

CSW 58 - Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa NZ - Report - May 2014

The fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 - 21 March 2014.



The Priority theme was the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

The Review theme for CSW 58 was 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

The Emerging issue was women's access to productive resources.

It was my privilege to attend CSW 58 as the UN Convenor. It was also a challenge as this was my first time in this representative role. I wondered if it would be a talk fest, or an opportunity to make a difference to the status of women here in NZ, especially our Presbyterian women, and to contribute internationally from a NZ Presbyterian Women's perspective. I discovered our insights and actions are highly valued in the international arena,

International Women's Day

My visit coincided with International Women's Day at the UN. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General; John W. Ashe, President of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly; Hillary Rodham Clinton, Former United States Secretary of State, U.S. Senator; Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women; and Andrea Nunez, Vice President of the World YWCA Board, were among other dignitaries who helped us all to celebrate on this occasion. Their speeches are all available on the UN web site.

Equality for women is progress for all

"Countries with more gender equality have better economic growth. Companies with more women leaders perform better. Peace agreements that include women are more durable. Parliaments with more women enact more legislation on key social issues such as health, education, anti-discrimination and child support. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all."

[Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#)

I also enjoyed listening to Helen Clark who is the UN Development Administrator make her statement, Amongst other things she said,

“ This year's International Women's Day theme - Equality for Women is Progress for All - states a simple truth. No country will reach its full potential if its female citizens do not enjoy full equality. . . . While there has, undoubtedly, been progress for many women and girls, it has been uneven and too slow. . . . Grounded in international human rights, gender equality doesn't just improve the lives of individual women, girls, and their families; it makes economic sense, . . . Let's mark this International Women's Day by redoubling our efforts to make equality for women a reality. . . . Let's commit ourselves to investing our time and resources in all aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment. Only then can we fulfil the rights of all women and men, and create a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient world.”

From then on, at CSW 58, it was a learning curve but one of the most enlivening times I have ever experienced. To be with thousands of women from countries around the world, to learn about women's organisations from civil societies across the globe, to have time be able to interact with individual women from such diverse countries, was fascinating.

There are many very inspiring women doing amazing work to improve the status of women and girls where they live. Our reality is so different from those living in a war zone, those for whom hunger is a daily reality or those who have been displaced or made refugees by circumstances beyond their control.

Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa NZ have special consultative status which means we can have up to twenty Presbyterian women from NZ as delegates. This year we had only one. Next year will be different I hope.

Consultative Status is a phrase whose use can be traced to the founding of the United Nations and is used within the UN community to refer to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. These are organisations that have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the fields of activity covered by the Council and its subsidiary bodies, and that are known within the fields for which they have or seek consultative status. In other words, these are special interest groups with more than a few clues about what is really happening in civil society. As Presbyterian Women across New Zealand our experience is valued at the UN. As a member of a faith based organisation we, Presbyterians, have a unique focus. This is very different to those attending from some of the other non-governmental organisations. We network across many different organisations as Presbyterians are involved at many levels in many organisations in many different countries around the world. I found it interesting how easily we found each other, and how quickly we connected in the different forums at the United Nations events.

UN Ecumenical Women .

Among the many organisations I worked closely with, was one called Ecumenical Women at the United Nations. [www. ecumenicalwomen.org](http://www.ecumenicalwomen.org) Ecumenical Women is a coalition of Christian non-governmental organisations. This organisation has a permanent representation at the UN and its head quarters is based in the Church Centre conveniently placed across the plaza in front of the United Nations itself, and many of the events take place there. Ecumenical Women submitted a joint advocacy statement signed by most of its member organisations to the United Nations to the 58th Commission on the Status of Women.

The Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa, New Zealand, was one of the signatories to this joint advocacy statement

We envisioned a human community where the participation of everyone is valued, where no one is excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, age, religion or cultural practice, and where diversity is celebrated as God's gift to the world.

Ecumenical Women reminded the 58th Commission on the Status of Women of the important role that faith-based organisations have played in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, including food programmes, education, healthcare, housing, water and sanitation, capacity building for women and girls and much more.

Our network's pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals provided a unique vision of our achievements and the challenges still ahead.

Ecumenical Women realised that the Millennium Development Goals, although well intentioned, remain treatments rather than the cure. Large-scale social and economic transformation, partnerships and political will are required if we are to achieve these goals. We recognised that significant yet unequal progress has been made and that existing commitments must be met.

We affirmed that the promotion of gender equality from a human rights perspective, and the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, as enshrined in the Beijing Platform and international laws, and are necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals and contribute to a post-2015 agenda that will ensure gender justice and sustainable development.

We highlighted four areas of achievement and challenges and we advocated strongly on these areas at all levels - in conversations, at meetings, by lobbying government representatives including those from our own government, by asking questions in public forums, and by requesting audiences with the various UN missions. Not once were we turned down.

Our four advocacy priorities were:

1 Poverty and Hunger

Poverty and hunger continue to plague our societies. Though successive progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals demonstrate that significant gains have been made in lessening the number of persons who live in extreme poverty or hunger, there is more to do.

Traditional aid programs have failed to address the root causes of poverty and hunger around world. Without confronting social and economic discrimination, the wealthy will continue to grow exponentially wealthier while the poor will continue to remain marginalised.

2 Access to quality education, employment and decision-making

Whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

3 Health

The faith community has provided a broad spectrum of health services including maternal and child health services which have contributed to the achievements in these respective Millennium Development Goals. Great advancements have been seen on health issues, but women and girls' access to adequate health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services, remains unmet and of vital importance.

Caregiving work is most often unpaid and undervalued. Improving access to medical services and ensuring caregivers are financially supported would lighten the heavy burden women and girls take on and allow them to contribute more broadly to their communities.

4 Violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls in both rich and poor countries continues to challenge the global development agenda. We recognise that some states have made progress in addressing widespread violence; we also acknowledge that despite numerous UN actions, violence against women and girls persists as a gross human rights violation; we assert that much more needs to be done to create a transformative shift in social norms and behaviour.

Many governments adopt national legislation to end violence against women and girls, but fail to implement it. We recognise such implementation to be especially important when many violent acts occur in private. States must work actively to ensure that law enforcement and judicial systems prevent and punish all kinds of violence against women and girls.

We pointed out strongly that the ecumenical community effectively has been pursuing the ideals of the Millennium Development Goals for centuries and we will continue to pursue a just development system long after 2015. Ecumenical Women encouraged member states to

continue to work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals but also to acknowledged that a transformative change must take place to achieve equality and to generate a more peaceful and prosperous future for all. We were glad to discover when the final conclusions were reached that these recommendations were included.

I found the whole process of negotiation fascinating. When the negotiations began, as a member of the advocacy team, I was given a copy of the zero draft which noted every government's contribution, including our own. It was a lengthy document. The advocacy team, of which I was a member, was able to feed our comments and thoughts on this directly to those negotiating. Our points were valued as were those from other non-governmental organisations from around the world, and these directly contributed to the process. I felt for those directly involved as negotiators as the hours were extremely long, often with little apparent progress. This must have been very frustrating as words were substituted, whole paragraphs changed, and alternatives suggested. These changes did not always meet with approval from countries with inflexible viewpoints.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

All United Nations member states at the time, and at least 23 international organisations, committed to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, These are

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empowering women
4. To reduce child mortality rates
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development

United Nations Women

Another organisation I found helpful to connect with was United Nations Women. www.unwomen.org

It was good to read on the United Nations Women web site, a very strong statement calling for 'A transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development framework and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as robust mainstreaming of gender considerations across all parts of the framework.'

In order to address the structural causes of gender-based discrimination and to support true transformation in gender relations, UN Women are proposing an integrated approach that addresses three critical target areas of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment:

1 Freedom from violence against women and girls - Concrete actions to eliminate the debilitating fear and/or experience of violence must be a centrepiece of any future framework.

2 Gender equality in the distribution of capabilities - knowledge, good health, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights of women and adolescent girls; and access to resources and opportunities, including land, decent work and equal pay to build women's economic and social security.

3 Gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions, in national parliaments and local councils, the media and civil society, in the management and governance of firms, and in families and communities.

The call for a transformative framework to achieve women's rights and gender equality comes in the midst of a global conversation about the legacy and next steps after the MDGs. Intergovernmental and UN-led processes are currently under way to inform and design a post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The post - global agenda for sustainable development must focus on human development where the human rights of all frame the discussions and decisions.

As Hillary Clinton stated on International Women's Day at the UN - 'Women's rights are human rights. We will accept nothing less.'

#HeforShe campaign

UN Women also launched #HeforShe - a new equality branding campaign, in which men all over the world are being encouraged to speak out against the inequalities faced by women and girls. Check it out!

www.unwomen.org

Next year - CSW 59 at the United Nations, New York.

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women next year will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York, tentatively scheduled for 9-20 March 2015. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC- accredited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from all regions of the world will attend the session.

The Commission will undertake a review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The review (Beijing+20) will also include the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, the first five-year assessment conducted after the adoption of the Platform for Action, which highlighted further actions and initiatives.

The session will also address current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action, as well as opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.

The review will be conducted at national, regional and global levels.

All States are urged to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly for the preparation of national reviews.

The regional commissions of the United Nations will undertake regional reviews. Both the national and regional review processes will feed into the global review. I look forward to action from our government on this matter over the coming months.

I also look forward to the next NZ Government report to the UN of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women due this year. It should make interesting reading. If we do not agree with the Government findings, Presbyterian Women can prepare a shadow report or write an alternative report to send this directly to the United Nations.

An excellent CEDAW pamphlet is available to assist groups and individuals to join into this important conversation. Let me know if you would like a copy to distribute to raise awareness on this report.

Networking at CSW 58

There were so many opportunities to network with women from around the world. The Forum Handbook for 2014 summed it up - 'NGO CSW 58 Forum - where women and girls shape the future.'

The vast array of sponsored events such as a consultation day, an orientation for new NGOs, morning briefings on the negotiations, an artisan fair, and regional caucuses as well as a celebration march. Then there were various receptions, forums, external events, conversation circles, and parallel events. It was an absolute feast of new opportunities and I took every chance I could to attend any I thought might interest members of Presbyterian Women, I have much to share during the coming year. I also took the opportunity to attend some I knew very little about which can give us a more global perspective on issues facing so many women around the world.

I was glad to have the company of other New Zealand women from sister organisations who attended CSW 58. They each had a different focus and interests but it was great to compare notes, relax together over a meal and to catch up on each others' perceptions. One of the benefits of sharing these experiences is the friendship and networking that develops.

I was glad that, like many other sister national church groups around the world, our national organisation is now more inclusive of all Presbyterian women in the church - young and older, rural and urban, from small and large congregations, fellowship groups, Girls' Brigade, lay and ordained, rather than a national federation of scattered small groupings. Having the ability to speak nationally with a united voice is one of our strengths. It is great that we are celebrating change and working towards a vision for the ministry of women of our church, now and into the future.

Part of our vision as Presbyterian Women is to work towards a dedicated PCANZ National Women's Desk, and a PCANZ National Women's Assembly In 2015. What an exciting opportunity to creatively address some of the issues so dear to our hearts. I look forward to helping achieve this dream.

Do contact me if you would like more information, or if you would like me to keep you up to date and linked in to UN news on the Status of Women decisions.

A couple of highlights at CSW 58 among so many . . .

One of my lasting impressions will be the many stunning younger women from around the world who are so passionate, so articulate and so determined to ensure the world is a better place for women and girls and that each woman and girl will be included, empowered and have gender equality where and when decisions are made concerning the global future of humankind.

Hopefully it may be possible that a group of young Presbyterian Women from around New Zealand will be able to join me at the United Nations for CSW 59.

I will also treasure the personal stories shared with me by women from countries where women and girls are much less fortunate than we are in New Zealand.

While there are women and girls trafficked, girl children sold or forced into arranged marriages, prostitution, to be victims of the pornography trade, or used as slave labour; who live in poverty and hunger, who are abused, beaten, oppressed, used as child soldiers or human shields, raped, mutilated according to cultural practices, who suffer unbelievable violence, are denied education, leadership and decision making opportunities, and their basic human rights, or their cries and voices are silenced, I will continue to advocate for, and to fight for justice for, all women and girls - in New Zealand and around the world.

I know you will, too. For that is, quite simply, our responsibility to our sisters wherever they are, anywhere in the world.

**Carol L Grant
United Nations Convener
Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa**

United Nations CSW 58 2014

Events attended during CSW 58

I was also a member of the Ecumenical Women's' Advocacy Team which had direct input into the negotiations.

International Women's Day at the United Nations

UN Women International Women's Day March – Women against Violence

UN Ecumenical Women - Orientation Day and Dinner

NGO CSW Sponsored Events

NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day

Orientation for new NGO's

Morning briefings

NGO Forum Reception'

NGO Artisan Fair

NGO CSW Forum Co- Sponsored Events at the UN

The MDG's Post -2015 and Beijing+20 regional perspective series – an NGO - government dialogue: Asia Pacific – Key speakers from around the region on specific issues relevant to women and girls.

UN side event: Women and Cancer (Cervical and Breast Cancer: Why Prevention Matters. One of the presenters was Dr Jacqui Blue from NZ.

UN Side Event: Sustainable Cities and Women's Human Rights.

NGO Forum Conversation Circles

Human Rights

Violence Against Women

Trafficking and Migration

Older Women and Girls: Intergenerational Dialogue

Ngo Regional Causes at CSW 58

Two on Asia and the Pacific region

External Events

Understanding Health as a Human Right for Older Women: Evaluating the Impact of the MDGs

Parallel Events

Monitoring the Implementation of Domestic Laws Around the World

Post MDG Opportunity Institutions that Build Women's Economic Empowerment in science and technology

Empowering Women as Change Agents through Global Networking

MenCare: A sustainable approach for engaging men in care giving to advance women's empowerment

Making unpaid care work count in the post – 2015 framework: Reflections from the UN Special Rapporteur

Reaching the 'last girl' MDG's: prostitution and the most vulnerable women and girls

Women and HIV: a virus knows no gender

Culture dialogue on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV and ending Child Marriage

Gender based Violence as a Political Weapon

Empowering rural women through agricultural innovation

Addressing widowhood as a root cause of poverty across generations via the post 2015 MDG goals

Gender Based Violence in the Post MDG Agenda. If People of Faith Don't Speak Out, Who will?

Blue is the New Pink: Gender Equality through Men and Boys

Addressing violence against women within the post 2015 agenda: A convention to Eliminate Violence? (Australia and NZ)

Is Interfaith work Empowering Women?

Implementing Women and Girls Circles. A tool to vitalise progress with the MDGs

Promoting gender equality and empowering women who face challenges in traditional societies

The Role of Women in Post - Disaster Reconstruction and Recovery. (Japan)

Community partnerships to prevent violence against women and children in order to achieve MDGs

Regional Caucus on Climate Change

Understanding health as a Human Right for Older Women

Building Young Women's Political empowerment

Misuse of Technology: Protecting girls from Internet exploitation

Involving religious leaders in women's rights work: Innovative practices and challenges from the field

Future leaders today – teaching children and women entrepreneurship to increase economic opportunities

Stories of Women's Leadership: Achievements and challenges toward achieving the post 2015 agenda.

Turning words into action. Next steps. Nobel Women's Initiative

The Sequence of Success: Helping Women and Girls Achieve their Aspirations – A Proven Formula

Receptions

Hon Jo Goodhew NZ Mission Breakfast

Zonta International Reception

Meeting with Helen Clark

NGO Reception – Armenian Centre

The opportunities for learning, networking and making international connections was outstanding. The contacts from around the world and from around NZ since I have returned are valuable and often surprising. Groups without a voice at the UN are hungry for connection, knowledge and the opportunity to be involved in international, national, regional and local discussions and positive action.

Carol L. Grant

UN Convenor

Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa NZ