



GWI UPDATE – 17 July 2024
Human Rights Council 56th session
Special Edition



United Nations of Geneva.

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— GWI at the UNHRC —

Between 18 June and 12 July, GWI attended and participated in the HRC56. After celebrating its 105th anniversary on 11 July, this Special Edition of the GWI Update Newsletter serves as a reminder and a celebration of GWI’s 77 years of active participation and collaboration within the UN since receiving special consultative status with the ECOSOC in 1947. This Special Edition highlights some of the key events and final resolutions of HRC56, which support GWI’s advocacy work to advance the status of women and girls through safe access to quality, lifelong education and learning. This Special Edition Update is produced by GWI interns, Xinyang Sun, Ondine Deruaz-Scheiblin, and Sophia Schaaper, who represented GWI at the HRC56.

— Side event: Fulfilling the right to education through international cooperation – especially in conflict zones —

On 18 June, WWFP organised a side event titled, "**Fulfilling the Right to Education through International Cooperation – Especially in Conflict Zones**" co-sponsored by Soroptimist International (SI) and NGO Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Geneva. The event addressed the issue of prioritising immediate survival needs over education in affected communities, questioning the prolonged dependency on humanitarian aid without integration into development plans.

The event highlighted **the critical intersection of development and education rights**. It was reported that in 2022, 3,000 schools were attacked, a 20% increase from the previous year, depriving children of education and exposing them to vulnerabilities and violence. Furthermore, despite the 190 countries that signed the Safe Schools Declaration, these attacks and the military use of schools persist.

Speakers emphasised the need for equal education access for women and girls in conflict zones, focusing on enhancing education quality, promoting digital learning, and improving teacher conditions. Education is crucial in mitigating violence against children, such as slavery and forced child

marriage. **GWI encourages to advocate for equal access to education by promoting resources like the "Safe Schools Declaration" to protect schools in conflict zones. Access the Declaration [HERE](#).**

— Side event: Violence against women and girls – widows in refugee camps —

On 19 June, GWI attended and participated in an HRC56 side event organised by WRI titled "**Violence Against Women and Girls – Widows in Refugee Camps**" co-sponsored by Soroptimist international, Latter-Day Saint Charities, NGO CSW Geneva, and GWI represented by GWI Executive Director Stacy Dry Lara.

Speakers highlighted the severe challenges faced by widows in refugee camps and emphasised that widow refugees of all ages are extremely vulnerable, making them prime targets for violence and discrimination. These women often experience property loss, disinheritance, and the lack of crucial documentation like marriage or birth certificates. As a result, they may be forced into remarriage, trafficked, or prostitution and are frequently overlooked in UN documentation. Furthermore, speakers identified 1.36 million widows whose property rights are still restricted compared to men's.

Stacy Dry Lara, Executive Director of GWI, highlighted ongoing discriminatory practices and the importance of education as a tool to empower widows and combat these discriminations. She mentioned **the long-standing efforts of the GWI Hegg Hoffet Fund, established in 1936, which supports refugees and widows by providing them access to basic and higher education through funding.** The event concluded with a call for greater awareness and action to address these pressing issues. **To find more information about the Hegg Hoffet Fund's initiative in helping women refugees around the world, please click [HERE](#).**

— Side event: Commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the mandate of the SR on violence against women —

On 20 June, GWI attended a side event **commemorating the 30th anniversary of the mandate of the SR on violence against women, exploring its causes and consequences.** This event celebrated the 30 years of existence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It was punctuated by reflections from past SRs on the evolution of the CEDAW convention and the progress made in eliminating discrimination against women over the decades.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, SR of the CEDAW Convention between 1994 and 2003, described her mandate as the "glory era for human rights". She added that the international community was united in agreeing that women's rights must be incorporated into the human rights framework and recounted that national laws regarding sexual violence were almost non-existent at that time.

Then, Yakın Ertürk, Rashida Manjoo, and Dubravka Šimonovic, all SRs of the CEDAW convention during the 2000s, took the floor. They emphasised the importance of addressing the root causes of discrimination against women and not only its consequences. Additionally, they highlighted that creating and implementing new language specifically designed to approach these issues (for instance,

the term “gender-related killing”) was instrumental in facilitating the implementation of the convention’s recommendations.

The current SR Reem Alsalem concluded by mentioning the present socio-political context, which is very different from the situation experienced in the 90s. Indeed, today many hard-won women’s rights are being rolled back. They concluded by stressing the critical need to safeguard sexual and reproductive health rights, sexuality rights, and other fundamental human rights. They highlighted the urgency of this issue, noting the rise of a transnational anti-gender movement and stressing the heightened need to protect women’s rights. **To find more information about the CEDAW convention’s history, please click [HERE](#).**

— Side event: Celebration of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy —

On 24 June, GWI attended a side event titled “Shattering Glass Ceilings: Recognizing Female Diplomats: Contributions within the UN System” celebrating the International Day of Women in Diplomacy. Speakers underscored the indispensable role of women in diplomacy, collectively highlighting that without women’s contributions, diplomacy would be less representative, effective, and creative. **Speakers addressed the significant challenges women encounter in accessing leadership roles in diplomacy, including discrimination, biases, and care responsibilities.** They also highlighted promising initiatives like gender advisory boards and training programs focused on equality and harassment prevention.

Panellists celebrated the groundbreaking historical contributions of four women ambassadors who pioneered the inclusion of gender equality within the UN Charter. Tatyana Valovaya Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva noted progress with 67 female ambassadors currently leading missions but stressed the remaining journey towards achieving gender parity, as women still represent only 20% of ambassadors and face underrepresentation in leadership roles. **Speakers emphasised the positive impact of women in diplomacy, facilitating peace agreements and enhancing the credibility of the UN.** Discussions also centred on the urgent need for accurate empirical data on gender disparities and the critical role of embedding women’s rights in education to effectively challenge gender biases and empower women and girls globally.

The event concluded with a call to action, urging heightened awareness and concerted efforts to address gender disparities, toxic masculinity, and celebrate the significant contributions of women in diplomacy.

— Side event: Listening to children: a global call to strengthen the right to free education, preschool and secondary education —

On June 24, GWI participated in the [Child Rights Connect side event](#) to the HRC56 titled “**Listen to the Children: A Call to Strengthen the Right to Free Education from Preschool to Secondary Education.**” The event introduced the drafting of an **optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, seeking to ensure that states provide at least one year of free pre-primary education and secondary education.** It aims to recognize early childhood care and education as integral to the right

to education, promote international cooperation in education, and streamline reporting requirements under the Convention.

The event featured a panel of distinguished speakers, including two children advisors, from Brazil and Canada, along with H.E. Mr. Héctor Virgilio Alcántara, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the UN; H.E. Mr. Marc Bichler, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the UN; H.E. Samuel U. B. Saffa, ESQ., Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN; and Dr. Philip D. Jaffé, Professor at the Center for Children's Rights Studies, University of Geneva, and Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Human Rights Council has established an **open-ended intergovernmental working group, as per resolution HRC56/5**, comprising representatives from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, relevant experts, states, civil society, and other stakeholders. This group is tasked with drafting the optional protocol, for which a progress report will be submitted to the Human Rights Council by its sixty-second session (HRC62), in 2026, and made available in an accessible, child-friendly format. Informal consultations with member states were held during HRC56 on 21 June, 25 June, and 1 July. GWI had the opportunity to attend these consultations with member states and participate in various discussions, including debates on the roles and rights of parents in early childhood education. GWI is delighted to see this initiative moving forward and is committed to contributing actively and constructively to this vital work. **Read the draft resolution [HERE](#)**

— Side event: Women walking for peace: leveraging human rights mechanisms for the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence—

On 26 June, GWI attended a side event titled "**Women Walking for Peace**" organised by UN and the Permanent Mission of Guatemala in Geneva. This event addressed the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. Held on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, **the event showcased the Sepur Zarco case, where the Guatemalan High Court in 2016 convicted military officials for sexual slavery against the indigenous group of Maya Q'eqchi' women, marking a significant moment in international justice.**

The Sepur Zarco case occurred during the Guatemalan civil war, which lasted from 1960 to 1996. During this time, the women community of Maya Q'eqchi' near the military base of Sepur Zarco experienced systematic rape and enslavement by military officers. Between 2011 and 2016, 15 survivors fought for justice in Guatemala's Supreme Court, resulting in the conviction of two former military officers for crimes against humanity and the implementation of 18 reparation measures. **This case represents significant hope for these women, offering the possibility of reclaiming their land, accessing health services, and securing education for their children. It demonstrates that justice can protect victims and provide necessary reparations.**

The Executive Director of Justice Rapid Response, Samuel Emonet, underscored the necessity of gender-sensitive approaches and the vital role of civil society in bridging gaps between victims and services. He also highlighted CEDAW's significant work in holding states accountable and promoting survivor-centric approaches. Participants were informed about the Global Survivors Fund, a critical initiative providing comprehensive measures for survivors. This initiative effectively supports

institutional changes by financing the incorporation of education on historical memory into textbooks and promoting survivors' reintegration into society.

In conclusion, the event emphasized that a multifaceted approach combining international expertise, domestic commitment, civil society involvement, and survivor-centric strategies is essential for ensuring justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. With the Sepur Zarco case standing as a model for such effort. **To find more information about the Sepur Zarco case, you can click [HERE](#).**

— Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women —

On 28 June, the HRC56 convened its annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women, as mandated by HRC resolutions 6/30 and 53/27.

The morning session focused on "economic violence as gender-based violence against women and girls." High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk emphasised the profound impact of economic abuse, including control over financial resources and barriers to education and employment, perpetuating cycles of inequality. Urgency was stressed in implementing robust legal frameworks and policies to effectively address these systemic issues.

During the afternoon, discussions centred on the intersection of human rights, the economy, and women's rights. Experts explored how economic policies influence women's access to resources and opportunities, advocating for equitable structures that uphold women's rights and contribute to sustainable development goals.

The discussions concluded with a call for continued advocacy and public awareness to advance gender equality in global human rights agendas. Collaboration remains essential to removing barriers, empowering women economically, and ensuring the fulfilment of their human rights worldwide. **For more detailed information, you can view the sessions [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).**

— Resolutions and Decisions —

This HRC56 session concluded with the adoption of resolutions and decisions, which will soon be accessible on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights News website: [Human Rights Council News | OHCHR](#). During this HRC56, four Resolutions focusing on education and women's rights, particularly relevant to GWI, were drafted and deliberated upon.

1. Resolution 56/19 [\(A/HRC/56/L.15\)](#) on **"Technology-facilitated gender-based violence"**, which seeks to recognize the pervasive nature of digital violence, that disproportionately affects women and girls. It calls for comprehensive measures to prevent and combat such violence, including stronger legal frameworks, enhanced digital literacy, and support systems for victims.
2. Resolution 56/11 [\(A/HRC/56/L.26\)](#) on **"menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality"** which urges states to ensure affordable and accessible menstrual hygiene products, especially in rural and remote areas. It emphasises the need to integrate menstrual

hygiene into national policies, promote awareness to reduce stigma, and include menstrual hygiene in humanitarian efforts.

3. Resolution 56/22 ([A/HRC/56/L.25/Rev.1](#)) on the “**Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls**”, that reaffirms commitments to gender equality and the condemnation of violence and discrimination, highlighting the ongoing challenges of poverty, inequality, and gender-based violence.
4. Resolution 56/5 ([A/HRC/56/L.8/Rev.1](#)) “**Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education**”, this initiative aims to strengthen and expand educational opportunities for children globally, guided by principles of human rights and international cooperation.

— UPR Outcomes Adopted for Four GWI Affiliates —

The Working Group on the UPR, established in accordance with HRC resolution 5/1, held its 46th session from 29 April to 10 May 2024. For this HRC 56th session, the Council adopted UPR outcomes for 14 States, including four GWI National Federations and Associations (NFAs): Senegal, Mexico, Nigeria, and Congo.

Senegal:

H.E. Mr. Coly Seck, Ambassador of Senegal to the UN, reported that Senegal accepted 299 out of 322 recommendations, with a focus on improving the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls. The new government, elected in March 2024, is committed to human rights and implementing reforms to ensure greater equity and well-being for women and girls, involving stakeholders and civil society in the process.

Mexico:

Mr. Joel Hernández, Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights in Mexico, reported that 115 Member States acknowledged Mexico's progress and provided 318 recommendations. After thorough consultations with 49 authorities and civil society, Mexico accepted 304 recommendations (96%). These will guide the incoming administration, following the recent historic election of Mexico's first female president. Key areas include social rights, welfare, discrimination, violence reduction, inequality, and poverty eradication.

Ms. Francisca E. Méndez Escobar, Mexico's Ambassador, highlighted that Mexico accepted recommendations focused on equality, non-discrimination, gender equality, and violence prevention. Emphasis was placed on policies for vulnerable groups, including indigenous and African-Mexican communities. Mexico committed to combating hate, discrimination, and ensuring safe migration. The government also accepted recommendations to abolish torture and protect human rights defenders and journalists, with a priority on finding disappeared persons.

Nigeria:

Significant progress has been made on the death penalty, with a decrease in death sentences and steps toward an involuntary moratorium. Nigeria reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights but expresses concern over controversial concepts that deviate from recognized international standards, rejecting those that affect its sovereignty and cultural sensitivities.

Mr. Tony Ojokwu, from the National Human Rights Institutions of Nigeria, highlighted amendments to strengthen the Nigeria's commission's independence and powers. The government has also designated the commission as a national preventive mechanism under the optional protocol against torture.

Congo:

Mr. Aimé Ange Wilfrid Bininga, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Congo, emphasised that civil society organisations operate freely without government intimidation and that freedom of the press and journalist safety are protected by the constitution. Regarding female genital mutilation and early marriage, he noted that while there are no specific regulations on early marriages, such marriages are not sanctioned for minors. On sexual orientation, Congo's constitution ensures equality for all citizens, including LGBT individuals, who participate in national HIV/AIDS programs. Congo commits to ongoing cooperation with treaty bodies to enhance human rights protections. The country is focused on gender parity, with increased representation of women in decision-making roles and pending parity legislation. The Mouebara law (2022) combats violence against women. Additionally, a Child Rights Observatory has been established in Congo to handle child protection issues.

— Dates and events worth noting —

30 July	World Day against Trafficking in Persons, Global
31 July	Pan African Women's Day
9 August	International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
12 August	International Youth Day
8 September	International Literacy Day
21 September	International Day of Peace
5 October	World Teachers' Day
11 October	International Day of the Girl Child
15 October	International Day of Rural Women
17 October	World Day for Eradication of Poverty

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GWJ, formerly IFUW, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947
and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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