

CSW58 Report

In mid-March I attended the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW58), on behalf of the Catholic Women's League of Australia (CWLA). Held annually at the United Nations, in New York, CSW is attended by thousands of women - approximately 3,500 this year. New York is very cold in March, but was vibrant with colourful national costumes, much talk, lobbying, plotting, planning and energy.

The theme for this year's CSW was "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls." Governments send representatives to negotiate the Agreed Conclusions – a document, produced on the theme, which is discussed and argued over for the two weeks of the Conference. Governments also send representatives who can conduct Side Events showcasing how they have dealt with the theme.

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) are permitted to send representatives to CSW, provided they have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC). CWLA has consultative status and I was the representative. NGOs can run Parallel Events on the theme too. CWLA ran one entitled "Natural Fertility, Gender Equality and Environmental Sustainability". (See our website www.cwla.org.au for details.)

Three common threads appeared regularly at CSW58 - "The Family", "Gender Equality" and "Comprehensive Education on Human Sexuality".

Many pro-family, pro-life organisations have pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have been in place for the last fourteen years, do not refer to the family at all. However, the family plays a crucial role in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (MDG Goal 1), encouraging education (MDG Goal 2), reduce child mortality (MDG Goal 4), supporting members physically, emotionally and mentally, and encouraging environmental sustainability (MDG Goal 7). These groups point out that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16.3) states, "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." The family unit is the basis of our society, so it stands to reason that strong families lead to a strong society. Pro-family organisations would like to see "Supporting the Role of the Family" as a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal. The Sustainable Development Goals are set to replace the Millennium Development Goals, after 2015, so lobbying for the inclusion of certain goals is intense. Since they will influence policy and the decisions of all Governments worldwide for several decades, we must take a keen interest in them.

The Hon. Senator Michaelia Cash, the Federal Government's Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, attended the first four days of CSW58. She spoke to Australian delegates at the Australian Embassy in New York, the evening before the Conference started, and enthusiastically announced that she is passionate about gender equality and women's empowerment, and that the Australian Government is fully committed to it. There was much talk at the UN about Gender Equality being a stand-alone goal in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Gender Equality conjures up visions of respect for women's roles, equality of opportunity, equal pay, equal access to services, the elimination of violence against women. However among powerful UN groups it also means equality for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transsexual (LGBT) communities. So in UN-

Gender Equality is promoted as referring to equality for women, but the hidden agenda means equality for every gender group. Since Google announced, recently, that web users could choose from a list of 50 genders for their internet profile, we can expect calls for affirmative action for every gender in the future.

“Comprehensive Education on Human Sexuality” raised the most ire at CSW58. A last minute manoeuvre, unfortunately supported by Australia, saw the adoption of an amendment, which had not been submitted via proper procedure. The already agreed upon language of “sex education” was altered to “comprehensive education in human sexuality”. This might seem a trivial alteration but the Africans knew it would mean the promotion of promiscuity, “safe abortion” and other so called “sexual rights”, thereby raising, the already crisis level, HIV and AIDS rates. African countries which had lobbied strongly for “delay of sexual debut” to be included in the Agreed Conclusions were angry when this wording was also removed at the last minute. Delaying sexual activity has proven an effective approach to HIV control.

In this year, which is the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family and the year of the Synod on the Family, to be held in Rome in October, let us pray for protection for all families. And while calling on the Lord for help, let us be vigilant and aware of developments on the international scene.

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