

## CSW 59 OVERVIEW

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The Commission on the Status of Women meetings (CSW59) was held at the United Nations in New York from 9-20 March 2015. The authors, our International Representatives (IR's) in NY, were delighted to be joined by our Secretary-General Maria Lia Zervino, as well as by Board Member Rosaline Menga. In addition, we met up with WUCWO organisation members from CWL Australia, the NCCW –USA and the Union of Catholic Mothers, England. We attended the plenary sessions as well as many of the side events organized by member states and NGO's and parallel events organized by NGO's and committees. We have often observed that the "official" sessions do not reflect the reality on the ground as well as the side events and parallel sessions run by grass roots organisations.

The theme for this year's session was *Beijing +20: Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action* and presentations reflected the progress made since that meeting in China and the challenges still faced with particular emphasis on the areas of gender equality and empowerment of women. As always, our IR's were vigilant with regard to the misuse of these terms by powerful lobbies attending these meetings who attempt to include abortion as a human right under the empowerment of women and to extend the meaning of gender equality past that of equality of men and women to embrace different definitions of gender. Though they make strong efforts to achieve these ends, once again the final documents from this session do not include abortion as a right and fail to define gender beyond the traditional understanding.

The final Political Document from the session was actually concluded prior to the beginning of the CSW59. It contains no inflammatory statements or demands. Of greater importance is a document that outlines the working methods going forward for the next ten years. This document defines who can say what and when and after much debate, was finalized without the inclusion of those who oppose our Catholic viewpoint. Therefore, this session was an overall victory for those who stand for the family and the dignity of women.

During the two weeks of CSW59 we heard presentations concerning the effect of climate and poverty on women, of the increasingly exported harmful patriarchal practices such as female genital mutilation, of the effect on families of HIV, Ebola, malaria, and other diseases, of the plight of children born of women who were raped during war, of refugee women and their families, and of the difficulty women experience in securing stability in land ownership, food and education. We heard evidence of positive strides made as less developed countries resist the attempt of developed countries to force unacceptable practices such as abortion on them and we attended inspiring presentations such as that of a young woman who spoke against abortion to an audience of hundreds of young persons. We heard the testimony of women who have triumphed over natural disaster and endemic poverty in Haiti to establish businesses with a conscience and who have attained political power. We attended intergenerational dialogues and learned of practices regarding gender equality and aging. We saw designs being implemented for new safe cities and of practices being adopted by businesses to balance family life with increased productivity. We heard talks about countering cyber-violence against women

and children and of the economic empowerment of women. There was strong emphasis on meeting the needs of youth to guarantee a better world and to preserve the progress made for women and the girl child.

The main conclusion was that much has been done world-wide to improve the status of women in the last twenty years but that in no country have women achieved complete equality with men. Sadly, in some areas of the world, the status of women and the girl child have fallen back and work needs to continue to ensure the dignity of women; to reclaim, advance, and preserve their rightful place in the family structure, in business, in politics, and in society.

Our New York IR's, the Secretary General and Board Member from Cameroon were privileged to attend a special audience with Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations where we discussed the role of women in addressing world issues. He underlined for us that the root cause of poverty for women is the breakdown of the family structure and the abandonment of women with children whether in urban, rural, or war-torn settings.

Attending the CSW is always an exhilarating, educational, and draining experience. We are very grateful for the opportunity to represent WUCWO at these meetings and ever thankful for your prayers.