

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW 62)

12-23 March 2018, UN Headquarters, New York

Introduction:

The sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) took place in New York during the period 12-23 March 2018. The ‘working’ two week period was preceded by a Consultation Day – a mix of events, with speakers (such as Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women and H.E. Ms Geraldine Byrne-Nason, Bureau Chair (see below), and others, easing the CSW 62 attendees into two busy weeks.¹ The International Law Association (ILA) has recognised consultative status with the Economic and Social Commission of the UN (ECOSOC)² and was represented by the ILA Feminism and International Law Committee at CSW 62.³

The priority theme this year was *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*. A timely topic; rural women and girls suffer multiple discrimination – even compared with women and girls in non-rural areas. 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, from the 47th session of the CSW*. This approach (priority and review themes) allows for new themes to be explored, and at the same time, provides for review of what has been a priority theme. The overall result is to broaden the range of subjects under discussion during CSW, and by revisiting a review theme, to facilitate an assessment of progress made.

The 45 members of the Economic and Social Commission⁴ are elected for four years, on the basis of equitable geographical distribution. The four members of the Bureau are elected for two years. The Bureau facilitates the preparation, and is tasked to ensure the successful outcome of the annual sessions of the Commission. The Permanent Representative of Ireland (since 2017) was elected Chair of the Commission Bureau in 2018 and will serve in this role for two years. In this capacity, she chaired and participated in a number of events during CSW 62. This is an important role, as was noted during attendance at other CSW sessions. Mr. Shah Asif Rahman (Bangladesh), was elected Vice-Chair of the Bureau.⁵ The **Agreed** Conclusions were adopted on 23 March, addressing the priority theme (indicated above), having gone through a lengthy process of drafting and redrafting (through negotiation). This activity (and outcome) are key elements of CSW.⁶ The emphasis on **Agreed** should be noted.⁷ These reflect the consensus of the UN’s 193 members, a goal which requires great delicacy to achieve.

¹ <http://www.ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum/ngo-consultation-day>

² <http://csonet.org/>

³ Relevant websites are provided with further information is available on events.

⁴ For the Commission’s multi-year programme of work for the period 2017-2019 see ECOSOC resolution 2016/3

⁵ Exemplifying geographical and gender balance.

⁶ See ECOSOC resolutions 2015/6 and 2016/3.

⁷ See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw62-2018> for all relevant Documents, including **Agreed Conclusions** (accessed 9 April 2018). See too

Finally, the priority theme for CSW 63 in 2019 will be *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. The review theme will be *Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development, from the 60th session of the CSW*. Thus, as has been mentioned already, we see the review theme revisiting an earlier priority theme – allowing for assessment of progress.

Events:

Features of the first days of CSW are what are termed *High-level interactive dialogue among Ministers on the priority theme* and *Ministerial Round Tables on the priority theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls* (in two parallel meetings). These can sometime present as 'statements' rather than interactive. From the point of view of this writer, the main benefits of these events is that a considerable amount of up-to date official data are presented, and provide a useful source of information for research purposes.⁸

Side:⁹

i. Attendance at the daily 08.30 'briefing' is a must' (in the opinion of the writer). It is extremely important for understanding how the **Agreed Conclusions** are progressing. The platform 'group' is always well informed and informative. At CSW 62 it was not unusual for Dr Susan O'Malley, Chair of NGO CSW/NY, to be on the platform joining the other speakers for that day. Dr O'Malley frequently acted as a conduit for queries,



suggestions and other inputs, into the 'formal negotiations'. This represents a very useful aid for attendees trying to ensure that their views penetrate into those spaces where they can be heard. In general, the platform party left no doubt as to their willingness towards an open approach to NGO-input into discussions (taking place elsewhere). The daily 'briefing' also provided an opportunity for NGO lobbyists to raise

concerns, and for debate amongst those present to ensue.

<https://www.newsdeeply.com/womensadvancement/articles/2018/03/30/explainer-how-we-arrived-at-the-csw-outcome-document> for a discussion on the issues progressed (accessed 9 April 2018).

⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw62-2018/official-meetings>

⁹ Only some examples are offered due to length constraints; for fuller information see <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw62-2018/side-events/calendar-of-side-events> (accessed 10 April 2018).

ii. *Leaving No One Behind for Planet 50/50 by 2030: every rural woman and girl everywhere* was held in St. Vartan **Armenian Cathedral**, a short walk from the UN, with excellent facilities for hosting this innovative event.



The half day event was held on 15 March, off the UN ‘campus’, which enabled participation by people who were not part of ECOSOC officially recognised NGOs, with UN ground passes or equivalents, thus widening participation in the overall CSW process. The purpose was to recommend ‘a set of policy standards and benchmarks on how the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2030 will ensure that no one is left behind’. The idea behind this event, and its unusual structure (very interactive) was to share best practices. Those present in the audience were very engaged and vocal. The wide range of interviewees and speakers offered personal insights. Some were present



in the venue, others contributed via video/link. This allowed voices from many geographical points to be heard.

Those present sat at round tables and discussed and contributed to the general discussion. During the lunch break, each table was asked to answer the question *How can rural communities monitor governments in the implementation of Leaving No One Behind?* The answers were

collected, and led to later discussion. This event was a good example of ‘leaving no one behind’ in that all interested parties could participate.

The breadth of events available can be seen from the websites.¹⁰

Most events ranged from factual to uplifting; some recounted the grim story of the suffering of women and children, and others celebrated their achievements. A

recurring theme has remained the need for disaggregated data in order to allow well informed policy decisions to be made.

The data events and discussions were useful, and, importantly, accessible to the non statistician.



Parallel events

Parallel events organised by NGOs take place outside United Nations premises at a range of locations, of varying proximity to the UN, and of varying standards. Any NGO may organise and attend these events—subject to space availability. A potential disadvantage is that it can be time consuming to get to/from these external locations, added to which, even with a ‘ground pass’, re-entry to the UN building will require rejoining a queue, including ‘day visitors’. A great advantage of parallel events is that no UN ‘ground pass’ is required, and thus people who are not associated with any particular group or recognized NGO can attend and be involved – another example of ‘leaving no one behind’.

NGO parallel events¹¹ during the CSW session are coordinated by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW/NY),¹² which also organises Consultation Day, and whose Chair, Dr O’Malley, as mentioned already, is a frequent member of the daily morning briefing platform group.

The ILA Feminism and International Law did not attend any CSW 62 parallel events due to the wide choice of Official and Side events available. However, without question, the parallel events on offer were extensive in number, and wide in subject-matter, and provided a platform for discussion – and exposure of themes.

Patricia Conlan, Chair, ILA-Committee on Feminism and International Law, 10 April 2018.

¹⁰ Provided here.

¹¹ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1S1ZoLunoFRYZYyE191O-JA8eEFGy41guVIJPr9lzBQ4/edit?ts=5a872527#gid=0> (accessed 10 April 2018).

¹² <http://www.ngocsw.org>. The ILA Committee on Feminism and International Law hosted parallel events at CSW 60 and CSW 61.