

REPORT ON 58th COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN New York 10th – 21st March 2014

Priority Theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

Review Theme: Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.

Emerging Issue: Women's access to productive resources.

The number of NGOs seeking registration for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) continues to increase with over 400 being accredited this year. As has been the custom for the past few years, each organisation was permitted a maximum of 20 accredited delegates, however there was some relaxation of security; there were no secondary passes, much to the relief of all, which meant all accredited delegates were free to attend open CSW sessions, as they wished. As in the past many sessions remained closed. Tickets were still required for side events sponsored by Missions and various UN Agencies in order to secure a place. No accreditation was required for the concurrent NGO parallel events which are held off the UN compound.

The opening of CSW followed the usual business format this year focusing on the importance of gender equality. Due to continued renovations at the UN no tickets were issued for the opening; delegates were able to watch the proceedings in an overflow room or by webcast.

ICW-CIF delegates met for a briefing and refreshments on Sunday evening 9th March at the home of Iryna Kurowyckyj. It was also nice to welcome representatives from NCs with ECSOC status, viz. Korea, GB and Canada and to a few of the NY Permanent Representatives to the UN. During the next two weeks we met delegates from other NCs including USA, Spain and Indonesia. As in previous years it was very difficult to organise a definite briefing time for delegates during CSW due to so many commitments, however we would see one another somewhere most days and networking information was passed around.

Having organised ICW-CIF's programme I attended as many parallel events as possible, organised by affiliated National Councils, viz. Korea, USA, Bangladesh (unable to attend) and, all importantly, our (ICW-CIF) event entitled "Caring for Women is Caring for the World: The Challenges pre- and post-2015" which was well facilitated by Monica Tolman, the ICW-CIF Co-ordinator for the Status of Women Standing Committee. The two excellent speakers, Lopa Banerjee, Chief, Civil Society Section UN Women, and Celine Paramunda, NGO Representative at the UN for the Medical Mission Sisters and member of the Open Working Group (on SDGs), gave an overview of the MDGs and SDGs – where they are at, the shortfalls and positives, their relevance to CSW and the Agreed Conclusions and the future post 2015. Lopa considers this CSW to be more important than next year's saying we are at a convergence point with the coming together of the MDGs, SDGs and with the 2012 Rio Conference outcome document identifying sustainable development goals. Also, the focus is on Beijing +20. Celine highlighted that investing in women and girls is good for development as well as the need for poverty eradication. It was great to see the room, seating 70, over full with over 107 persons attending, representing some 34 countries; the engagement of the speakers with the audience, which gave warmth to the event, and from the many favourable comments received later, the parallel event was a great success. Many delegates said they now understood the relevance of the MDGs and SDGs which would help with their deliberations for the 2nd week of CSW and their preparation for CSW59 (Proceedings will be lodged on the website).

Among the ICW-CIF delegates who presented papers were Cosima Schenk, Linda Liu, Jung-Sook Kim at the KNCW event which examined "Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Asia-Pacific Region" and myself at the event arranged by the Foundation for Women's Rights Promotion and Development, a Taiwanese NGO, which looked at good practices and the achievements of the MDGs in the Asia-Pacific region in the fields of health, empowerment of women and ending violence against women. I presented a paper, prepared for me, on Australia's contribution towards achieving the MDGs in relation to women's health and caring.

The second week I devoted more time attending sessions run by the Commission, few of which were open. It is always fascinating listening to the reports of the State Missions on what their respective

countries are doing to improve conditions for women, this year focusing on equality in relation to the Agreed Conclusions. I also attended events sponsored by the NGO CSW NY Committee on Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information (DPI) all of which were co-sponsored by ICW-CIF. DPI organised a full day event to mark the UN Day of Happiness on 20th March, the 1st day of Spring in the USA. Speakers focused on events that occurred in their countries focussing on happiness or occasions in their lives that had brought them happiness. Although a long day it brought a certain degree of lightness as an interlude to the serious negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions. Apart from the side events mentioned above, ICW-CIF was a co-sponsor to a number of parallel events including the USA event at which I gave greetings from ICW-CIF and mentioned the ending of the ICW-CIF and NCW USA 125th anniversary year. The events I attended covered a wide variety of topics but equality was the underlying objective. I attended the NGO CSW Forum reception and a few other receptions, all of which provided a good opportunity for networking

After a long wait during the late evening of the final day of CSW58, Lily Hutjes and I found it very special being present for the announcement that the agreed Conclusion for CSW58 had been adopted and to hear messages of support from many Missions particularly from Egypt. Due to applause the Minister had difficulty delivering her message; similarly the Ambassador from El Salvador was also well applauded. Then followed debate on the only contentious resolution, viz. women and the girl child and HIV/AIDS. With amendments this was passed. The 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women eventually ended at 2.10 am

The atmosphere at CSW58 was positive in contrast to last year. Caucuses were given more time and seemed better supported which aided their work indicating comments made at CSW57 had been taken into account. Lopa Banerjee, Chief, Civil Society Section UN Women was present at all the daily morning briefings; she imparted energy in reporting about the Agreed Conclusions and CSW58 in general. A member of the CSW Bureau was also present most days at the insistence of the newly appointed head of the Bureau, Ambassador Libran Cabactulan from the Philippines Mission. He is very supportive of the NGOs attending CSW and would like to see most, if not all, of the sessions open to delegates. However he doesn't have the full support of the Bureau members but hopes to reverse this.

Both at the morning briefings and at many of the parallel events delegates were reminded that at this CSW, we were at a critical point in evaluating the success or otherwise of the MDGs and the development of the SDGs. It came through clearly that there must be a stand-alone SDG on ending violence against women; reference to ending violence was sadly lacking in the MDGs. There was debate on "The Family" with most delegates calling for nothing less than what is in the Beijing Platform for Action. CEDAW, which came into force in 1981 is also linked to this convergence. Preparation for 2015 is beginning in earnest. The NGO Forum in Geneva and the ECAP meeting, both in November 2014, are important major conferences.

ICW-CIF can have an influence on the development of the SDGs. In preparation for CSW59 all National Councils are urged to follow the formation of the goals and to make comment to ICW-CIF on what is happening in their countries and what they would like to see in the goals for the betterment of all women and girls. Councils are also urged to study the Agreed Conclusions and bring them to the attention of their respective governments for action.

Once again it has been a pleasure and an honour to have organised the ICW-CIF programme for CSW. My thanks go to all the delegates, the speakers at the parallel event and to all who assisted in some way to make ICW-CIF visible and the programme successful. Thank you for your support.

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