

CSW54 – what’s next?

Report: Rosy Weiss

General remarks:

Reluctantly the global women’s movement had to adjust to the fact that there will not be a fifth women’s world conference (for reasons we partly agree upon – who wishes the Beijing texts to be diluted); reluctantly also, we adjusted to the fact that after Beijing+5 no other special session of the UN General Assembly will commemorate the Beijing achievements; in fact, we were all too happy to see the Commission at Beijing+10 coming up with a “reaffirmation” of the Beijing outcome. Now, preparing for Beijing+15, air tickets bought, hotel reservation settled, I read one week before leaving Vienna, “sorry, not all of the NGO representatives will have the opportunity to attend the deliberations of the Commission” and, two days before leaving Vienna, that “sorry folks, no copies of UN documents will be provided to NGO representatives”. And I am asking myself: how far we are ready to step back?

In fact, as I am describing below, the spaces for influencing decision making by women’s organisations at this Beijing+15 Review have been significantly reduced. This has been manifested by the agreement on the Declaration having taken place on day two of the Commission without consultations with civil society; the absence of information on opportunities to influence the conduct and outcome of the CSW meetings and the Declaration; and poor logistics and facilities preventing women from participating effectively.

Very mixed feelings already upon arrival at JFK, as you can imagine. US immigration turned out to be by far the easiest hurdle. Lucky those who like me already arrived prior to the start of the Commission. It took me half an hour to get my badge whereas colleagues arriving the opening day of the Commission needed almost 8 hours to get it. Why? Already before the start of CSW54, DAW, logistics, and security knew that around 7000 NGO representatives were registered of which more than 3000 would try to attend CSW54’s opening on March 1. They should not have been surprised and unprepared... Why the chaos? Nobody really knew. As always in such cases, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. As the Commission’s Vice-Chair, finally summoned to appear at one of our Morning Briefings (all such briefings held in the Salvation Army Building, 52nd Street between 3rd and 2nd Ave) told us during week two, there are requirements of DAW, security, and logistics, each one in its own right. As it turned out, nobody was really responsible for what we (NGOs) called the chaos of week one.

Of course, there is the refurbishing of the UN premises due to asbestos. Everybody knew it; everybody should have been prepared to it. The so-called North Lawn Building (acting as replacement for the old UN building), where all government and UN parallel events took place, was only accessible by means of special tickets (in addition to the official badges). These tickets, meant to be distributed by the organisers of these events, turned out to be major obstacles to attending those meetings as not even organisers themselves knew that they were responsible for ticket distribution. The result: tickets were given away by the overstrained DAW officers on a first come, first served basis.

Speaking about NGO side events: They were organised in the Church Centre as well as in the Salvation Army Building at 52nd Street. For whatever reason that might have been necessary (I saw empty rooms in CCUN during both weeks), this meant wasteful running back and forward for NGO representatives interested in the various, highly calibre events. Not to mention events of lucky organisers who had found space in various more distant locations such as government missions or other official buildings.

IAW co-signed four open letters to the Secretary-General, three in protest of the difficulties encountered, one in reaction to the appointment of an all-male High-Level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing.

In an unprecedented move, Rachel Mayanga, special adviser on gender issues and advancement of women reacted on March 18 to these protests.

“Greetings from United Nations Headquarters! Spring has begun to leave its mark with lots of rain and higher temperatures. Just over two weeks ago you began your journey to New York City to attend the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women - filled with anticipation about contributing to the process of assessing what has been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 15 years ago.

You came in great numbers – over 3,400 individuals from some 460 organizations in 138 countries, showing that you attributed great importance to the occasion. Despite experiencing a difficult registration process and strained facilities with limited seating, you attended over 90 parallel events hosted by Permanent Missions and UN Entities as well as hundreds more organized by NGOs in the Church Centre. You added an important dimension to the high level round tables, inter-active panels and general discussion of the session, bringing diversity and wisdom and turning many lifetimes of rich experience into recommendations to improve women’s lives. You seized the opportunity to meet others who share your passion for gender equality and exchanged expertise and swapped success stories on how to tackle injustice and discrimination against women and accelerate progress in all areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

I recognize the important role of the vibrant women’s movement that you represent and credit you with concrete achievements and measurable progress. Once again you have done us proud. – I hope that you took away with you a sense of renewed purpose and strength for your future work as a result of being a part of the session.

I wish to encourage you to let the message of Beijing + 15 resonate in your home countries – that equal rights and equal opportunities mean progress for all - and I look forward to continuing our partnership.“

In all this, the New York NGO Committee on the Status of Women did its best – despite personal shortfalls - to help, to calm, to facilitate. Since CSW53 and preparatory talks there, high expectations have been placed in the two-day NGO Forum¹, organised prior to the Commission. As it turned out fund-raising was not successful, and the Forum again took the shape of an ordinary NGO forum as we had already the years before, no Madison Square Garden, no march through the city.... Has the movement lost its power?²

But, back to the Commission, its work and IAW presence.

The Declaration³: Due to the failure to strongly reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to commit to renewed and concrete actions and resources to implement the Beijing commitments, the Declaration 2010 must be considered a backward step. “It clearly overstates the progress made and underestimates the degree and types of challenges that remain for women in their multiple identities, including the persistence of violence against women. It fails to take into account changes in the global and local contexts. The current context of multiple crises – such as the food, energy, climate change, care, economic and financial crises – new forms of insecurity, new aid modalities, internationalization of conflicts, perpetuation of the feminization of poverty and the ongoing struggle around women’s health issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS, have created challenges not present 15 years ago” (final statement of NGOs, March 12, 2010).

The Commission adopted seven resolutions: see
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes.html>

- women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS

¹ For the programme see <http://www.ngocsw.org/en/main>

² For the call for action of the NGO Forum see <http://ngecswny.wordpress.com>

³ Doc. E/CN.6/2010/L.1

- release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts
- the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women
- women's economic empowerment
- eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women
- strengthening the institutional arrangements of the UN for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by consolidating the four existing offices into a composite entity
- ending female genital mutilation⁴.

Also on 12 March, the Commission on the Status of Women decided to transmit the following Moderator's summaries to the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council, that will take place end June in New York:

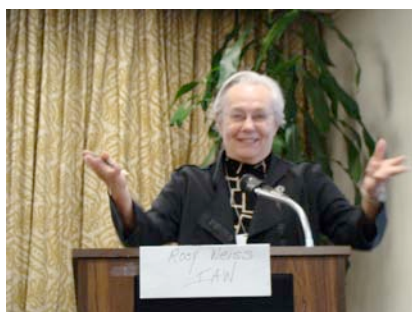
High-level round table on "Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals"

Panel discussion on "Linkages between implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals"

Panel discussion on "Women's economic empowerment in the context of the global economic and financial crisis"

Panel discussion on "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women – contribution to the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council"

Personal comments to the most important resolutions from an IAW viewpoint:



As you can imagine, I was working primarily on two resolutions: maternal mortality and the new gender entity. And, may I recall: negotiations between governments were held without any tangible interference with NGOs as this has been prevented by logistics – see comments above.

- a) Maternal mortality (sponsor US): The text does not create any new rights, and does not fall behind Cairo and Copenhagen. Yet, it falls behind Beijing as it does not support Strategic objective C.1, actions to be taken (k) "consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions". The only part referring to reproductive rights is contained in OP 3 and only relates to the outcomes of the review conferences. Consequently it does not advance women's cause due to the difficulties within the EU.
- b) The resolution on strengthening the institutional arrangements of the United Nations for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by consolidating the four existing offices into a composite entity (sponsor Norway) had an immediate support by the G77 and China, normally ample ground for suspicion on the part of an international NGO.
The background is that the CSW is not responsible for the establishment of such an entity. This is the sole responsibility of the General Assembly to which the resolution

⁴ (See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/outcomes.html> for the documents).

of the CSW, in support of the establishment of such an entity, is addressed. Nothing more, nothing less.

IAW activities:

a) Together with Catholics for Choice; the Center for Health and Gender Equity, Inc.; the Girls' Power Initiative; the International Planned Parenthood Federation; Ipas; and Population Action International, IAW has put before the Commission one written statement prepared in Geneva on managing the consequences of sexual violence against women and girls; broadening the involvement of men in reproductive health; enabling women to exercise their reproductive rights; and linking or integrating various aspects of reproductive health.

In addition, we prepared two oral statements, one on decision-making by women in conflict situations and one on hunger, climate change and the empowerment of women. I was given the chance to read out the second statement during the high-level plenary in the afternoon of March 9.

In the name of the Alliance, I was glad to support an oral statement prepared by the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights and the Greek Council for Refugees on harmful effects of traditional or customary practices conflicting with women's rights.

b) Thanks to the initiative of our New York representative Soon-Young Yoon, IAW organised two highly professional side events on women and climate change. The first was at the North Lawn Building together with the Global Gender Climate Alliance, UNDP, UNIFEM, Women's Environment and Development Organization, and representatives of the governments of Finland, Mexico and the USA, the second at the Salvation Army auditorium on 52nd street, together with the Global Gender Climate Alliance, the NGO/CSW/NY subcommittee on women and climate change, Women's Climate Initiative, Women's Environment and Development Organization, and World Health Organization IAW is also very grateful for the stimulating ad put into the NGO Handbook by Soon-Young⁵.

c) Thanks to the initiative of our representative Judy Gordon, IAW co-sponsored a side event of the New York NGO Committee on Mental Health at the Church Centre entitled "keys to women's empowerment, mental health, human rights".

d) Finally, in view of the bad feelings and spirit of resignation in so many NGO representatives, nurtured by the experienced chaos during CSW54, IAW seized the opportunity for an impromptu side event on March 11 to call for an informal exchange, reflections on the days experienced here, and possibilities for a way forward under the title: "CSW54 – the end of an era? Do we have a future with the UN?"

The response of NGOs was overwhelming. The open discussion produced many suggestions to improve the situation for the years to come (with reconstruction of the building still ongoing for at least four years!) and a general feeling of an unquestioned importance of the CSW for the women's movement. We only have two pillars at the moment, CEDAW and CSW. Nobody knows exactly the consequences, once the gender architecture will be in place and operational, and DAW being integrated in that big entity together with OSAGI, UNIFEM and INSTRAW.

IAW also held several "social" events, such as an evening honouring Hon. Vice-President and long-time head of the UN Delegation in NY, Kay Fraleigh, with an award and a friendship



⁵ For the Handbook see <http://www.ngecsw.org/en/main>

book; two meetings to deal with IAW internal questions; as well as a lunch of the delegation. In addition, the IAW delegation was invited by Alicia Kershaw, President of a new IAW member organisation, to a delicious evening reception at her beautiful home in Soho. Many thanks to Alicia. We enjoyed this evening very much.