

REPORT ON CSW 57: THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 2013

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“I said it before and I will say it again: There can be no peace, no progress as long as there is discrimination and violence against women.” –Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary and Executive Director, UN Women from July 2010-March 2013, at the conclusion of CSW57

“The hero of my life is my mother...We each need to be a drop of water, like her, and come together to make a tsunami that changes the world....” - Dr Hamid Al-Byati The Ambassador from Iraq, at CSW 57

Sixty-six years ago, 15 member states gathered for the first Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year, from March 4-15, over 6,000 attendees from 131 member states assembled for the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York. They convened as delegates from NGO's or their countries' missions to be educated and to discuss and debate this year's theme, “Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls.”

Numerous lobby groups were in evidence as they tried to influence the UN State Member delegates who would produce the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission. As no Conclusions were reached last year, the expectation and pressures were high to finalize a consensus document this year. Issues over wording were debated strongly as various factions wished to include or exclude phrases such as “sexual reproductive rights” which in reality translates to abortion. After much intense negotiation up to the very last hours of the two-week meeting, Agreed Conclusions were reached and made public a week later. In the final document, the multiple references to “reproductive rights” found in the preliminary drafts were limited to two both tied to the International Conference on Population and Development that limits abortion and concedes that it is not a right. However, in a blow to the magnificent efforts of the Holy See Mission, all references to family and to an “inherent right to life, liberty, and security of persons” were deleted due to the strong lobbying efforts of the United

States and some delegates from the European Union. This was particularly painful as these are important principles found in the UN's own *Declaration of Human Rights*. Excellent statements concerning the link between arms, war, and violence against women and girls did make it into the final Conclusions as did the need for female education.

While none of the WUCWO representatives could be a direct party to the negotiations of the State Member delegates, much information concerning the nature and content of the Member negotiations was delivered via Facebook and Twitter so we were able to keep abreast of the intricate and sometimes heated deliberations prior to the release of the final Agreed Conclusions. Despite some glaring omissions in the document, it is notable that Conclusions were produced this year and that the opportunity to make statements promoting the status of women was not missed again. As Michelle Bachelet so eloquently said in her closing statement: *"Our common humanity united us over that which divides us. That humanity here is our shared conviction that ending violence against women and girls is a must, is possible, and is stronger than any doubts, difficulties, or inflexibility."*

We eagerly attended many of the side events that were sponsored by State delegations and the less formal parallel events primarily sponsored by NGO's that took place during the two weeks of the CSW. It is noteworthy that some events were co-sponsored by States and NGO's giving strong support to those NGO's. It was at these presentations that we learned of the multiple faces of discrimination and violence against women perpetrated around the entire globe. We were sickened by the reports of rape used as a weapon of war, of child marriage, of human trafficking, of female genital mutilation, of gendercide, and of more subtle but just as real forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls in education and the workplace. We learned that violence against women and girls is present in every part of society and in all nations and has no boundaries in terms of age. The presentations of grassroots organisations that work to change harmful traditional practices, to reverse long-held cultural views detrimental to women and that offer education and assistance to women and children suffering from and fleeing violence were most heartening. Many references were made of

the need to ally with faith-based organisations to help accomplish this work on the ground.

Much work has been done by very good people around the globe but so very much more needs to occur before all women and girls can live a life free from violence and discrimination and accomplish the unique mission for which they were created. The Mission of the Holy See is preeminent in working tirelessly at the United Nations to ensure that this becomes a reality. In their powerful concluding statement on CSW57 they noted that: *“The Holy See remains deeply committed, through its vast related network of institutions around the globe, to advancing and protecting women from all forms of violence as well as through financial and human efforts worldwide to promoting recognition and respect for the dignity of all women and girls.”* We in WUCWO look forward to a more visible and coordinated collaboration with the Holy See Mission at the UN.

All who attended CSW57 for WUCWO felt the privilege of witnessing these informative and moving sessions. More information is available under the International Tab at our WUCWO website concerning the sessions attended and the personal experiences of women from WUCWO at the CSW57. We hope that you will access these accounts to learn more about CSW57.

References:

CSW website www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/57sess.htm

Closing Statement of Michele Bachelet at CSW57:

www.unwomen.org/2013/03/closing-statement-michelle-bachelet-csw57

UN Declaration of Human Rights www.un.org/en/documents/udhr

Holy See Mission Statement on CSW57 www.holyseemission.org/statements