

GWI United Nations Representative Advocacy Report Vienna 2025

Meeting attended: (place, date, time, name of meeting):



Subject of meeting:

This high-level conference held at the UN Vienna to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women, discussed progress in the fields of crime prevention and criminal justice reform against the objectives outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It looked in detail at gender-based violence (GBV), transnational organized crime, terrorism, corruption, and drug-related issues - which disproportionately impact women and marginalized communities.

The two-day event was sponsored by Sweden and the People’s Republic of China, with the support of Norway, Ireland, Spain, and Australia, as well as the UNOV/UNODC Group of Friends for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Speakers at the opening included **Ghada Waly**, Executive Director, UNODC; **Sima Bahous**, Executive Director, UN Women; **Li Song**, Ambassador of China; **Annika Markovic**, Ambassador of Sweden; **Grace O’rao**, Women Volunteers for Peace, Kenya. Ambassadors from the UK, Germany, the Philippines, Australia, Mexico, Kenya and Ghana moderated the panels, with many others attending. Panellists included experts from around the world, including judges, prosecutors, government officials, police, lawyers, academia and civil society. The undersigned represented GWI.



L – The Opening Panel; C – the Ambassadors from Sweden and China; R – Elisabeth Francis (c) with other NGO members.

Six panels were held:

1. Violence as a Cross-Cutting Issue

Violence is an issue that cuts across so many crime-related areas - criminal justice, organized crime, terrorism, and various forms of trafficking. Despite progress, gaps in legal frameworks continue to hinder justice outcomes, disproportionately impacting women and girls. The panel discussed strategies / initiatives to build inclusive, effective, and human rights-based responses to GBV.



Comfort Olubo Umaru, Prosecutor, Natl Judicial Institute, Nigeria; and Elisabeth

2. Integrating Gender Perspectives in Criminal Justice Reform.

A fair criminal justice system must ensure that policies, laws, and institutions address the particular challenges faced by women and girls - both as victims, perpetrators and as justice sector professionals. However, biases, systemic discrimination, and gaps in legal protections continue to prevent women's equal access to justice. The panel discussed the importance of integrating the perspectives of men, women, boys and girls into criminal justice reform, focusing on best practice strategies to create inclusive legal frameworks and gender-balanced law enforcement and judiciary systems.

3. From Margins to Mainstream: Women's Role in Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism.

Women who are victims of terrorism often face distinct challenges such as sexual violence, legal discrimination and exclusion from support services. But women are not only victims - they may also participate across the spectrum of violent extremism, including acting as supporters, recruiters, and, in some cases, perpetrators. Ensuring women's meaningful participation in the design and implementation of policies and programs to prevent and respond to violent extremism is vital. The panel explored how these aspects influence radicalization, recruitment, and counterterrorism efforts, emphasizing the need to integrate women's voices, experiences, and leadership into security policies.

4. Addressing Organized Crime: A Gendered Approach

Organized crime has unfortunate consequences for millions of people worldwide - with women and girls disproportionately affected. Economic vulnerability, and legal barriers often leave women at greater risk of exploitation, sexual abuse, and human rights violations at the hands of criminal networks, including in the context of crimes that affect the environment. This panel discussed the gendered impact of Transnational Organised Crime



and highlighted the vital role of women in law enforcement, policymaking, and grassroots initiatives.

5. The World of Drugs: From Trafficking to Treatment

The global drug trade has far-reaching social, economic, and security impacts. Women are not only victims of drug-related crime, but they can also be participants, as traffickers or members of organized crime networks. The panel discussed how a gendered approach is needed to address drug trafficking, improve law enforcement responses, and expand access to treatment and harm reduction services.



6. Corruption: Implications for Women’s Rights and Empowerment

Corruption remains a major barrier to women and girls, impacting equitable access to justice and equality before the law, economic opportunities, access to public services (in particular health services), and access to leadership and decision-making roles in both the public and private sector. The panel gave examples of strategies for strengthening anti-corruption measures. These must be accessible – e.g. South Africa shared: ‘awakened conversation’ - and recognise that corruption is not just about money but can include sexual favours etc. They must ensure women’s equal access to justice and economic opportunities, and promote women’s leadership in governance and accountability mechanisms.



Refers to SDG no #: (please reference)

All with particular reference to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17.

Relevant treaties/conventions/resolutions:

Many, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Kyoto Declaration, UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the UN Convention against Corruption; the international instruments to prevent and combat terrorism, etc

Personal observations:

- This was a very well-attended, well-structured conference with the involvement of so many ambassadors indicating the importance being paid to the crime / women’s issues agenda - and signaling their ongoing commitment to a multilateral approach. It was interesting to hear from law practitioners and NGOs specific examples and lived experience – ‘stories



that highlight gaps in justice systems' - from various parts of the world; it was a great opportunity to network on behalf of GWI.

- Many excellent recommendations / best practices were discussed during the panel sessions and the Q&As. The outcome pamphlet is well worth reading.

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Report - UNODC and Beijing30 Women Justice and Security in a Changing World.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Report_-_UNODC_and_Beijing30_Women_Justice_and_Security_in_a_Changing_World.pdf)

- Across many of the panels - from GBV to organized crime, trafficking, and terrorism - technology was highlighted as an aid to progress (through multiple uses of AI) - but also as a driver of new and emerging forms of violence against women and girls. The 'global digital divide' is clearly exacerbating women and girls' vulnerability to technology-facilitated violence, with young women and girls often being manipulated into criminal activities. This is an area where things are likely to get worse. Education / risk awareness is vital.

- Many panellists made the point that legal empowerment begins with rights awareness. Women must first know their rights in order to claim them. Education and training at all levels is important.

- Focus on Partnerships not just on funding; count on male support.

- Need for more inclusion, trauma-informed care, support for women's organisations and work with grassroots organisations; mental health is a cross-cutting issue not an add-on;

- Training of first responders, reduce secondary victimisation;

- Institutional change has to go hand in hand with a change in mindset /societal change.

- Foster critical thinking; enforce the Bangkok Rules, the Mandela Rules;

- Data is crucially important and an important role for civil society.

- Educating young people, particularly on their rights and emerging crime threats, was continuously identified as a critical crime prevention strategy.

- Prevention has to start early and must include men and boys.

- UNODC: reported that its 'spotlight initiative campaign' has enabled nearly 3 million women access to justice; in Mexico 20k police officers trained, in Pakistan 15 gender policy desks; there are many peer-reviewed tools available; the challenge is to spread awareness and implement, implement, implement!

Elisabeth Francis

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