



## CSW Alliance Meeting

23 February 2016



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On 23 February 2016, the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) organised a Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Alliance meeting at Europe House. In anticipation of the upcoming CSW60 session at the United Nations Headquarters in New York beginning on 14 March 2016, this meeting was aimed at preparing the UK delegation for the various consultations and events that would take place in order to maximise participation in all possible areas. A combination of new and seasoned CSW attendees were present at the meeting, and this resulted in an insightful sharing of knowledge and experiences.

Zarin Hainsworth, Chair of NAWO, opened the meeting with a brief history of NAWO and the CSW Alliance, as well as the programme for the day. Seated at the front alongside Zarin were Pat Black, Soroptimist International Director of Advocacy, and Fatima Haase, Progressio Policy and Advocacy Assistant.

Pat Black, spoke about the events leading up to CSW60 and the outcome document relating the Agreed Conclusions. Pat emphasised its importance and its impact on future decision-making.

This year, a four-page draft of the outcome document was issued. The text group, experienced in looking at past agreements and resolutions made in previous documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), examined where the wording of the draft might have 'slipped backwards' in terms of the agreed language.



It was found that the draft did not contain agreements that had already been embedded in other documents on advancing gender equality.

Pat highlighted there was an introduction in the draft which focussed heavily on the priority theme of women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development, followed by content under various headings linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This followed a similar format to the SDGs process.

However, upon close inspection, it was found that the text was missing several key points. For example, Pat said that there was no mention of education in terms of women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive rights, nor civil society organisation (CSO) involvement in empowerment.

Pat went on to describe how, in response to the draft, Wendi Momen (Trustee and Treasurer of NAWO) with her colleagues in the Text Group had proposed alterations to the document which were put forward to the UK government. Pat explained this would enable the government to raise pertinent issues through its role as a conduit to the European delegation to CSW60.

The Text Group met with the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to discuss the draft. The GEO agreed that the initial document was weak with respect to the language. The suggestions for amendments to the wording were agreed.

Pat informed the meeting that a compilation document would be released on 26 February 2016. The new draft would take on board as many comments as possible to serve as the text for main negotiations before 9 March 2016. A copy of the comments on the initial draft can be made available to those interested, but this will eventually be replaced by the compilation document.

Pat concluded by saying that language in documents such as the outcome document is critical as there are strong nuances in language, and therefore care has to be taken in choosing the most appropriate words. Annette Lawson, former Chair of NAWO gave concrete examples of to show how the use of language in the text was important.

Annette remarked how it often seems petty why a particular punctuation mark or word choice in a text matters, and there is a big debate among feminist groups on this. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need to ensure that agreed language is used consistently throughout the documents.

Annette used the difference between ‘prostitution’ and ‘sex workers’ to illustrate why language is important. The United Nations (UN) has a primary interest in solving HIV/AIDS, and to the UN, ‘sex workers’ is seen as a more appropriate term because it appears to raise the status of these women, as though they are working by providing sex. From the feminist point of view, ‘prostitution’ is preferred because it is seen as a form of violence against women.



Annette mentioned that more women in prostitution suffer from violence than those in any other profession. She added that if women are selling their bodies, there must be a reason for it; no woman would do it willingly unless for survival. Prostitution is not acceptable and should be abolished—just as slavery was—because it is an

appalling means for people to survive. By using ‘prostitution’ instead of ‘sex workers’, it brings to the fore the main issue of human rights.

Annette further commented that the goals and outcomes when dealing with gender equality are specifically to do with women and girls’ advancement. Therefore, in text, it is imperative to explicitly mention ‘women and girls involved in prostitution’, not merely ‘sex workers’. She also said that other forms of phrasing for ‘prostitution’ could be acceptable, for example, ‘trafficked for sexual exploitation’, found in some texts.

In summary Annette said the arguments for changes to text in the Agreed Conclusions are made by lobbying the GEO for preferred language use.

Regarding the resolution on the Multi-Year Programme of Work for CSW in future years, Annette said that attempts have been made to identify the relationship between gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the UN. There is a debate about who should be responsible for SDG 5 (Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls) and what should be included in the resolution in the coming years.

Following Annette's presentation, Fatima spoke about the review theme for CSW60, which is the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. At every CSW, there is a priority theme and a review theme. From the consultations at CSW, an emerging issue would also be identified. Although the emerging issue for this year has not been determined yet, Fatima expects it to be related to violence against women and girls.



This is because this issue has been a priority theme at CSW twice, and being highly contentious, there has been no official document produced, and no Agreed Conclusions made on it.

Fatima ended her presentation by reminding the delegates to keep in mind sexual inequalities and use language that has been developed from previous agreements. This is to prevent governments from slipping back into old modes of thinking.

Before proceeding to the break and small group sessions, there was a short question-and-answer session.



Helen Dennis, Christian Aid Senior Advisor of Poverty and Inequality, highlighted the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul from 23–24 May 2016. Her concern was how the role women and girls can play in relief work following natural disasters, conflicts, and wars could be raised in the consultations to recognise the unique contributions they can provide in

humanitarian crises.

In response, Zarin mentioned that this was a new UN process which has a follow-up process, of which the documents produced in May would serve as the framework for action. Thus it is

necessary for representation from women's organisations to ensure that the language is gender-sensitive. Zarin stressed the need to have a voice for the voiceless women, and work for women need not be restricted to CSW; in fact, involvement in the World Humanitarian Summit would increase the strength of CSW as it ensures CSW is linked to other UN processes.

Zarin continued with a general presentation of the progress made with regard to the CSW Alliance. The Alliance Liaison Group had met with GEO twice and the members of the Group believe that the GEO are now voicing their view on the value of collaboration with the UKNGOCSW Alliance. It has become an institutional mechanism.

The Liaison Group is of the view that GEO sees the CSW Alliance as having international reach and significant advocacy power. The Alliance was urged to use existing UK parliamentary mechanisms to raise awareness of CSW and its themes throughout the year. This includes raising awareness among parliamentarians by asking them to table questions in parliament and asking questions of Ministers either written or oral about CSW, and using social media platforms and press releases.

It was noted that a large delegation of parliamentarians would be present at CSW including Rt Hon Baroness Norhover, Baroness Hodgson, Baroness Verma, Rt Hon Nicki Morgan MP, Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, Rt Hon Maria Miller MP, Jo Churchill MP, Gavin Shuker MP, Jess Philips MP and Ben Howlett MP. If any NGO would like to have a parliamentarian or government representative attend their events, it was essential that they provided Monika with details of their events. Zarin would then inform the parliamentarians and then put the NGOs in direct contact with interested parliamentarians.

Zarin provided further information on the arrangements for the delegates while at CSW60 in New York. Every morning at 9.00am, delegates would gather at the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) office 866 UN Plaza for a morning briefing. Zarin also noted that for security purposes within the building, the names of those entering the UN Plaza should be provided in advance to Monika Pindel.

It was pointed out, however, that there are daily UN Women meetings held from 8.30–9.30am, and it would be useful to attend those as well. The problem is the BIC office is open at 9.00am and the meetings are held in different buildings. Zarin highlighted the need for a solution to this logistic arrangement and welcomed any suggestions. One recommendation was to have representatives for UK NGOs attend the CSW NGO meeting and quickly share the details with the others at the BIC office later, as in previous years.



The meeting broke into small groups discussing working in Caucuses (with Fatima Hasse); Networking (with Margaret Clark); Planning (with Barbara Cleary); Commission for Social Development (CSocD) (with Pat Black); Text (with Marianne Haslegrave and Annette Lawson); and Media (with Jenny Vaughn). The small group session lasted about 45 minutes.

At the end of the session, representatives from each group shared key learning from the discussions.

The Planning Group had explored the process for obtaining passes for the UN. It was noted that this could take some time so a lot of patience was needed. It was also acknowledged that the offices managing the passes had on occasions in the past been open at the weekends. Those arriving at the weekend should check as it would save time during the week. The importance of organising your programme – what you want to do was critical to ensure time is used wisely. It was important to get balance between not over planning and allowing some space for spontaneity – not to be over ambitious and allow time to travel between venues. The group also discussed the benefits of attending the consultation NGO day on the first Sunday particularly if it is the first visit to CSW.



The Networking group noted this as a key to success. From their discussion, they said that networking is necessary because people have different strengths, and so by connecting with others, lobbying efforts can become more effective. When there is collective interest, it is easy to establish a common need and open

doors to opportunities. Networking can happen both vertically and horizontally. One approach to networking is to plan strategically and target the people to network. It is useful to search for key people and the areas they work in, then identify who to target to meet, perhaps at social events. One way to network is to pay attention to body language, listen and empathise and take an interest before exchanging contact details. After the initial meeting decide how to continue and build the relationship. There was also a suggestion to create a LinkedIn CSO group for networking purposes.

The CSocD group explained that it is a functional commission under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. It is not of the same status as other commissions such as CSW but has its own group of NGOs. On the subject of the SDGs, it was noted that although the United Nations Development Programme developed them, its role is data gathering from relevant countries, not monitoring. The indicators for the SDGs will be announced in March.

The Caucuses Group shared information about how the caucuses operate. During the CSW, regional caucuses meet in order to discuss thematic and regional issues as well as political positioning and for information exchange. These meetings are open to all participants who are registered to attend the CSW. CSW caucuses are political spaces where lobbying and

advocacy happens. Advocacy centres mostly on the draft Agreed Conclusions (sometimes referred to as the Outcomes document). NGOs can work on this document through Caucuses, individually or in self-organised informal groups.

Regional caucuses meetings are usually scheduled into the CSW-NGO programme and are important because they highlight the social and political context experienced by women in those regions. They can also act as a conduit to incorporate women who are unable to travel to New York. Most importantly, working via the caucuses represents an avenue for grassroots organisations to share their expertise, knowledge and challenges.

The Media Group presented ways to use the media effectively. Jenny Vaughn, Progressio Campaigns Officer, shared the CSW media guide. She emphasised that it was important to take ownership of media efforts in the social media, through the use of hashtags and tweets. Offline media such as press releases were equally useful. She mentioned that there was a must-read section in the guide.



Jenny also encouraged those that did not already have a social media account to start one so that while they are at CSW60, they could post things with the #cswalliance hashtag to create buzz around CSW.

The Text Group, shared the importance of ensuring agreed language is retained in all documents to be able to hold governments accountable for their

actions. The process of making amendments is a difficult one—influencing the change of just one word or phrase can be a significant achievement in itself. When suggesting amendments to text, it is essential to make references to previous agreements in past documents as this upholds the agreed language used. Weak words should be replaced by stronger ones so that they lend greater clarity, and where possible, word choices should be generic to ensure inclusivity and the widest coverage.

During the question-and-answer session, there was a question on involvement in the caucuses. It was shared that the North America/Europe Caucus operates under a different process compared to other caucuses in that it has voluntary leadership. Zarin advised the delegates to enter a caucus in a spirit of learning and sharing by interacting accordingly and being sensitive to using that space. She added that in the past there had been thematic caucuses centred on particular themes, but since they are facilitated in various ways, efficacy depends on the style of facilitation. Nonetheless, anyone can assist in how the group works and help make it more effective.

The issue of women and girls in countries in conflict who are raped was brought up. Neda Salmanpour, a NAWO Trustee, stressed that there was no mechanism for dealing with such cases of rape, and thus there is a need to speak for the voiceless women. Zarin responded to this by saying that the UK government is very careful about what resolutions it puts up, but it

was agreed that Neda, Margaret Owen and Professor Jackie Jones of the Wales Assembly of Women, draft a potential resolution that might be used to gather support.

Before closing the meeting, Zarin shared some thoughts on CSW. It is a formal event for Government delegations and whilst NGOs have the right to be there, this right needs to be used responsibly. It is important that all delegates work together and be mindful of each other, use the space well to advocate and lobby bearing in mind the strengths and limitations of CSW. It was agreed that, bearing in mind situations in previous years, details of next-of-kin should be provided in the event of an emergency. It was suggested that good health insurance was also useful.

Delegates to CSW were reminded to email [csw-alliance@nawo.org.uk](mailto:csw-alliance@nawo.org.uk) if they would be attending a caucus and for there information on their events at CSW.

On behalf of NAWO, we would like to thank everyone involved in the preparation and delivery of this event.

