

**Report to National Council of Women of Canada
UN Commission on Status of Women (CSW) meeting March 4-15, 2002**

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It was my great pleasure to attend the CSW meetings in New York this March. Unfortunately, because of the health of my husband, I had to return to Winnipeg after the first week. Nonetheless, the experience I did have was rich and may be of interest to members across Canada. There was the usual mix of renewed commitment by states, painfully slight evidence of progress and heartfelt challenges from NGOs who speak for the women who live the day to day realities being discussed. However, I continue to believe it is the tension between these three forces that sustains the UN as the unique and indispensable voice for global governance that the world needs if it is ever to achieve the goals of Beijing: Equality, Development and Peace.

CSW which has 45 state members in the secretariat for follow up to the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women Programme of Action (PofA), the subsequent 2000 Beijing+5 Outcomes Document, along with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. It convenes these annual meetings in March around **International Women's Day**, March 8, for review and appraisal, assessment of progress, development of new strategies and the empowerment of women on two of the twelve areas of concern from the PofA. This year the themes were on poverty and environment, specifically: **“Eradicating Poverty, Including the Empowerment of Girls and Women of All Ages”**, and **“Environmental Management and Mitigation of Natural Disasters: a Gender Perspective”**.

Many **linkages** were made as well with other major UN activities and commitments: the Millennium Development Goals (New York '00); UN Security Council October '01 Resolution #1325 on Women, Peace and Security; Financing for Development (FfD - Monterrey in March '02); the World Congress on Aging (Madrid in May 02) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10 – Johannesburg in August, 02).

Parallel to these meetings of the UN's 195 member states, the **NGOs** held 104 side events - workshops and seminars, dialogued with and lobbied the government delegations, selected representative speakers to fill the few NGO spots in the CSW agenda, and prepared critiques of positions taken by individual states and by the CSW as a whole. In addition to networking among themselves, they also carry the message home to interested parties. This year, there were two major parallel events – one on each theme - held the Saturday and Sunday preceding the opening of the CSW portion, and innumerable others held at Church House across the street from the UN during the CSW proceedings. I was able to attend excellent ones on trafficking, rural development, unions for women, and conflict, gender and peace.

The **Canadian Delegation** consisted of one head, Florence levers of Status of Women Canada (SWC), two alternates Gilbert Laurin of the Permanent Mission and Zeynep

Karman of SWC, nine advisors from SWC, DFAIT, CIDA, HRDC and the Permanent Mission, and two NGOs, Nayyar Javed, President of CRIAW (Saskatoon), and Priscilla Settee, Director of Indigenous Peoples Program of the University of Saskatchewan (March 11-14). (names on file) They met with NGOs daily fro ½ -1 hr. and were most forthcoming with helpful information, e.g. about the resolution of Afghanistan women that the US had introduced and which was being negotiated plus another on hostage taking in Azerbaijan; about their efforts to get Gender Mainstreaming included in the FfD, about JUSCANZ – still meeting but only consultative; occasionally they meet with the EU; gave us advice on NGO interventions – try to work with coalitions and keep to the assigned themes; what lay behind the controversy on “communications” at the CSW – whether reporting of systemic discrimination should be through Human Rights machinery alone or through a Special Rapporteur working with CSW – issues would be raised about mandate and confidentiality; about concerns relating to holding a Beijing+10 which would be a negotiating conference where language might be weakened and the NGO voice swamped by fundamentalist voices vs. a high level meeting. They welcomed our sitting beside them on the floor of the Conference Room when space permitted which was at all times except for the special IWD presentation by Laura Bush. In general, they were very positive about the role of NGOs in influencing governments and public opinion in ways that bureaucrats and experts can’t as readily do.

There were not as many **NGO representatives** as usual, many claiming tightened US visa requirements as a barrier. From Canada there were three from VOW, two each from B&P Canada and Baha’i, and one each from World Vision and NCWC, and several trade union women including Nancy Riche. The women I spoke to from Africa were from the bureaucracy, not NGOs.

The **first two days** were devoted to government statements. The **third day** was a seminar with one half day for each of the two themes. The **fourth day** was given to debate on communications (shorthand for whether CSW should play a formal role in partnership with the UN High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR) when complaints relating to women were being investigated, or just research trends in systemic discrimination which would be forwarded to other branches of the UN including the UNHCHR. The Secretary General’s report had presented two options: a more formal role or a retrenchment of the current informal cooperation between the two bodies in the interest of not going beyond the 1947 mandate or threatening confidentiality. G77 favoured the latter; Canada sat on the fence.) and working methods. The **fifth day**, International Women’s Day, had a brief set of **skits by regional NGOs** on the themes of poverty and the environment, then in the main conference room a **formal ceremony** with the Secretary General Kofi Annan; **Laura Bush**, wife of the US president speaking on Afghanistan following a video on the same topic; **Angela King**, the UN Assistant Secretary General; **Queen Noor** of Jordan; and **Carolyn Hannan of UNIFEM** rounding out the topic.

The extras I was able to attend:

At the **seminar on Sunday**, I joined the group on **macroeconomics** and its impact on women from poverty and environmental management/natural disaster perspectives. At the **third day seminar, the outstanding speaker from my point of view was UNDP's Van Der Murtele** who spoke on human rights, rarely compatible with mainstream economic thought, and on the economy of care, uncouncted and undervalued in dominant economic discourse. He called for people who were conversant in all these areas to search out synergies and address contradictions.

That evening, a **reception** was held in the Turkish hall across the street from the UN where the **30th anniversary of the UN NGO Status of Women Committee** was held. Tributes were made to the indomitable pioneers and their legacy. A letter that the first Chair had written to her granddaughter was read – an excellent distillation of the key messages of tasks accomplished and those remaining from the older generation of women to the women who must carry on the struggle. On **the fourth night, the ICFTU held a reception** following a day of workshops on unionization of women in all parts of the world. On **Friday afternoon, UNIFEM, the International Council of Women (ICW) and CHANGE sponsored a seminar on Poverty, Peace and Women.**

The **draft CSW government statements** on each issue were issued on Friday and touched on the following points: for **Poverty**:

- Gender equality requires that gender analysis be mainstreamed – we heard a lot about GE, GA and GM – recognizing that men and women have different roles in different societies and are impacted differently by poverty;
- different solutions in different places are required to achieve equality;
- the quickest way to find these different solutions is to include women from all walks of life in the decision making;
- lessons can be learnt through sharing best practices;
- all institutions at the global, national and local levels have roles to play;
- sex, class and age disaggregated data are needed;
- women need resources allocated through budgetary processes and raised through taxation or received through AID;
- they also need help in building their capacity to use these resources through education, social services and security, market access, secure employment;
- unsustainable debts need reduction or elimination; and
- partnerships must be forged among all the players.

For Environmental Management/Natural Disasters:

- women play a vital role in disasters
- women are particularly vulnerable during disasters;
- women need to be included in preparing prevention and mitigation strategies, and also in the relief and reconstruction phases;
- research into root causes of disasters and systematic implementation of results are needed, e.g. land use planning, natural resource management, water management;

- data must be disaggregated;
- gender-sensitive indicators are needed to monitor and assess vulnerability and risks;
- equal access to early warning information is needed;
- capacity building, participation in decision making, partnerships among all actors are needed with codes of conduct;
- links to sustainable development strategies are of paramount importance.