



GW I UPDATE – 25 September 2019



The ceiling of the Human Rights Council Chamber, created by Spanish abstract artist Miquel Barceló.
U.S. Mission Photo by Eric Bridiers

— GW I at the Human Rights Council —

The world is home to the largest youth population in history. They are the most connected generation ever and their perspectives are shaping global development and the implementation of the United Nation's (UN) 2030 Global Agenda on Sustainable Development. This Special Edition of the Graduate Women International (GWI) Update Newsletter showcases the experience of two talented GWI interns who participated in the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC42) in Geneva. The HRC42 sessions they attended support GWI's advocacy work advances the status of women and girls through the safe access to quality, lifelong education and learning. We value their viewpoints as young women who are progressing our mission through the ideas they express in this publication. *Stacy Dry Lara, Executive Director, GWI.*

— 42nd session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva —

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, highlights climate change as global threat

From 9 to 27 September 2019, the HRC42 takes place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The HRC is an inter-governmental body made up of 47 UN member states responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights worldwide. As active participants in the mandate of the HRC, GWI attended the opening session on Monday, 9 September 2019. HRC President, Coly Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal, kicked off the opening session by asking for a minute of silence for the victims of



UN News/ Daniel Johnson – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, briefs the press in Geneva (4 September 2019)

Hurricane Dorian, which, in August 2019, caused extreme damages to the northern islands of the Bahamas and left 50 people dead and 2500 people missing. The session then proceeded with an opening statement from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR), Michelle Bachelet, who warned of the effects of climate change affecting every region of the world. The High Commissioner described climate change as a threat to human rights that the world has never seen before. This subject is of importance to GWI as women and girls are disproportionately affected by natural disasters and their consequences, which is a point that was also raised by the High Commissioner. The full opening statement of the High Commissioner can be downloaded from the GWI website [here](#).

Report of the Independent Expert (IE) on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

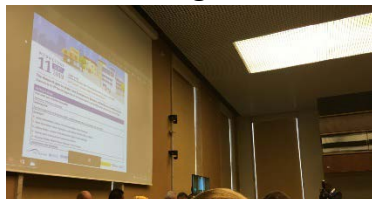


Presentation of the Report of the IE on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

During this first week of the HRC42, Ms. Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, the IE on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons presented her latest report to the Council. In this report, the IE reported on her activities, particularly within the third International Conference on the Human Rights of Older Persons which will convene in Vienna on 12 and 13 November 2019. The IE also examines in this report the human rights protection of older persons in emergency situations, an issue that she considers of key importance when addressing existing protection gaps. The report highlights that older persons in situations of forced displacement, particularly older women, are at heightened risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. Violence may be encountered inside or

outside the home. The IE concludes the report with her recommendations on how to facilitate the design and implementation of appropriate and effective frameworks to ensure the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons. The full report can be downloaded from the GWI website [here](#).

The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation: a key issue of HRC42



Side event on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Spheres of life beyond the household

Around the world, access to proper WaSH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) is a human right that 2.5 billion people do not have; 1 in 3 people do not have access to safe drinking water. The intensification of efforts to ensure that everyone, including women and girls, can fulfil their fundamental right to WaSH, thus achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, which calls to “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, one of the key topics of this first week of HRC42.

On the opening day of the session, Léo Heller, Special Rapporteur (SR) on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, presented his thematic report on “Human rights to water and sanitation in spheres of life beyond the household, with an emphasis on public spaces” to the Council. [A friendly version of the report is available here](#).

The presentation of the report was followed the next day by a side-event organised by the SR and during which GWI took the opportunity to draw the SR's attention to Menstrual Hygiene Insecurity (MHI) as a needless barrier to girls' and women's education worldwide. GWI was also took the opportunity to

exchange with Juliana Muller from Brazil, who in 2018, at just 17 years old, won the 2nd Human Rights Youth Challenge (HRYC). Organised by Heller, this second edition of the HRYC aimed to raise awareness of the human rights to WaSH and draw attention to people who lack access to WaSH in spheres of life beyond the household. With her excellent video, "RIGHTLESS", Juliana Muller allows you to walk a mile in the shoes of a young girl in rural Brazil who understands the consequences of being left behind first-hand. You can view her excellent submission [HERE](#). Congratulations, Juliana!



From left to right, Clémence Mathiaud, GWI Junior Office Administrator with Juliana Muller, Winner of the 2nd HRYC.

In the evening of 11 September, GWI continued showing support for water and sanitation rights by participating in the opening of an art exhibition on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation organised by the UN Office in Geneva and the Permanent Mission of Germany. The exhibition was opened in the presence of Michael Ungern-Sternberg, the German Ambassador, Léo Heller, SR on the human rights to water and sanitation and Tatiana Valovaya, Director General of the UN Office at Geneva.

Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN), Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) join forces for Korean Unification

On 19 September, GWI participated in the side event *Korea Women, South and North – Peace, Family Strength, Rights and Development*. A follow up of previous side events organised on the occasion of the HRC38, 39 and 41, the panel, chaired by Carolyn Handschin President WFWP, showcased programmes in progress such as the 1% Love Share Project, which supplies North Korean women and children with bedding and children's clothing, and upcoming initiatives like establishing a peacebuilding/partnership meeting place for women near the DMZ. Projects like the latter could help provide a cultural insight that could be taken into consideration while building political and public will for peace on the Korean Peninsula. Speakers included Lois A. Herman, WUNRN founder and coordinator, Rajat Khosla for the World Health Organisation (WTO) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Thania Paffenholtz, Director of the Inclusive Peace and Transition Institute and Heiner Handschin, from the UPF 5th UN Headquarters for Asia.

— HRC42 Side Events —

Collaboration to advance education for displaced persons

On 17 September 2019, GWI attended a side event at HRC42 sponsored by inter alia by UNICEF, the International Rescue Committee and the African Union. The event focused on the vital partnership between civil society and government organisations to provide education to refugees and internally displaced people. This becomes particularly important considering that 92% of refugees are hosted by low-income countries with limited means, meaning that civil society organisations are often the only support on the ground. As Maria Agnese Giordano, Global Education Cluster Coordinator at UNICEF, put it, each type of organisation brings something on the table that no other organisation does. This is particularly true for civil society organisations, which are community-built, and it is crucial to coordinate their efforts as well as the ones of all other education stakeholders, including the refugees themselves. Since GWI promotes the access to education for women and girls, this event was of particular importance

because women and girls in humanitarian settings are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to education. After all, the opportunity to learn and to make a livelihood gives people dignity and hope.

Japan, South-Korea and the Netherlands amongst HRC election candidates



Pledging event for candidate states to the Human Rights Council elections for the membership term 2020-2022

On 11 September, GWI participated in a pledging event for HRC election candidates for the term 2020-2022 organized by, inter alia, the Permanent Mission of Fiji, the International Service for Human Rights and Amnesty International. The session gave candidates an opportunity to present their visions on HRC membership and to respond to questions from different stakeholders on how they would realize their pledges and commitments. Among those candidates who accepted the invitation were the Netherlands, Japan and the Republic of Korea. All three of them pledged their commitment to human rights and the advancement of the HRC. To that effect, the Netherlands brought forward that membership to the HRC is not a free right, but also requires domestic action. Topics of interest were, for example, how candidates intend to ensure civil

society participation and gender equality. In relation to the latter, the Netherlands brought forward their leading role in terms of gender equality amongst the European states, whereas Iraq, another election candidate present at the event, was requested to explain how women's participation in public functions could be increased. In response, it was put forward that Iraq shows the highest participation of women in society in the region, and that although by law, 25% of the country's parliamentarians should be women, women currently account for 33%. The other election candidates present at the pledging event were Armenia, Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, the Republic of Moldova and Poland. Libya, Sudan and Venezuela declined the invitation.

GWI takes part in two panels on the effects of the Yemeni conflict on women and girls

On the 10 September, GWI Intern, Ciara Rainsby, attended two HRC42 side events relating to the situation in Yemen. The first one concerned the effects of the conflict on women and girls. The panellists mainly discussed how women are not provided with proper services and therefore cannot finish their studies or gain employment, which can deeply affect and/or destroy their future at that of their children. In addition, the second side event consisted of panellists speaking about child rights in Yemen. One of the speakers stated that 12,000 children are without proper education. This raises deep concerns for the sake of these children's right to education, especially young girls, and how vulnerable they are as victims of war.



Side event on Child Rights in Yemen organised by Synergie Feminine Pour la Paix Et Le Development Durable

GWI participates in a reflexion on the creation of the United Nations

On 17 September 2019, GWI participated in a UN Library Event called The UN Before the UN that opened an exhibit with documents and other archives from before 1945 - before the UN that we know today came into existence. GWI was resonated with one panellist, Fatima Sator, Communication Specialist at United Nations Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, who spoke about how gender equality was included in the preamble of the UN Charter. The inclusion of gender in such a document was groundbreaking and as the speaker stated, was due to the influence of Latin American women, particularly by

Brazilian diplomat, Bertha Lutz, whose presence at the San Francisco UN conference in 1945 and her ability to network, when only 3% of the 160 delegates were women, allowed her the possibility to bring attention to the necessity of including the word “women” within the Charter. *Especially, worth noting is that GWI founding mother, Virginia Gildersleeve, also participated the UN Charter conference in 1945.* This history levelled the path towards discussions of gender today and the first step to how an organisation like GWI could work at the international level. Now, gender issues have become a priority of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

GWI engages in discussions on human trafficking in the Pacific region



Members of the Panel Discussion on Human Trafficking in the Pacific

GWI participated in a panel discussion on Human Trafficking in the Pacific Region. This issue raises many concerns for women and girls in the area. Firstly, the keynote speaker of the panel, Urmila Bhoola, UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, stated that 15 million people in the world are in forced marriage of whom the majority are girls. She also discussed the implications of modern slavery and enlightened the audience that 98% of women and girls in slavery are exposed to sexual violence. These alarming statistics exposed us to the reality of the global situation. Secondly, another panellist, Linnie Roche, an associate of the Homes of Hope organisation in Fiji, informed the audience that women and girls in Fiji have

been forced into sex slavery. For example, she had previously worked with a 14-year old girl that had been sold to her own father’s boss. Her organisation operates on the basis of community safety nets and trauma-informed, survivor-led care and their work has therefore allowed these female victims to have a sense of belonging after being shamed and silenced. Thirdly, another speaker, Anne Pakoa, representative of the Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, spoke about the biggest exposed case of human trafficking that the island of Vanuatu had experienced that involved the smuggling of 202 Bangladeshi men to the island from 2017 to 2018. She ended on the note that human trafficking cannot be handled by one state, it involves and affects everyone. This is what we must take away from this.

— Our 2019 Fall Interns —



From left to right, Ciara Rainsby and Anna Indermaur

Ciara Rainsby

My name is Ciara Rainsby and I have recently graduated from the University of Exeter where I did my Bachelors' degree in International Relations. I am 22 years-old, originally half Irish and half English but have lived most of my life between Switzerland, France and the US - this is what sparked my fascination with International Relations! I am very thankful to have the opportunity to do this internship as I am deeply interested in women's rights issues. It also provides you with great exposure into how an NGO functions on a day-to-day basis and how other international organisations, like the UN, work. This is only my fourth week but there are so many highlights already!

Anna Indermaur

My name is Anna Indermaur and I am 25 years old. I recently graduated from a Master's programme in European and International Human Rights Law at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Before that, I studied international relations at the University of Geneva. As a Swiss citizen, I have the privilege to choose my own career path, and I have the opportunity to pursue education up to the highest level if I wish to do so. I do not take this for granted. Coming from a background of farming from both my mother's as well as my father's side, I am the first one ever in my family to study. This makes me proud, and it shows that with the right educational system, education does become accessible to everyone, as it should be. I now consider it my mission to pass on my privilege to others, and to support others in achieving what was given to me simply due to where I was born. So far, I have done so by joining the youth organisation AIESEC and the Red Cross in Geneva during my undergrad studies. My internship with GWI gives me now the opportunity to pursue my dedication professionally and to understand the work of an NGO advocating for a cause like girls' education. After my time with GWI I intend to proceed in promoting universal access to education, because I firmly believe that a person with access to education can achieve anything.

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Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. GWI, formerly International Federation University Women, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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