

Report to NCWC on CSW 2007

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Introduction:

Preparing my report on the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) is always a daunting task. So much happens during the two weeks of meetings: two 3 hour high level inter-governmental meetings for each of the ten days between **February 26 and March 9**, more than 200 UN Agency and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) parallel panels and workshops, receptions, caucuses, daily meetings with the Canadian delegation, and the occasional lighter moments attending New York musicals – you get the picture! Over 4000 NGOs registered and more than 1300 appeared. A Saturday afternoon advance registration had been arranged which avoided endless lineups on opening day lineups.

CSW tried this year to simplify its format: focusing on one theme rather than two and one update from three years before, holding Interactive Panels rather than simply listening to a series of “show and tell (or conceal)” statements by government representatives, asking for fewer resolutions, and having more NGO speakers, preferably representing coalitions rather individual organizations, hopefully with messages that are relevant to the CSW agenda. Did they succeed? Well, Yes and No.

They did tackle one topic: *Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child*. They did hold Interactive Panels on: 1. the above topic 2. Gender mainstreaming 3. Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century 4. Emerging Issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between men and women. And they did review the theme of 2004: Evaluation of progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions (ACs) on the *role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*.

Only five resolutions rather than the usual ten were submitted, and one of those was withdrawn in favour of “language” in the ACs. Only **four resolutions** were debated: Forced and Early Marriage (US), Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women and Children, Ending Female Genital Mutilation and one on HIV/AIDS Education..

However, the workload expanded to fill the time available. The **8 page draft** of ACs with which they started, a relatively brief summary statement of all the studies, expert and regional meetings that had preceded the event, **mushroomed into 29 pages** after all the regions, principally the European Union, the G77 and China, Mercosur, the US and others had submitted their proposed additions. After much lengthy and late night negotiation, it was **contracted into 16 pages**. There was some controversy over whether there should be a minimum age for marriage specified, and whether the issue of Mental Health (MH) should be identified. Compromises were reached by not specifying an age, and by assuming MH fell under the category of “special needs”. NGOs did not always follow their instructions to make their comments relevant and pointed . So, some improvements and some “best laid plans... gone astray”.

Canadian Government Delegation:

The **Canadian Government Delegation had two NGO reps**, Sherry Lewis from Native Women’s Association and Nisa Sanjani, a young woman, from Power Camp in Montreal (week two only). There were **no Government politicians** in evidence though **four other political women** (Senator Nancy Ruth, Anita Neville Lib., Judy Wasylycia-Leis NDP, Nicolle Demers Bloc) attended the International Parliamentary Union meetings and attended the Feb 28 Canadian Reception at the Mission. **Status of Women staff** were as helpful as ever. Florence Ievers headed the Delegation (now replaced by Sherry Becton), Marianne Fofonoff, Mary-Lou Sutton and Nancy-Jean Waugh, the latter two both near the end of their tenure. DFAIT had ever-skilful and communicative Nell Stewart, Chantel Walker and Julie Delahante. Kara Mitchell was there from CIDA. **Daily meetings were held with the Canadian NGOs** (beneath the stairs at the Dag Hammarskjold Library), and copies of relevant documents were made available. I submitted some wording change for the ACs drawing attention to the fact that socio-economic difficulties were cited as only occurring in the developing world, all to no avail, although the ACs do call on all actors, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) to take note of the girl child in their planning.

Canadian NGO representatives:

Women came from **Business and Professional Women, Ba’hai, Anglican Church, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, PSAC, Canadian Teachers Federation, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian and International Federations of University Women, NCWC, YWCA, Canadian Futures Fund, CRIAW, UNANIMA. Girl Guides and two nurses presenting on Ritual Abuse Torture.** Despite much asking around, we never made contact with the three **McGill Law students** sponsored by NCWC which was a disappointment as in past years we have enjoyed the intergenerational dialogue. **Sarah Belanger from PSAC** (Public Service Association of Canada) initiated a statement of Canadian NGO disappointment with the Canadian statement as no mention was made of the decimation of status of Women Canada and the ongoing struggles of many women in Canada, particularly the aboriginal. Fran Donaldson, BPW, offered to help coordinate NGOs at CSW next year.

Special events:

Special events included many **special tributes to the much beloved Angela King** who had died a few weeks earlier. She was the first woman to hold the Office of the Advisor on Gender to the Secretary-General (OSAGI). The annual **UNIFEM/New York NGO Status of Women Committee reception** at the Turkish Centre was more than a hit as a long line of women waited outside until some people left. This year’s **awards** went to Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and to Rima Saleh, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. Canadian Voice of Women for Peace held a consultation with Henri-Paul Normandin, Canadian Ambassador, where they raised many issues (see section on p.9). There was a showing of the Canadian **NFB film “Finding Dawn”** on the Sisters in Spirit Campaign, a special International Women’s Day event with the new Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon – he made a moving tribute to women and to the UN “without which he, a poor boy from South Korea, would never have been able to move up in the diplomatic world - attending along with the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council. Their focus was on a **High Level Panel on Impunity**: calling for an end to granting impunity to individuals who have committed violent and discriminatory acts against women and the girl child. This is often used in peace negotiations to secure the cooperation of all parties. In its place, there was a call for “prevention, protection of victims, prosecution and punishment” (p.11). **AVON** held a two hour event followed by a reception where they showcased what they were accomplishing through micro-financing women to sell their products, and using company profits to tackle cancer research, education and violence against women (p.11). **WEDO** also held a reception at their Lexington Avenue office which was an exuberant and heart-warming affair. There were daily briefings at the UN from 9-10 am, and two main caucuses, Coordination and Linkage, that met on alternate days from 5-6 pm when thematic and regional caucuses also had the opportunity for input, that kept everyone up to date. **The New York Committee on Status of Women (Jackie Shapiro), WEDO (June Zeitlin) and the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL - Charlotte Bunch) provide tremendous leadership at these UN events.**

I intend to encapsulate the ACs at the outset as the best way to share the complexity and diversity of issues raised relating to the girl child because the Panelists from both NGO and CSW were generally elaborating on the same ideas. I suggest you read each statement recognizing that behind it lies a particular sensitivity of some government, or a particular form of pain, injustice and compelling real-life story told to someone by a girl child, and reported on in the more than 200 NGO side events! I will be adding some of these details. I wish I could share all the stories I heard!

Agreed Conclusions (summary):

Part 1: Overview

- **Reaffirmation of basic UN documents:**
 - **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), Outcome Document of Beijing +5, and the CSW Declaration at Beijing +10**
 - **Outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Children, the commitments to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child made at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 Summit on Social Development, the 1996 Conference on Racism etc., and the 2005 Millennium Development Declaration and Goals**

- The legal human rights frameworks found in the Convention on the Elimination of discrimination Against Women (**CEDAW**) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) **CRC** with their **Optional Protocols**, and the **2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**
- **General Assembly (UNGA), ECOSOC and Security Council (UNSC) resolutions** on the girl child
- The June 2006 Political Declaration on **HIV/AIDS**
- The commitment to the full realization of the **human rights of women and the girl child** as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Profound concern re the **failure to meet previous goals and commitments**
- Recognition that the **empowerment of girls requires the active support and engagement of parents, legal guardians, families, boys and men and the wider community**
- Recognition that **difficult socio-economic conditions** in many developing countries (*no mention of difficulties in developed countries! MS*) has resulted in **the feminization of poverty**, that achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is dependent on **empowering girls** from which there is a **positive multiplier effect**
- Concern that girls receive **little explicit attention**, too few resources and that research data is rarely **disaggregated by sex, age and other** relevant factors
- Appreciation for and acceptance of the recommendations from the **UN study on violence against children and the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women**

Part 2: Governments urged to take action

1. based on the following **Norms and Policies**

- Called for **Ratification** of all relevant documents, and phasing out of any reservations
- Urged ratification of **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, particularly the Protocol to prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children**
- Consider becoming a State Party to **ILO Conventions 138 and 182** – minimum age for employment, elimination of worst forms of child labour, with strong enforcement penalties
- **Intensify effort to implement** commitments listed in Part 1
- Exercise **leadership and advocacy** to eliminate violence against children, and engage political and religious leaders, public and private sectors, and media and civil society
- **Review and revise all laws** (including those generated by multiple legal systems) **regulations, policies, practices and customs that discriminate against women and girl children**
- **Condemn** all forms of discrimination and violence, establish **mechanisms to monitor compliance**, and work with civil society
- **Ensure magistrates, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and persons working with victims are gender sensitive and aware of developmental needs of children**
- **Eliminate impunity** and exercise **due diligence to punish perpetrators** and protect victims
- Create and maintain **birth, death and marriage data registries**
- Review and enforce **laws on minimum legal age of marriage and of consent**; provide educational opportunities and advocate for advantages of keeping girls in school
- Give explicit attention to the girl child in **budget processes** to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to combat violence and discrimination
- **Governments have the primary responsibility**, and should **urge all UN organs, the international financial institutions, civil society and NGOs and the private sector to share the responsibility**

2. In the following areas:

- **Poverty** – 4 paras. – reduce inequalities, include gender perspective, improve situation for girl child, and consider globalization impacts in all development strategies
- **Education and Training** – 15 paras. – eliminate gender inequality in primary and secondary school; collect disaggregated data on dropouts by sex and age; provide better opportunities for

- girls at all levels; provide both formal and informal education; identify constraints and gaps and address them for better retention; promote gender sensitive training; ensure safe and girl friendly school environments; provide education and livelihood skills programmes for girls not enrolled in formal education; ensure access to leadership training for girls; ensure access to HIV/AIDS education for girls and boys; attend to rights of girls in peace activity and non-violence education; invest in public infrastructure projects that support girls' ability to attend school – transport, water, sanitation – and promote equal; sharing with boys of household tasks; increase girls' access to ICT; eliminate gender gap in drive for literacy; allocate sufficient financial and technical resources.
- **Gender Stereotypes** – 6 paras. – address stereotypes; ensure all men, women, boys and girls are educated to respect one another; promote non-discriminatory treatment of girls in family; encourage dialogue and cooperation among all relevant actors; encourage active participation of boys from an early age in elimination of discrimination against girls.
 - **Health** – 4 paras. – ensure rights of girls to highest attainable standards of health; ensure age appropriate reproductive and general health counseling, ensure quality pre-natal and maternal care including for obstetric fistula; legislate against harmful customary and traditional practices such as FGM
 - **HIV/AIDS** – 7 paras. – ensure comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support; inform young women how to protect themselves; educate men and boys to accept their responsibility; address underlying causes of feminization of HIV/AIDS; address needs of girls heading households; work to overcome legal, regulatory, trade and other barriers that block access to resources and drugs; reduce price of anti-retroviral drugs.
 - **Child Labour** – 2 paras. – eliminate worst forms of child labour and ensure enforcement of ILO standards for girls who are employed ; raise public awareness of special needs of girls – migrants, domestic workers in their own homes or in those of others.
 - **Armed Conflict** – 4 paras. – take special measures to protect girls; prevent recruitment of girls, facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration; ensure explicit attention to girl child in all plans addressing violations and abuse of children in armed conflict.
 - **Humanitarian Assistance to Girls** – 1 para. – ensure special needs of girls are met in camps for refugees and internally displaced, and in reconstruction.
 - **Violence and Discrimination** – 13 paras. – condemn all forms of violence against girls (long list); strengthen legal frameworks to end impunity of perpetrators; provide age-appropriate services to girls; avoid using custom, tradition or religion to cover up violence; strengthen advocacy and human rights approaches; create community-based support networks; engage men and boys in prevention; eliminate root causes of son preference – prenatal sex selection, infanticide; legislate against and eradicate child pornography; ensure follow-up to recommendations from UN study on violence against children; increase education and training of all personnel working with children as to harmful and traditional practices; protect girls in juvenile detention facilities.
 - **Trafficking** – 2 paras. – combat in gender and child sensitive ways; strengthen international cooperation to fight trafficking.
 - **Girls in high-risk situations** – 1 para. – support with adequate financing and programming.
 - **Migration** – 2 paras. – build awareness of risks faced by girls in regular and irregular forms of migration; promote and protect human rights of girls regardless of immigration status.
 - **Empowering Girls** – 3 paras. – promote people-centred sustainable development; provide safe and supportive spaces for girls, particularly for adolescents; invest in awareness, education and training of all professions relevant to protection and empowerment of girls.
 - **Participation of Girls** – 2 paras. – respect and promote right of girls to express themselves freely; involve girls in decision-making processes.
 - **Gender Mainstreaming** – 1 para. – attend to girl child in all legislation, policies and programmes, strengthening monitoring, and using gender budgeting and gender impact assessment tools.
 - **Data Collection** – 3 paras. – strengthen national research and systematically collect, analyze and disseminate gender and age disaggregated data.
 - **Treaty Bodies** – 1 para. – Ensure all Human Rights Treaty Bodies explicitly report on girl child.

- **Implementation of Commitments** – 2 paras. – all actors are called upon to mobilize necessary resources to meet goals of Beijing Platform for Action to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child; strengthen national capacities of developing countries.
- **Support to the UN system** – 2 paras. – all UN organizations to mainstream a gender perspective in all country planning; all multilateral, financial and development institutions to support UN agencies in the above work.

For further detail go to

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/pdfs/csw%20agreed%20conclusions_as%20adopted_9%20march.pdf

New York NGO Committee briefing day, Sunday, February 25th at NYU:

It was entitled *Make Girls Visible*, and there were many girls in attending and speaking. As always, their invaluable **handbook** without which an NGO can be completely lost at the UN was distributed. **Experts** who had attended the September 2006 preparatory meetings **summarized their findings**: the need for protection and empowerment, specially for girls in vulnerable situations; and the need for an institutionalized human rights approach to eliminate discrimination and violence against the girl child. Because girls are on the lowest rung of the family structure and often invisible, they become victims of culture, community violence and war. **Seven groups were identified as most vulnerable:**

- Girls facing harmful social practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), pre-natal sex selection and infanticide, and health conditions such as FGM, obstetric fistula, and early morbidity
- Girls living like slaves in the worst forms of child labour
- Child mothers
- Girl heads of households
- Girls displaced in war and conflicts, and
- Girls in marginalized groups

Solutions were proposed, among which were:

- Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Strengthened Gender Equality Architecture at the UN
- Actions on the Secretary General’s Violence Against Women Report and on the UN study on Violence Against Children
- “The time for rhetoric is over. Now is the time for Action on Implementation”

In addition to stimulating workshop discussions on a myriad of topics, the NY committee brought **updates on critical happenings at the UN. UN Reform** is in the air as a result of the **High Level Panel on Coherence**. Speaking on how to bring environment, development and humanitarian programs into a coherent whole. Member States said they were overwhelmed with tasks relating to achievement of the Millennium Goals and the multiple reporting requirements they faced. UN agencies spoke of lack of coherence at the regional and country level. Because of the able advocacy done by women’s NGOs at the 2006 CSW, and by a most eloquent plea from Stephen Lewis as he left his post at UNICEF in 2006, for more prominence to be given to Gender as a cross-cutting issue, a strong recommendation was made that there be one UN agency created for Gender Equality. This is what the women call “**Gender Equality Architecture**”. This one agency would consist of OSAGI, Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and UNIFEM; be at a high level, be generously resourced, and staffed at the level of an Under-Secretary General. This proposal has received endorsement from senior people at the UN but is not yet a priority for many countries, so the discussions go on. An amalgamation of United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Global Environment Fund (GEF) was also recommended; however, the **key recommendation** made by the Panel was to coordinate all UN activity at the regional level, with a “**One Stop Shop**” in each state where all UN agencies would come under one leader and one budget. **Pilot projects** are underway in Tanzania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Pakistan, Vietnam and Uruguay, with not too much evidence to date of gender being central, or of plans to close the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”.. They also recommended multi-year funding and cooperation with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) on humanitarian assistance.

These changes are seen as both an **opportunity** for gender to be integrated into national plans, with systemic change being possible, and a parallel **threat** as gender could fall off the radar. Another concern is that the entire program is very much an **AID and market-based approach rather than** a more comprehensive structural and **developmental approach**. Some critics even suggested it was just a case of the UN “cozying up to the big donors”. Missing was an explicit commitment to work with civil society/NGOs. Charlotte Bunch of CWGL said: “*We’ve shown them what we can do with a little. Let’s show them what we can do with a lot!*” She also quipped, “*When at risk, demand more!*” and reminded us that “*Gender Equality is now on the table*”.

Other topics under study are the new **Human Rights Council** along with the **CEDAW committee’s probable move from New York to Geneva** where all the other human rights committees are located. There has also been A **Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)** that has been dealing with the “**Responsibility to Protect**”, **Financing for Development (FFD)** - Financing for gender equality will be the topic for CSW 2008), migration, indigenous peoples (their draft Convention recently failed to pass when Canada, Australia, China and India failed to support it – we were told “for technical reasons”). However, the **Convention on Persons with Disabilities** did pass last December after years of grassroots work, much of it started by Disabled Peoples International, then located in Winnipeg.

They alerted us to the do’s and don’t’s at the UN, and when and where to find the Morning NGO briefing, the orientation for new members, and the Coordination and Linkage Caucus meetings.

Monday, February 26:

The official proceedings got underway with the CSW Bureau introductions and general comments by Chair of CSW HE Amb. Carmen Maria Gallardo; Amb Dalius Cekuolis, President of ECOSOC; Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy SG on Gender; Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, E.D. of UNFPA; and Rima Salah, Deputy ED of UNICEF; CEDAW Chair Carloyn Hannan; and a young woman from South Africa, Collina. This was followed by “show and tell (or conceal)” statements from States Parties.

Then **Radhika Coomaraswamy**, the first Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Children and now Special Rapporteur on Children in Zones of Armed Conflict introduced the topic to which state parties replied. She used the plight of Roma children to illustrate the special problems of marginalized populations and the dangers of stereotyping. She went on to cite harmful traditional practices, child marriages (currently 100 million), child mothers and heads of households who were often victims of early and forced marriages, girls without parents, the worst forms of forced labour (domestic slavery, recruits into armed forces); the general powerlessness of girls to combat the scourges of FGM, obstetric fistula and HIV/AIDS, and the majority of girls/women reporting that their first sexual experience was forced. Add to this list the trauma of becoming displaced persons with no legal protections, and the ongoing suffering of marginalized populations wherever they are found, and the agenda for the next two weeks was set. States used the remaining time in the first session to ask questions, and to “show and tell” what they were doing. I was struck by a **question posed by Denmark as relating closely to Canada**: As introduction, the representative stated “*Investment in the girl child is investment in a future based on Human Rights*”. Then came the question: “*Our girls are well educated. We have kindergartens. Women are in the labour force in unprecedented numbers, but after they graduate they aren’t doing so well. Why is that?*” I could hazard a few ideas: a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities added on to their workday, media stereotypes than make positive self images difficult to build, slowness of the total society to embrace women’s equality... I am sure there are more.

After lunch in the bright UN Cafeteria with its wide selection of modestly priced food, I attended an NGO Panel in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium on **UN Reform and Gender Architecture**, sponsored by WEDO, NGLS, UNIFEM and CWGL. I was struck by the comments of Gita Sen. She stated she thought we were rushing into providing solutions without discussion of the problems of poverty, some of which could be attributed to macro-economic policies and institutions that often work for economic growth and not true development, and not all to corruption or poor governance at the national level. While not ignoring the twin challenges of possibility and threat, Charlotte Bunch thought a GE Agency could lead the way with both an integrative and cross-sectional approaches.

Tuesday, Feb. 27:

I spent the morning listening to more states “show and tell”. During lunch break, I attended a Swedish session on: **Promoting the equal rights of women and girls to freedom from violence – understanding and combating violence (committed) in the name of honour.** **Yakin Erturk** from Turkey and former Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women attacked the practice of **impunity** whereby violators are excused based on culture and religion. *“Women must have the right to live a life free from violence and discrimination based on their sex. They need shelters, anti-violence campaigns, solidarity networks and services for both men and women, and shaming of the perpetrators rather than the victims. Over and beyond, there needs to be more international intervention and cooperation that recognizes systems of domination, and is prepared to build multi-ethnic/multi-cultural societies based on **human rights** where equal participation prevails”.* **Purna Sen**, a lecturer in Global Studies at the London School of Economics, tackled the thorny issue of **honour crimes**: its features, definition, culture and future. She described the honour code whereby behaviours and actions, usually focusing on women’s behaviour relating to their sexuality, may lead to honour being lost or damaged and then restored by a man in order to restore his and his family’s social standing in a collective. Women must be modest, bounded within the family unless chaperoned by a male, faithful in marriage, and meet motherly, wifely and daughterly obligations. Transgressions may be real or alleged. Men’s actions may be selected from a continuum of violent options set by the collective: forcing marriage, imprisoning within the home or killing. As a result, women are constrained and fearful, and patriarchy and gender inequality are preserved. What this analysis neglects are the other moral, ethical and colonial systems of oppression that exist in most cultures and religions. This leads to the western perspective becoming inherently discriminatory. Context is ignored. Cultural norms are powerful and generally arose from a particular history. They can rarely be changed by outsiders, particularly if they speak from a position of presumed superiority. Violence against women exists in all cultures, so something more than gender inequality is causative. **Lena Carlson** of Save The Children spoke of tensions among the generations in all societies, but particularly in immigrant societies. People working with families need to be sensitive to many factors in order to deal effectively with children who may live in fear of their parents. Involving men and boys in the struggle against patriarchy, providing role models and mentors, and holding dialogues about how to “right a wrong” have proven effective.

Gender Mainstreaming: High Level Panel

Speakers from Philippines, Ghana, Egypt, UNICEF and Bangladesh compared experiences: progress is slow because of lack of awareness and motivation to change. Policies are there but not yet applied.

Philippines focused on child labour with the help of ILO and made some progress. They used baseline surveys to understand the current divisions of labour and work loads – found the girls worked longer hours than the boys, held group sessions with children, developed gender awareness kits for capacity building among adults, and sought out mentors and alliances. **Ghana** collected gender sensitive data, trained people in lobbying and negotiation skills, promoted readiness among the girls to change, but experienced some backlash from the boys. Donors also need the political will to adapt their accountability processes and to pool resources. **Egypt** worked with legal, monetary, budgeting and development offices, using a human rights base. UNICEF noted that gender equality is at the core of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but there is low mutual understanding of CRC and CEDAW. Bangladesh worked on capacity building in general, and on child marriages in particular.

Wednesday, February 28:

Stop Stoning in Iran: this workshop was sponsored by the Raahi Women’s Centre for Legal Counseling: There is a strong and vital non-political women’s movement in Iran but it is threatened by militaristic and fundamentalist powers. Women are doing so well in Post Secondary Education that quotas for men may be introduced. However, they do not have access to careers in the army, to judgeships or to be the Prime Minister. The threat of a possible US invasion of Iran complicates their work as it feeds fear of homophobia in Iran and islamophobia abroad. They have a campaign against stoning but it is legitimized in 47 articles of the Penal Code The judicial system denies its existence and any reporting in the media is censored. Their organization documents details of cases. This is a women’s issue as the woman is obliged to satisfy a man’s sexual needs. A man is free to divorce his wife at will while a wife must prove sexual impotence on the part of her husband. A judge’s decision is final and his knowledge base may be very narrow and traditional. The

women run the risk of having the stoning punishment converted to imprisonment or execution. The goal therefore is to decriminalize adultery and the resultant stigma. International letter writing pressure is helpful in resisting extremism in religion, identity and politics. Violence against women consists of honour killing, child marriages and extreme violence e.g. stoning. To date they have 1 million signatures on their petition. *“Men and women in Iran live in two worlds.”*

Although wearing the hijab is just advised, those without it may be imprisoned or tortured. Even the clergy lack freedom of expression. The EU is trying to persuade Iran to stop stoning. When the diaspora support the campaign, they are accused of supporting a US invasion of Iran. Iran has not signed CEDAW. There is fear about complaining under the Optional Protocols of the ICC and the ICCPR as complaints are not confidential. A crime of honour resolution was submitted to UNGA in '03 but didn't pass as Turkey, with its eye on joining the EU, would not support. *“The current Constitution and legal system are harmful to women's lives. Watching stoning is harmful to the people's mental health. Iran has the highest rate of suicide,”* said a noted physician and medical ethicist.

Children and HIV/AIDS:

Rima Salah, Executive Director, UNICEF: Because of their general social vulnerability, powerlessness and lack of education, girls are contracting HIV/AIDS with increasing frequency. 15 million girls have lost either or both parents which adds to their distress. Discriminatory attitudes reduce their access to treatment and support. Providing health services, programming to empower girls and providing scholarships to enable them to stay on at school, with grade ten being the minimum goal, can help. Involving men and boys in public awareness campaigns is essential. Some jurisdictions in Latin America are finding ingenious ways to keep girls at school through conditional cash transfers and scholarships. The need is very great.

Pauline Muchini. Of the 9.8 million people living with AIDS, more than half are women: promoting gender equality can get at the root causes. A massive “scaling up” is required in international efforts to address poverty as very young girls are selling their bodies just to survive or support their families. Female condoms and microbicides can help but governments resist promoting them as equivalent to encouraging “bad girls”. Young wives in early marriages are at great disadvantage as they can't “say no”. *“Where is the political will? Where are the resources?”*

Amandli Byong: (a young student from Botswana - the only male on the Panel): added the issues of bride price, formerly seen as the means of “acquiring a beautiful lady” from the appropriate caste or culture, now seen as payment for sex; the fact that women can still not inherit; schools that are not safe for girls; the male search for “love” may only be found in an abusive relationship; religious institutions demand respect of girls but do not return it; *appreciative inquiry* is a technique that can help build a girl's self-esteem and mutual understanding among boys and girls.

Morgani Grace Stalwi: (Malawi): the feminization of HIV/AIDS is pandemic. 76% of infected women live in the Southern Sahara. Education of girls is the key but 22 m. young girls in Africa have never been to school. Fewer than 30% of girls are enrolled in primary school in Malawi.

Thursday, March 1:

UNFPA Briefing with Judith Bruce, Population and Development: this was arranged for the IFUW but I was included. The main message was that young adolescent girls are very much in need of special spaces and programmes where they can build self-confidence and learn about their sexuality before being overwhelmed by household chores, married off to an older man, being impregnated, and/or infected with HIV/AIDS, all of which interfere with their orderly progress in school. In some areas, stipends are being paid to families to enable the daughter to stay on at school.

Indigenous Rights: Canada, US, Australia and New Zealand recently blocked the passage of the Draft Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Canada said it was because of procedural gaffes related to land title, but that passing the Convention remains a high priority for Canada. Meanwhile, the action has weakened Canada's reputation. In a conversation with the Australian Chair, I discovered that the Australian Government had tried to introduce private property rights on traditional lands held in common through promoting matrimonial property rights for women. He believed that the advice of the Australian policy person leading the initiative was on loan to Canada's Conservative Government who are currently promoting the same initiative with Canada's aboriginal

women. This initiative can bring private property rights into conflict with collective property rights. Its success would also depend on there being adequate housing on the reserve to accommodate the expelled spouse, but that is currently far from the case.

Legal Mechanisms from Around the World to Protect the Girl Child from Neglect, Abuse and Punishment - International Federation of Women Lawyers: their main target was the new forms of violence mediated through the Internet: child pornography, recruiting for escort services, selling girls, and trafficking in general. Governments are slow to move. The perpetrators are very difficult to trap because of frequent changes to their electronic codes. Some countries like Hungary want to legitimize pornography for 14 and up. Several horrendous case studies were given of abuse and neglect: an estranged parent, in this case a woman, locking her three children in a basement for years and severely neglecting their needs; finally a neighbour grew suspicious and reported the mother. The attitude of “It’s none of my business” prevents neighbours from scrutinizing and reporting. As a result, over 50 children a year were dying in the Netherlands. Judicial authorities initiated an awareness campaign: identifying symptoms such as withdrawal, never smiling; holding annual celebrations of the rights of the child. A backlash occurred when a new party advocated freedom to have sex with a child. A New York City lawyer unsuccessfully took to the courts the case of severe abuse by a school principal of a special needs child. When the case was publicized, job requirements for such a post were developed. *“The public must find ways to be the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ for children who are suffering and ‘speak out!’”*

Friday, March 2:

I and several other Canadian NGO women were invited to attend **the meeting arranged at the Canadian Mission** with Ambassador Henri-Paul Normandin by **Canadian Voice Of Women for Peace**, one of the most active Canadian NGOs at the CSW. The discussion ranged widely: the threat of conventional and nuclear weapons strikes against Iran, implementation of treaty obligations, mechanisms for conflict prevention, and the urgency for clarity on the scope of a state’s right to self-defence. Other issues raised were ritual abuse, the “war on terror”, the threat of closer integration with the US, child marriage, arms production, refugees and internally displaced persons, right to water, indigenous people’s rights, the US ban on family planning programmes, and the need for public debate in Canada on our role in Afghanistan. The Ambassador was open and generous with his responses, commending the NGOs for pushing their issues at the UN, *“without which there might not be much movement”*, and also for *“making the life of UN diplomats far more interesting!”*

Workshop by IFUW, CFUW and NCWC on what NGOs can do to move their issues forward. The format was interactive and solicited NGO input into successful strategies they had used. My contribution was to give short case reports of effective NGO advocacy I had experienced while in the Manitoba Government. I chose to speak of work done by parents of children with mental disability, organizations of people with physical disabilities, parents involved in child care, and organizations pioneering how to respond to violence against women. The small group I was facilitating was comprised of five young women, two **American** and three **Mexican**, from relatively privileged backgrounds who had strong self concepts. They thought their family, school and sports lives couldn’t be better, and they weren’t aware of any issues that needed to be tackled. On further probing, I found they resented the tyranny of media images, and disapproved of the use of alcohol and drugs among their peers. A **Malaysian** woman spoke of Soroptimist sponsored life skills programmes. A woman from **Pakistan** spoke of life skills programmes introduced to primary schools that at first met with opposition from the mosques, but they were able to overcome their objections. A woman from **Bangladesh** spoke of training programmes in violence against women for government, police and journalists.

Monday, March 5:

Adolescent Girls’ Right to Choose – UNIFEM and UNICEF:

Aminata Toure – UNFPA (UN Family Planning Association): Perceptions of children and adolescents, seeing girls as objects rather than subjects, plus the shortage of resources to enable girls to access their rights are key obstacles. In Egypt, UNFPA is tackling the culture of FGM and working to educate re parenthood before marriage. Their national Plan calls for closer coordination between child and women human rights treaty bodies (CRC and CEDAW).

Shanthi Dairum – Malaysia: No one strategy will work. Girls need to know about both their physical health and their emotional well-being. A legal framework is needed that will protect girls from “private actors” and guarantee their reproductive rights. The increasing privatization of health services is a problem as information for adolescents is not available. Strategies must help girls to choose to “avoid, mitigate or leave” both inside and outside marriage. **Shadow Reports by NGOs to Treaty Bodies help.**

Moushira Khattab – researcher in South Africa: There is very little sex-disaggregated data. In ’96, The Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed, and it is a criminal offense to interfere. The thousands of women dying from back-street abortions were what led to the law. Poverty and prostitution increase women’s vulnerability. Much needs to be done beyond passing a law: enforcement, public education, and access to services which are currently largely funded by the UN and its agencies.

Luisa Cabal – Colombia: There are gaps between the laws and standards and the reality. To hold governments accountable, they have taken cases, e.g. of rape where responsibility was denied by a school principal, to the Inter-American Court. They used language from the treaties: “failing to protect”, “cruel and degrading treatment”, absence of birth control, the “adolescent’s right to autonomy and privacy” to win their case and secure compensation.

Paul Hunt – a lawyer at the Human Rights Centre, UK: The CRC and CEDAW, in fact all the ECOSOC Human Rights Treaties, are the “best kept secret in the world”. Not many know their countries have signed or that girls have rights. Societies have profoundly entrenched Gender Inequality. In **Myanmar**, gang rapes, sexual slavery and sexual violence are rampant. All societies must find ways to talk about “sexuality” and not disguise it under “reproduction”. *“We must find what works, what doesn’t and what we can do better... If young girls are dying, or putting babies in trash cans, abortion is OK. If you don’t like it, take a walk... The rights of the child and the child’s best interest must come first. Challenge the religious people with the primacy of Care!... governments must not use the treaty charge to ‘progressively realize higher standards of health care... depending on the ‘availability of resources’ as an escape hatch... there must be indicators and benchmarks to show whether progress is being made.”*

NFB Film – “Finding Dawn” This is a beautifully made film showing the tragic reality in Canada of the “Missing Sisters”, most of them aboriginal. After reviewing the horrors of the Picton Case and the tragic stories of several other women and their families, the audience was challenged with: “What are you going to do about it?” Ambassador Normandin introduced the film and Beverly Jacobs commented on it. The film is an excellent resource that should be widely used in Canada.

Tuesday, March 6:

ECOSOC chamber – I heard statements from **IPU** members from Bahrein, Dominican Republic, Italy (on peace), Belarus (on anti-trafficking), Bangladesh (woman PM and Leader of the Opposition! – their women have benefited from micro-credit), and Slovakia (EU impact on the traditional family, Gender segregation in the workplace but increasing numbers of women in management; 30% of entrepreneurs are women, some children’s services, *“UN documents on gender equality are important!”*).

Secretary-General’s Report on Violence Against Women – CWGL: The focus was on the struggle at the UN since the ‘70s of the **LGBT** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual) community for recognition in human rights documents. Barriers have been the focus on “marriage rights”, and on torture, disappearances and imprisonment at the expense of rights to freedom of expression, privacy and decision-making. After 30 years, issues of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity are being recognized to the extent that there are three NGOs accredited that represent these communities. They have also worked at the UNHCHR since ’91. A Brazilian resolution there met with violent opposition. A Nigerian law was passed condemning same sex marriage and public displays of affection. After 30 years, there is now a substantive UN and HR body of affirming language but there are still reports of murders from Jamaica, South Africa and Guatemala. Current efforts center on massive abuses in daily life, but also in Darfur and by some Blue Helmets. Access to information is limited for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual) persons who show varying degrees of “coming out”. ILO was the first UN agency to include the duty to accommodate in its labour standards. They are based on the principles of freedom of association, collective bargaining, elimination of forced labour, gender equality and good working conditions. Collaboration is needed at all levels, and with other movements such as those against ethnic discrimination, racism, and the unjust distribution of wealth and power. South Africa was the first state to list sexual orientation as a

forbidden ground of discrimination. The struggle at the UN goes on: to get language into UN documents, to make the UN relevant, and to hold governments accountable.

Engendering the Peace-Building Commission (PBC), especially in Africa and the Organization for African Unity (OAU): The gender issues for war affected girls are abduction, rape and recruitment. All youth so affected need rehabilitation with special attention shown to disability, gender and trauma. Other issues raised were the prevention of conflict, security, governance, judicial reform, capacity building, land reform, orphan refugees and financial resources. An overarching theme was the need to address poverty. There is tension in the UN between the need for international oversight and the drive for national autonomy. Achieving Gender Equality in Government is an ongoing struggle. A manual was prepared for incorporating women into decision-making.

Wednesday, March 7:

Session on Resolutions and Follow-Up to ECOSOC decisions: The resolutions were on Forced and Early Marriage (US), Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women and Children (Pakistan for G77 and China), Ending Female Genital Mutilation (South Africa) and one on HIV/AIDS Education (SADC)).
Follow up to ECOSOC Decisions: Carolyn Hannan of DAW spoke on employment generation, recalling the World Summit commitment to “full employment for all”. Gender violence was flagged as an emerging issue. In ECOSOC’s role as coordinating body for the implementation of all UN Conference and Summit recommendations, it vowed to strengthen links with regional bodies, hold annual ministerial reviews and a biennial forum. She affirmed the contribution of CSW to ECOSOC Reform, saying they had always been at the forefront urging cooperation. The following year will be one of review of the High Level Coherence Panel’s Paper. The process “like Mahler’s music is not as bad as it sounds”. They are planning a high level meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions (IMF, World Bank), UNCTAD and the WTO in Geneva in April. Their aim is to build consensus around common themes: contributing to sustained economic growth. Systematic dialogue between ECOSOC and CSW leadership should ensure gender issues receiving due weight.

Global Summit for a Better Tomorrow: This was a full blown event sponsored by AVON and chaired by the charismatic UN bureaucrat, now retiring, Shashi Thakoor. His closing words to the assembly were that the single most important action for creating a better world should be to “*Educate Girls*”. Avon demonstrated how their system of franchises for women selling cosmetics helped women all over the world develop their own businesses and thrive. A short video was shown depicting Mohammed Yunus and his successful Grameen Bank in Bangladesh which provides micro-credit loans to women. One franchisee spoke who grossed \$300,000 a year. Examples were given of how the Virtue Foundation established by Avon uses their profits to support Cancer research, education and violence against women. They deplored the fact that the global fund to fight Violence Against Women set a goal of \$190 m. but only raised \$3.9 m. They identified security and education as the necessary building blocks for women everywhere as more than 70% of the poorest people in the world are women. Since ’94, their resource base has quadrupled. They hope to create a “Ripple Effect”.

Thursday, March 8:

An International Women’s Day Special Event: Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary-General, made a moving tribute to the UN, as, he said, “*Without the UN, how would a poor little boy like me from South Korea have been able to rise to this important post?*” He pledged his support for gender equality. **President of the General Assembly, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,** and **President of the Security Council Shadrak Kumalo** echoed these words.

A Panel followed on **Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women and Girls.** This event was also chaired by **Shashi Thakoor,** and several tributes were made to his long distinguished career at the UN, ending with today’s event. “*Violence against women is the most common and least punished crime in the world,*” were his opening words. It has reached pandemic proportions. He gave his endorsement to one dynamic, high-level and well resourced UN organization devoted to advancing gender equality. Ending impunity for perpetrators was the topic for the day.

Carla del Ponte who had served as Prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, said the lessons learned were: that a rejection of violence against women must be enshrined in the constitution; that creative efforts were needed to make the court process less intimidating to women as cross-examination by its nature is adversarial; that focal points and training in Gender Equality were needed throughout; and that the experience of women in war must not be compromised. She commented on the eventual inclusion of rape as a war crime in the International Criminal Court Statute, whereas at first it was considered trivial.

Senator Dillan Francisca Toro Torres from Colombia spoke of a story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez where he described a beautiful village created by women while the men were off at war. She challenged women in responsible positions to speak out, and all politicians to work to provide safe houses, victim and family protection and to hold the perpetrator responsible for the costs. *“A woman in politics is a woman changed, but many women in politics changes politics.”*

Next came **Antero Lopez, Deputy Policy Advisor, Department of Peacekeeping Operations**. He agreed his department had far to go to achieve gender balance in policy, personnel and practice. They follow SC Resolution #1325, plan law and order operations, and incorporate ethical standards. UN police can advise and build capacity in local police forces. Gender violence is still too often seen in the field, in spite of UN norms, as belonging to the “private sphere” and therefore beyond the purview of public law and its enforcers.

Ms. Raghida Dergham, Columnist and Senior Diplomatic Advisor to Al Hayat (a newspaper), gave a similar message: *“Tell the stories repeatedly, effectively, and creatively in order to shock and change attitudes... Speak Out! Don’t despair! Persist!...The public don’t want to hear. They want violence as entertainment... but it is our moral and professional responsibility to end impunity, in policy, in Legislation and in Human Rights Tribunals... Tell the Story!”*.

Todd Minerson, ED, White Ribbon Campaign, and Rev. Jacques A. De Graff, 100 Black Men, spoke of the importance of involving men and boys. *“Yes, there is backlash, but there are many men willing to end the silence.”* They agreed that women need safe spaces, and men need to create new models of masculinity.

On a sobering note, **Shahshi Thakoor**, the Chair, added that in Kerala, 33% of the elected people are women, women are well educated and fed, and are politically conscious. Still, 41.9% of women report experiencing conjugal violence. *“There is no room for complacency. Never stop being vigilant.”*

Conclusion:

On this note, I end. I was not able to attend the final day because of a FAFIA consultation in Ottawa on the federal budget. I obtained the results of the ACs from Status of Women Canada. As ever, attending CSW was a momentous experience for which I am most grateful, and from which I trust NCWC can receive much impetus for its ongoing work.

Addenda:

Recent senior appointments of women at the UN

Carolyn McAskie – new under Secretary General on Resolution #1325

Asha-Rose Migiro – Deputy Secretary-General of the UN

Resources

WEDO www.wedo.org

CWGL www.cwgl.rutgers.edu

SG Report on Violence Against Women www.wunrn.com

Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women www.ohchr.org

Convention on the Rights of Children www.unicef.org/crc/

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/index.html

Glossary

ACs	Agreed Conclusions
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
BPW	Business & Professional Women
CSW	Commission on Status of Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
E.D.	Executive Director
FFD	Financing For Development
G77	Group of 77 (non-aligned states)
GE	Gender equality
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-Viral Auto-Immune Deficiency
HR	Human Rights
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	International Parliamentary Union
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans-sexual
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MH	Mental Health
NGLS	Non-Governmental Liaison Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAU	Organization for African Unity
OSAGI	Office of the Special Advisor on Gender (to the Secretary General)
PBC	Peace Building Commission
PSAC	Public Service Alliance of Canada
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNFPA	United Nations Family Planning Association
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commission for Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VAW	Violence Against Women
WEDO	Women Environment and Development Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization