- 260,000 staff, teachers and administration in Afghanistan today, 27% are women. They are responsible for providing education to all Afghans. The cornerstone of
their policy is to make education available to women and girls in all areas of Afghanistan. There should be opportunities for teacher training and transportation to enable. There are workshops, seminars and activities regarding the empowerment of women.

- 9.3 million students now in Afghanistan
  - Boys 5,825,408 61%
  - Girls 3,734,118 39%
- There are 200,000 teachers
  - Men 153,355
  - Female 66,706
- Administrative staff - 38,038
  - Men 34,949
  - Women 30,389
- Vocational Staff 1189 and 293 are female
- Teacher training schools and students: there were 4, now there are 350 with 68,758 students with 56% female students.

Yet there are challenges, which the Ministry is working to remove:

- 3.5 million students not in school
- Security
- Poverty
- Cultural issues
- Rural area issues

The Deputy Minister thanked UNICEF for being with them for the long and difficult journey. The aim is to improve the numbers to 50% boys and 50% girls.

He asked the international community for its continued help. It needs books, curriculum, lavatories, school buildings, workshops on gender, and money for transportation fees to eliminate the long 2 and 3 hour walks for some girls.

To conclude strategies, innovation and partnerships are all important.

Ms. Rayana Fazli, Education Portfolio Manager, Aga Khan Foundation:

Aga Khan Foundation Girls’ Education Support Programme – Flexible Response Fund
with funds from Canada.

The Programme introduces girls to school but also works to create an environment to keep them there.

Responsible Response Fund: This is a small fund that adapts to the context of the area. It looks to address the needs in the local community. It is a mechanism to ensure local buy-in and study the effect on sustainability as a result. There was a lack of female teachers in the area involved. To attract more, the project topped up teachers salaries and helped with transportation costs to go into these remote areas.
With more female teachers in place, more girls enrolled in school, the dropout decreased and the graduation numbers increased. One of the unexpected findings was the empowerment of girls. The girls went on to get more education and some returned to the rural community to teach. Essentially in this one community they had broken the previous cycle. The community was also empowered and it took ownership in the long-term change that needs to happen. And the influence spread. The empowerment was not only local but also spread to neighbouring communities.

This experiment was an example of the kinds of programmes that can be used. The Afghan government now needs to get resources to those who need them most. It is important to document the good practices that have become proven so that we can learn.

**H.E. Mr. Geir O. Pedersen**, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN:

Norway is a great supporter of education and indeed of girls' education. Afghanistan is one of Norway's most important partners when it comes to development assistance. There is a great challenge in working with states affected by security. It has been quite remarkable what Norway has delivered since 2001. We need to continue to focus on gender.

Gender is important in the area in which Norway is working. Norway is building a dormitory for girls in one of its school so the girls can be safe. It has helped to build 10 schools with another on the way. Without half the population you cannot build a prosperous society.

It is hoped other countries will continue to support.

**Nora Fyles**, Head of the UN Girls' Education Initiative Secretariat:

UN Girls' Education Sector Invitation: the new Afghan Sector Plan

Afghanistan is putting in place a Sector Plan for the next 5 years. It focuses on getting girls into school and their completing. It will be getting more females into teacher training – hoping to train 10,000 annually. It wants to increase women's literacy and help in the rural areas. It needs to put strategies and police in place to improve security and to move the plan from paper to implementation in the next 5 years. It will be consultative in nature and will be a reflective process, which will ask questions and respond. The interactive response will integrate standards of good practice with gender equality.

It is hoped the plan will be extended and used in training in other countries. Several Africans were in the room and referred to the “Miracle of Afghanistan”.

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Ongoing Discussion and Conclusion:

In every village there are shuras and school councils. The development workers need to be transparent in dealing with shuras in order to build trust. There are a lot of cultural and religious issues to be taken into account and trust will be essential.

National Afghanistan Strategic Education Plan will begin in 2017. There will be a lot of experimentation in the next few years, especially in the remote communities. Some communities are indeed so remote it may take 2 or 3 days to walk there. The government won’t be able to win approval everywhere. There will be a lot of trial and error.

World Bank Report of 2011: this focused on how to break the sequence of violence in failed states.

Building institutions takes a generation or more.
We must not give up. We need to support Afghanistan. The success of Afghanistan will eventually have to be owned by Afghanistan itself. Unless peace and security can be solved there will be no sustainability.

Sector Plan:
Which boys and girls are most likely to become disengaged and be pulled out? How do we build a system to address these issues? How do we build a system for skills development that will require variety to address every need?

The strategy around community-based schools has proven s great success especially in insecure areas.

Learning Genetics – another recent report.

To conclude:

- Finance: sufficient finance is needed from the government and from external partners. We need to ensure it reaches those who need it most.
- Inclusion: we cannot leave people behind
- We need to strengthen the education system from planning to implementation. Document to guide direction.
- Innovation will be a big theme

Know it is possible to continue to make progress but it will be essential we continue to work together and partner.

Again our challenges – security and poverty. Afghans love to educate their children. We hope the donors and international community will continue their work. Thank you.
CLOSING PERSONAL COMMENTS

It was indeed an enlightening, invigorating, and intense experience to attend the CSW61 at the United Nations in New York. It was humbling to meet so many talented women from across our globe, to hear their remarkable stories, and to learn of their creative, determined and often, courageous actions. To so many of them, the United Nations is the only hope, and one felt encouraged that the newly appointed Secretary General Antonio Guterres was indeed listening. But he will need the help of all of our own home countries.

Sadly this year one could sense a real shadow – the growing nationalism, greed and xenophobia, the frightening and vast scope of human trafficking and its consequences, and the escalating desperation of so many - a stark realization when countless others on every continent are turning inward.

The CSW61 theme is the key to the situation. Women’s economic empowerment will change the world of work and thus the quality of life at home and in the community. It is fundamental for a prosperous and secure world and essential for broad economic growth, stable economies and social development.

Graduate Women International is only one of many NGOs that participated at CSW61 but it is well positioned with the support and involvement of its NFAs and individual members in some 60 countries around the world to make a difference. Our commitment to tertiary education gives us a unique focus, our collective energy, a unique power, and our global membership, wisdom, breadth, experience and legs.

I thank Geeta Desai, the GWI President for her leadership, and Stacy Dry Lara and her small Geneva staff for our superb preparation. I thank our UN Reps Sophie, Polly, Mick and Maureen who work countless hours at the UN to build our network and guide us in our efforts. It was a privilege and honour too to engage with the other GWI delegates whose camaraderie, passion, wisdom and scope will long be remembered. We have ongoing work to do and our collective efforts will continue to be essential.

Hally Siddons
Graduate Women International
Canadian Federation of University Women-Ottawa
March 28, 2017