

NCWC REPORT on 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) March 2003

Introduction:

The **47th session** of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has come and gone, the 48th CSW has been sworn in early and has started planning for '04, an innovation this year. Those topics will be how to involve men and boys in achieving equality for women, and the issues of women relating to peace and security. For the first time, the NGOs will be conducting an online discussion group in preparation.

I thoroughly enjoyed the two week event in New York though it was more than a little unsettling to know that the governments of the world were debating the prospects for **war and peace** upstairs in the Security Council while government Status of Women representatives met downstairs, with NGOs there and across the street at the Church Centre, all discussing media and violence issues affecting women. Sparked by the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, an anti-war demonstration was held at 8 a.m. Friday, March 7th, across the street from the UN. Fifteen or so large shocking pink signs had been inscribed in as many different languages: "Women Say No to War!" Several anti-war petitions were also developed and circulated for signatures. There was no vocal support for a possible war.

Ironically, since *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the Media* was one of the two main themes, **Media coverage** of the CSW was non-existent, all focus of the dozens of TV trucks permanently installed just outside the entry gate to the UN being on the Security Council. One woman journalist called this media invisibility "passive violence".

The **weather** from March 1st to 14th was spectacular: rain, sleet, snow, ice and fierce wind with a few beautiful bright sunny days here and there. The Broadway Musicians were on strike which hindered options for evening **entertainment** but several of us did manage some plays and art galleries. I found the nearby **KINKO** stores for e-mailing, copying etc. a convenience though the cost was not negligible. A laptop with access to home audiences would be a great help, as would a small printer as the computers at the UN are reserved for government delegates. The Pickwick Arms Hotel on E. 51st between 2nd and 3rd Avenues provided a convenient and not too costly refuge for myself and my "buddy Nayyar Javed of CRIAW from Saskatoon.

Security was moderately tight (OK if you had your credential letter and picture identification), but relaxed over last year: e.g. coats could be hung near the cafeteria whereas last year this was not allowed anywhere for fear of concealed explosives. Only 600 of 1700 pre-registered NGOs appeared with almost no

Latin American and no Middle Eastern women. There was the usual varied and modestly priced food in the UN **cafeteria** which made all our lives easier.

Preliminary Workshop for NGOs (March 1-2), planned by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York: This event was held at Barnard College.

Expert panels discussed CSW's two main themes:

1) **ICT and media:** *Participation 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*, and

2) **Violence Against Women and Human Rights:** *"Women's human rights and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly"*.

The Panels were followed by workshops where participants could share key issues they wished to raise with the governments at the CSW. This was a good preparation for the days ahead. (*Notes#1 and #2 in Addenda*)

CSW 47th Session

Canadian Government Delegation: This was led by Head of Delegation Status of Women Minister Jean Augustine and by two Alternate Heads of Delegation, UN Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Gilbert Laurin, and Florence Ievers from Status of Women Canada. The Delegation had thirteen civil servants and two **NGO** representatives, Jo Sutton (Executive Director of *Womenspace* as advisor on ICTs) and Charlotte Thibault (President of *Cybersolidaires* and Affiliated with the *Canadian Women's Foundation* as advisor on violence against women and human rights). They met daily with Canadian NGOs but attendance was weak because of competing NGO events.

NGOs from Canada (Note #3)

Government process

The CSW has 45 members. This year's Chair was Ambassador Jerandi from Tunisia, the first male Chair. After introductory statements from the Head Table, opening statements were given by the current bloc chairs (Greece for the European Union (EU), Morocco for the Group of 77 (G77) and China), New Zealand for Japan, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and assorted other "orphans" (JUSCANZ), Peru for the Rio group, Benin for the francophone Africans and Angola for the South African Development Community. These were followed by statements from individual governments, International Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and NGOs (allotted a set number of speaking spaces so they collaborate among themselves to determine who should speak – Reiko Aiko of the International Federation of University Women spoke

on behalf of the Five-O – 5 women’s organizations who have been at ECOSOC since 1945: IFUW, ICW, YWCA, Zonta and Soroptimist International).

One session was then devoted to a Panel on each theme, plus another one on the Millennium Development Goals (passed in November '01) and how to integrate a gender perspective into all the goals rather than simply have it hived off into a separate goal as it appears in the text. Following the theme panels, a simple draft text from the CSW Secretariat based on the earlier meetings of experts was introduced for negotiation. The document was greatly expanded, refined and debated by inputs from blocs, individual governments and NGOs lobbying for their preferred language. After several drafts, final agreed conclusions were to be arrived at by the final day of the CSW, in this case Friday, March 14th. This was achieved for the first theme (ICT/Media) but referred to the next Commission for the second (VAW/HR) (*internet address <http://www.un.org/csw/>).

In addition to the above-mentioned two themes, the CSW passed **four resolutions**

- That Afghanistan women (ensuring their inalienable rights as citizens, without gender limitations) be included in the new Afghan constitution),
- That efforts continue to promote a Peaceful Settlement of the question of Palestine, with particular attention to the situation of women and girls,
- That gender mainstreaming be promoted,
- That a gender perspective be incorporated into all matters relating to HIV/ AIDS

They couldn't get one on inheritance rights allegedly because of opposition from Islamic governments.

There was also a report on communications which dealt with the problems of privacy and confidentiality when the CSW refers individual alleged human rights abuse cases to the UN High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR). The issue has to date been resolved by giving states 90 days to investigate before the UNHCHR does its work, a situation which could leave a woman complainant at risk.

Government Agreed (and Non-Agreed Conclusions):

Conclusions for each theme are all built on earlier documents:

- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol (OP) – urging their universal ratification
- Beijing Platform for Action and the +5 Outcome Document,
- Convention on International Crime,
- Security Council resolution #1325 on women and peace and security;

- Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which have gender as a cross-cutting issue but an issue which may if not watched be viewed as separate from the achievement of the other 8 goals,
- Financing for Development (FFD) recommendations (seen as necessary but not sufficient),
- NGOs at the UN – being studied by ECOSOC and by a Task Force from the UN General Assembly (UNGASS),
- CSW perspective which favours coordinated reporting on all conference commitments provided the specialized language on gender is not lost.

Key issues on ICT/Media: (check CSW website for accuracy <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>)

- 1) Integrating gender into all policies and programmes
- 2) Bringing gender participation and perspective to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
- 3) Ensuring access, affordability, education/training and infrastructure maintenance for girls and women as systems develop
- 4) Regulating to ensure women's full participation in production (including local production), ownership, control and management in ICT and the Media
- 5) Finding ways to eliminate sexism in the Media
- 6) Continuing to use traditional media to empower women
- 7) Improving North-South and South-South technology transfer
- 8) Ensuring resources for local groups of women

Key Issues on Violence Against Women and Human Rights: (no agreed conclusions as yet check CSW website - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>)

- 1) Integrating gender into all policies and programmes
- 2) Encouraging ratification and implementation of relevant UN instruments
- 3) Tackling violence against women and children as primarily a human rights concern and only secondarily as a crime or human security concern
- 4) Ensuring the collection of relevant age and sex-disaggregated data
- 5) Paying special attention to the needs of trafficked women and children by ending impunity for perpetrators and ensuring safety, necessary documentation and return to country of origin only if voluntarily agreed to
- 6) Contentious issues remaining: whether custom, tradition or religion should be used to enable states to avoid their obligations to eliminate violence against women; removal of all elements not "directly relevant" to the topic or dealt with elsewhere; efforts to retreat from previously agreed language.

NGO Process and Events

- 1) **Daily** meetings were held at 9 am each day for **briefings** by the **NGO New York Status of Women Committee** and to give a platform to caucus groups and women in senior positions at the UN.
- 2) **NGO Caucus Meetings** were also held on most days on: economic justice., violence against women, ICT, health with separate groups for reproductive health, mental health and midwifery, peace, trafficking, human rights, refugees, youth and religion. **Regional Caucuses** also met regularly: European Women's Lobby, Asia Pacific, Femnet (Africa), some JUSCANZ government meetings but no NGO Caucus. The Canadian and European Government representatives were very helpful in advancing improved language.
- 3) There was much discussion on whether or not to promote a **Beijing +10 (or + 15) Conference**. **Opponents** favoured a celebration of some sort in 2005 but feared a full conference where the "language" would be re-opened and possibly weakened, based on the debacle they experienced with fundamentalists at Beijing + 5 where existing language was protected but only after a horrendous struggle. There is also "conference fatigue" at the UN and a recognition that the priority should shift to promoting co-ordinated implementation of all UN conference commitments. "Shadow Reports" on progress made or not made by individual states could be useful, but the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the focal point for women in the UN system, questioned the value of expending time and energy on these. Regional meetings, or meetings under the auspices of independent NGOs such as AWID (headed by Canada's Joanna Kerr) or WEDO might be an alternative. **Supporters** led by Finland's Hilka Pietila wanted a new world conference to animate interest of younger women and the public, also to deal with issues that have emerged since Beijing in '95. **Consensus** was finally reached to promote and organize a celebration in '95 rather than a Conference but to be open to one in '07—'10. There are 140 National Plans with gender benchmarks that can be used to assess progress. A close watching brief will also be kept on the ECOSOC review and the UNGASS Task Force on follow up of all UN conferences and on the roles of NGO.

NGO wrap-up on Themes

ICT/Media: the process was smoother, possibly because the issue is newer, not (yet) as controversial. Some believe it may be an iceberg issue with many unforeseen consequences lurking beneath the surface.

- It certainly presents women with opportunities, but also with special obstacles.
- There is a digital divide. Most women use the internet differently than men: purposefully and for connectivity rather than as a game or business tool.
- The key issues involve:
 - access,

- affordability (the women want community centres (estimated to cost about \$40,000),
- NGO training,
- help with infrastructure including maintenance,
- involvement in planning and technical design and preparation of relevant content (currently where the greatest gender deficits are found),
- science and math education for girls,
- recognizing the benefits of e-government but also its potential threat to democracy as governments bypass elected representatives and NGOs,
- threat of commercial takeover of ICT
- need for technical transfer from “North” to “South”, from “haves” to “have-nots”

Crossover issues which complicated and often blocked negotiations were:

- globalization
- technology transfer (issues of both cost and intellectual property rights)
- listing categories of women
- use of Internet for pornography
- language on sexual exploitation in media vs freedom of expression

Violence Against Women and related Human Rights Issues:

- trafficking (some states prefer to deal with this as a crime rather than a human rights issue; #2 criminal money-making “industry” after drugs!)
- porn (termed pornographization and sexualization of media!)
- luring
- peace networking
- media ownership and need for greater control by women to eliminate degrading issues and stereotyping

Crossover issues which complicated and often blocked negotiations were:

- G77 and China wanted inclusion of right to development
- urging ratification of CEDAW and Optional Protocol
- VAW as a human security concern rather than a human rights one
- trafficking (seen as already dealt with in the Treaty on International Crime)
- language on vulnerability of women and other groups without parallel references to their agency and strength
- right to reproductive health
- right of trafficked women to return to country of origin
- prostitution (controlling demand rather than criminalizing the woman)

130 NGO parallel events (Notes in Addenda) were held at the Church Centre (CC) across the street, a third more than last year. Unavoidably, you couldn't

attend all of them. In addition to the two day pre-CSW workshops at Barnard College, there was a lunch for all Canadian NGOs at the Canadian Embassy as guests of the #2 Canadian Ambassador Gilbert Laurin on the 5th, the annual NGO Committee in NY reception at Turkish Centre on the 5th with UNIFEM's Secretary General Noeleen Heyzer being honoured, an arts & crafts fair on the 6th at the CC (I would have liked to pack 1/2 dozen Afghanistan carpets into my already document- crammed luggage!); for me and **other International Council of Women** representatives, a reception at the home of Shirley Munyans on the 6th, and a breakfast meeting with the International Federation of University Women on the 5th and 11th, a special program with governments on the 7th to honour International Women's Day; and on the 8th a full day of IWD celebrations at the Museum Of Natural History (I was unable to attend as I went to see my daughter in Baltimore).

The Panels I was able to attend were:

- The Culture of Peace (Note#)
- South Africa and India on Media Monitoring (Note #)
- Integration of a Gender Perspective into Human Rights (Note #)
- Human Security and Human Rights (Note #)
- Human Rights and Accountability (Note #)
- Reflections on what it means to put violence against women into Human Rights (Note #)
- UNIFEM on third wave feminism (Note #)
- Nigerian women on gender based violence (Note #)
- Betel Nut Chewing in Taiwan (Note #)
- Post traumatic Stress Syndrome (Note #)
- How to strengthen global governance for gender equality (Note #)
- Religion and Faith Based perspective on domestic violence (Note #)
- US Humanists on Peace (Note #)

Addenda with Notes to follow

Muriel Smith, Global Convener