



CSW62 Advocacy Report

Submitted by Shirley Gillett

Report on the Commission for the Status of Women(CSW)62, United Nations Headquarters, New York, March 12-23rd, 2018.

The Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations is an annual meeting of women's groups who represent the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) that are affiliates to ECOSOC(United Nations Economic and Social Council) alike GWI. Each group is allotted 20 delegates who represent their particular values and unique features whilst attending the many meetings to collectively work on evaluating progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards, and formulate policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide positive outcomes for the theme for the year going forward. Every three years they are required to show what they have achieved towards the goals of ECOSOC. UN women led by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcukva(Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director), along with representatives of member states are also significant presences at CSW.

This report, whilst being limited in length, aims to give an overall sense of CSW62 and also some of the unique features relevant to GWI's role there and finally some vignettes of personal interest.

This year there were approximately 8,000 (mainly) women with 175 member and observer states attending. The side events which are political and governmental take place in various meeting rooms in the United Nations. Parallel events are seminar, paper and workshop ninety-minute presentations that any group or individual may head up on a topic of relevance to woman. This year there were hundreds of side events and parallel events.

The Graduate Women International(GWI) delegation met for two 7AM breakfasts and for a prearranged dinner. At the breakfast members introduced themselves and there was a briefing on CSW from GWI's viewpoint. This year it was given by Louise McLeod (Board member) as President

Geeta Desai could not attend due to illness, other than the dinner. GWI has two UN representatives who explained their role. These are purely voluntary and take a great deal of time and enthusiasm. There was a cross section of ages and countries(though a majority of Americans)in the delegation.

The priority theme this year was 'Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls'. The review theme was 'Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (agreed conclusions of the forty-seventh session)'.

New Zealand NGO attendees met informally each evening to be briefed re official UN proceedings by Rural Women NZ Chair, Penny Mudford, our NZ NGO representative attached to the NZ Government delegation. Penny and RWNZ President Fiona Gower were invaluable throughout CSW62 as they “were able to shine a light on rural New Zealand women who throughout history have been the backbone of rural New Zealand communities”.

The side event “Empowerment of Rural Women through economic opportunity” was facilitated by Jackie Blue and New Zealand was represented by the Minister of Womens Affairs, Julie Anne Genter who spoke impressively explaining how New Zealand a rural country is essentially historically built upon an agricultural economy. She drew our attention to current issues for NZ rural women.

GWI was involved in the programme in a number of ways; for example in the WG-USA sponsored panel, “Intersecting Grassroots Radio and New Technologies to Reach Rural and Refugee Women”and the seminar presentation “Preventing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Rural South Sudan” co-sponsored by Non Violent Peace Force and WG-USA. They also made an oral statement called” Education is a precondition to the empowerment of rural women and girls”. As delegates we took the responsibility of filling out reporting templates of any sessions of particular interest for GWI.

A personal highlight was attending a UN Women flagship side event from 10AM-3PM. There were women of all ages from many different countries sitting around 30 tables and the programme presented with a mixture of live and Skype interviews with women through the age groups. The

story of a widow ending up on the streets despite being married to a high-status man was eye opening. There was also music and African dancing, but the learning came in our round table group which consisted of ten women from ten different countries with the group task of workshopping on recommendations. Our group bonded really well and one proposal was around accountability (we pledged to endeavour to make real changes to women's actual lives post CSW). By the time we had heard from all 30 groups there was considerable cohesion and affirmation.

Another "knock out" was the presentation by two women from Kaitaia (New Zealand) on sexual abuse demonstrating the power of story. They have set up a charity "Indigo House" aimed to help victims and survivors of sexual harm and are looking to go global with the CSW presentation being videoed.

A further highlight was the Townhall Meeting with Civil Society and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. Each year the "townhall meeting" is an opportunity for civil society to engage with him and his senior leadership on topics around gender equality in the work of the UN.

The main hoped-for outcome from CSW is the document collated by NGOCSW which can only be accepted if agreed to by all member states. Thus, the second week consists of dogged cross checking and consultations and word bartering until all are satisfied. If there is not full agreement it does not go ahead. This year it did, and the outcomes document can be seen on the CSW website. Significantly, GWI also contribute to the written outcomes for the CSW62 Outcome Document.

It is deeply moving to be in an environment with so many women from so many different countries and backgrounds yet with similar desires for a fairer world where women are not only not abused but political powers are exerted for them to be able to develop to their potential.

Attending CSW is somewhat overwhelming with so many simultaneous choices and like being in a bubble with a kaleidoscope of impressions and many layers and, whilst exhausting, also energising. In leaving I was inspired by a quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt given at the final ecumenical service, "Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. You have no security unless you can live bravely, excitingly, imaginatively; unless you can choose a challenge instead of competence."

Footnote

One section from the Agreed Conclusion 23 March 2018

jj Promote and respect women's and girls' right to education throughout the life cycle at all levels, especially women and girls living in rural areas and those who have been left furthest behind, by providing universal access to quality education, and free and compulsory primary and secondary education, ensuring inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, eliminating female illiteracy, and striving to ensure the completion of early childhood, primary, and secondary education and expanding vocational and technical education for rural women and girls; and foster, as appropriate, intercultural and multilingual education for all;

Grateful thanks to GWNZ for their support,

Dr Shirley Gillett