

The 58th Commission on the Status of Women – March 10-21, 2014

Priority Theme:

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. The Agreed Conclusions (E/CN.6/2014/L.7) are available here:

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/L.7

NAWO was a considerable presence at CSW this year with more young women (and a few young men) participating as part of the Youth Caucus, and our accreditations at maximum all round. We also put on many side events - either under NAWO's name or in partnership with others –

NAWO members, UKJCW members and the UK NGO CSW Alliance members. The Alliance co-chairs – Annette Lawson and Zarin Hainsworth - worked with Jan Grasty (UN Women) and Jessica Woodroffe, Heather Barclay, Helen Denis and others from the GAD Network to act as 'conduits' for the Government's official delegation - especially during the second week when text work is the focus.

This year when the **Millennium Development Goals** which end next year were reviewed, with an eye to the new Post-2015 Framework being developed, some of the main concerns that had already been among the most difficult to resolve last year when the main theme was VAWG, were repeated. The tensions between conservative and more progressive states had to be resolved on issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights and services, including on legal and safe abortion; and the attempt to get sexual orientation and gender identity into the text; the demand for 'sovereignty' to determine what aspects of the Agreed Conclusions should be implemented; and the difficult issue of 'the family' rather than 'families in their diversity'.

This year, as last, **CSW went yet again to the wire to get Agreed Conclusions** - the final text was not agreed until the small hours of Saturday March 22nd. A few stalwarts among UK NGOs were there at the end, supporting and pushing for the best possible outcome but understanding from the regular updates from our negotiators, what was likely and what not.. There are preferences but no real distinction on bottom lines at CSW between the Government and UK NGOs which means a strong bond has been built and working together is a pleasure.

Meanwhile, a great deal of work has been taking place around the globe on what the next set of goals – **the Post-2015 Global Framework** - should be. See the CSW Alliance priorities paper available on the NAWO web site: <http://www.nawo.org.uk/csw/csw-alliance/csw-alliance-documents/>

We, ourselves, had some very clear goals – especially for **a transformative stand-alone gender equality goal with a strong anti-VAWG element and good mainstreaming of gender through-out the whole agenda**. And most NGOs wanted this too; some were more focused on sustainable development and poverty eradication, perhaps without making the powerful links always with the need to address gender inequality in order to meet those goals. While our own Government and the EU as a whole were similarly committed, other governments were, alas, less aligned, especially on the primary need for gender equality based on a human rights framework. Some sought a stand-alone goal on the family and no mention of gender.

Sticking points bring different interests together and alienate others and some very strange alliances are formed – some based on geography, others on religious grounds, some to make political points and continue battles that are ongoing and relevant in other contexts, and the focus is women – our bodies, our desire and right to freedom from unjust control and violence, power to make decisions and so forth. These were prominent battle grounds:

“Sovereignty”. What is the point of seeking a global agreement that then lets everyone off the hook by saying, if you don’t like this or that because it is not in line with your religious faith, culture or background, then you won’t fulfill it? The EU as a block, draws a red line under this one and won – no sovereignty buy-out.

“Family”. How can anyone be against the family? Of course no-one is, but the word is shorthand disguise for ‘not LGBT, not single mothers, not unmarried people’ etc. etc. In the end the word, ‘family’ is used rather than ‘families’ but the paragraphs still focus on gender equality. And the overall document recognize the link between gender equality, women’s rights and empowerment

SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and services. There is a strong paragraph (19 i) including detailed listing of what needs to be provided and a reminder of violence. But no language on ‘SOGI’ – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity – leaving out many and leaving rampant homophobia without protection for this group in the Agreed Conclusions.

Another group that is not mentioned in these agreed conclusions is women in prostitution. This is the result of a deep divide between not only governments but NGOs: ‘Prostitution’ v. ‘sex work’ in the context of a wider battle on sexual, and reproductive rights is a battle between those who think women’s human right to sexual and reproductive health and freedoms includes a right to be involved in prostitution and, indeed, in any aspect of the global sex industry because it is ‘work like any other’, and those who see this ‘work’ as a form of violence against women, and an exemplar and driver of gender inequality, providing, at its most basic extreme, for men’s desires at the expense of women.

All EU states, and most others around the globe, are signed up to ‘no going back’ on Beijing language. In that amazingly progressive document and in CEDAW, the text addresses the needs of women involved in ‘prostitution’. This battle means neither side ‘wins’ and the word, prostitution, is eradicated from the final CSW text, so nothing is said to protect any woman so involved despite many being among the poorest and most vulnerable everywhere.

Resources. This issue divides North from South: the North is wary of a document committing governments to resourcing development in ways they consider they either do not wish, cannot or will not be able to maintain while the South seeks urgently to ensure it has the best opportunities for real development. The North seeks commitments from the South on monitoring, evaluation and absence of corruption.

But we can celebrate that we do have a CSW58 agreed document with much that is needed – including the stand-alone gender goal in the post 2015 framework - on which we can lobby to have the commitments implemented. Next year is Beijing+20. And the new Framework for Post-2015 will be finalised. Linked with other powerful international agreements such as CEDAW, RIO, other human rights treaties and the BFPA, CSW’s Agreed Conclusions can be used by us to make a difference now; and especially next year.

Annette Lawson