



Priority theme: 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.'

Dates: 13 to 24 March 2017

PREAMBLE

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), established in 1946, organizes an annual two week programme of activities at the United Nations to review the progress made by governments, NGOs, faith-based organisations, on gender equality and women's empowerment; formulate policies and set global standards for women.

This year's theme: 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work' is based on the premise that women's contribution to the economy is not recognized and counts as unpaid work. Women in the workforce are discriminated against by way of low wages, barriers to progression and recruitment, harassment, unfair dismissals which impedes the woman's full participation and realization of her full potential in the workplace.

Faith-based organisations such as: Ecumenical women which comprises- Salvation Army, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW), Anglican Communion, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), the Lutherans to name a few, participated in the annual women's meetings through their daily worship services at the Church Center and side events.

ORIENTATION - Day 1 (13th March 2017)

Ecumenical Women organized an Orientation Session for its members at the Church Center. The Registration and breakfast was held on the 2nd Floor whilst the opening worship was conducted at the Chapel. The Ecumenical worship Theme and Scripture: 'The Power of Women's Work'...."This is the work of God that you believe..." John 6:29. 'Women who worked and believed in their work: continuing the Legacy'

Monday 13th March 2017, the Worship service was conducted by the Lutherans. Their theme and supporting scripture was- Esther. Esther 4: 16 (possible portions).

Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka- Under Secretary- General and Executive Director of UN Women gave a powerful presentation on this year's theme. She reminded delegates of the conclusions in 2013 to end

impunity and prejudice against women; also that was reaffirmed in 2015 in Beijing and in 2016 the SDGs were adopted. However, “ implementation is the problem and the gains achieved are being lost. The erosion/pullback of the problem is enormous and frightening.” She continued, “we need to broaden the community, realize the fight we have in hand and the role we have to play- as ecumenical women are part of this.”

Dr. Phumzile talked about the CARE Economy- which entailed creating a safe space for women to leave children and go to work; create conditions for women at the workplace /for men to bear parental burden and help their women take care of the child.

She also dilated on the FAMILY- what is the definition of FAMILY, what does FAMILY stand for? She posed the following questions- “Is FAMILY Mum and Dad? Dad and Dad? Mum and Mum?” She called for orientation on the different types of lifestyle and stated we should not discriminate against them. “We are all made in the image of God”. Dr. Phumzile concluded by recognizing that 80% of women in Africa work outside the home, in the informal sector- selling in markets, street corners etc.

A panel discussion followed on the Priority theme: Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. The Panelists were- representatives from: UN Women, ILO and the Costa Rica Lutheran Church. The first panelist (UN WOMEN) stated- “the feminist struggle for gender equality is not just women’s equality but the strongest struggle for all peoples”. She said ADAM was Hebrew for Earthling, and that God created man and woman in His image. She asked – “Is the Holy Spirit lesser than the Trinity?” To which she responded- “No”. The Holy Spirit is the HELPER and the Woman is the HELP MATE. SDG8 she pointed out, empowers all women and girls. Decent work can promote human dignity and cited the example of the role of women in the implementation of UN1235.

According to her, violence against women is the authority and legacy [of men] over women’s body; violence against women’s work is the authority and legacy over women’s labour. “Faith upholds culture and Faith can also provide vision and leadership for communities to follow”. “Why are we harsh on the poorest of the poor?- Why do the police take women’s wares on the street corners and throw them away destroying the woman’s capital?” She concluded by saying that the clause- Equal Pay is the biggest robber in history and needs to be fought against because of stereotypes- beliefs, norms etc. which are entrenched in these clauses.

The new changing world of work, the informality of work which includes migrant workers. New technology and digitization classifies the way work is and thus excludes people from the new work space due to lack of IT skills. This pushes women back down the economic order creating a pressure down as race and class intercedes. It needs careful redistribution of care work and occupational segregation. A challenge was posed to faith-based organisations: how can we change the norms around in terms of making sure the chances are sustainable; how can we look at and value work?

The ILO representative talked on equal pay for equal work. He cited violence in the work place and at home, also emphasizing on the Care economy. He said labour provisions are now in trade agreements, and that they are working towards eliminating forced labour, trafficking and gender equality. He pointed out that there was a “Closed Bubble- what can one person do? What can we do?”[We need]” collective bargaining to advocate for women”.

Questions and answers followed and the concluding question was- 'How are we going to demand these go into the Agenda?'

Official Opening of CSW 61 at the United Nations

The Chairman performed the official opening of CSW 61 at 10.09 am. He called for Agenda item 1- Working Group on Communications -and its elected members were endorsed. The Provisional Agenda was also endorsed.

In his opening remarks, the Chairman reminded delegates of the theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work and invited the Secretary General to give his address.

The Secretary General gave appreciation to all delegates for attending CSW despite various setbacks. He stated that, "in a male dominated world the empowerment of women must be a priority". He highlighted the weapon of physical and psychological warfare on women such as sexual abuse, forced marriages, FGM, sex slaves and said that UN will support [women] in every step of the way. He called on men to stand up for women's empowerment and emphasized the need for a cultural shift. He pointed out that competent men and women are needed in our organisations and that it is not about equality but Results.

The President of ECOSOC Council, the Permanent Representative to Zimbabwe in his address focused on SDGs 1,2,3,5,9, 14.

The President of the 77th Session of the General Assembly, talked about the UN Charter (We the peoples of UN...). He made reference to Paragraph 20 of the Agenda and pointed out SGD 5- target 5 in which he sees his faith in women's equality restored.

Under Secretary General, Phumzile , who is also the Executive Director of UN Women said that 750 young women were engaged in activities at CSW (Saturday and Sunday) and would be attending the Sessions in order to get a holistic view of what goes on. She informed delegates that 8,600 registrations were received for CSW 61. The meeting would "review progress on women and girls and would be the barometer to measure the achievement of the SDGs"; and would inform "how lessons from MDGs are reflecting on the SDGs. In this regard, 35 countries have already submitted country reports".

The Chairperson of CEDAW pointed out that the "MDGs bypassed the most marginalized – women, therefore it is important that the SDGs are grounded in the rights and empowerment of women".

Various speakers spoke on the theme- The Chairperson, Committee on violence against women, Director General of ILO (statement read); the Youth Representatives at CSW spoke on the activities of the 61 Youth Forum.

Day 2- 14 March 2017-[Shut down of UN and Church Center due to blizzard]

Day 3- 15 March 2017

Daily Worship at the Church Center conducted by the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women. Our theme was: Mary and Martha: a story of two sisters. Luke 10: 38-42. The worship service was coordinated by Dr. Brenda Smith who introduced the theme and set the scene for the service. A skit was presented, reflection was delivered, followed by singing and prayers said by Rev Dionne.

This was followed by a panel on Empowering women through labour rights. It took the pattern of a Panel with each panelist telling their story.

The Cambodian story: working for Nike. Lady worked in a cardboard factory but later started organizing women to stand up for their rights because of an incident at work where a woman died without any compensation paid out to her family. She organized women for change and became a Union leader, however charges were pressed against her by over 500 employers.

The Native American story: a rape survivor from the Navaho tribe in New Mexico, Arizona. She opposed toxic waste from the mining companies which led to environmental mess when the mining companies shut down. Due to loss of jobs the families struggled to survive. There were several one-parent families and people needed support and self-esteem, as people lived far from each other, but had no close contact unless they came to the small town where she lived. She advocated for more women on the Tribal Council.

The Mozambique story: women and girls are regarded as second class citizens and pulled off the streets – they are called illegal traders. Early marriages (48%) which affects the girl child are of economic and cultural benefits to the parents. She is involved in raising the awareness of parents on Family Law and Human Rights issues; also through adult literacy and income generating projects.

Zimbabwe story: a call to action was undertaken. It was discovered that equal was only 23% of the global pay gap. The Labour laws and lack of equal opportunities prevailed. IT is taking over women's economic employment in the changing world of work. Women need to be more marketable and have skills and competencies.

The Kenyan story/ Florrie's story: she was brought up by her dad. Her mother left with her baby sister, they were two girls. Her dad remarried and had five daughters. This was a problem as a boy was needed by the dad. He married another wife and had five boys with her. Later, Florrie stayed with her mother in another town, but sometimes stayed with her dad as well. She got married and had four boys but one died. She did not have a girl child. Her husband also died, and she felt she did not have the rights other women had. Her husband brought home everything, she did not go to the market or shops- he was the one controlling the money. After he died she did not have any knowledge of doing anything. She had to send for her children's housemaid. She met a United Missionary who reached out to women like her and now she is going back to school. She is embarked on a community development course at the college with a scholarship from the United Methodist. She has formed a support group- OPERATION HOPE.

Question and Answer session

- Q. 1. The importance of education is different in the African context. How is the Pay gap impacted by the access to education?
- A. "In the Zimbabwean context, there are policies and Labour Laws - government supports these Labour Laws- however implementation is the problem. The Pay gap is as a result of the education policies".
- " Government is responsible for women's education- literacy and numeracy which includes health and economic empowerment. ICT has been introduced in the curriculum from infancy

across the board”.

"Education is important in homes first then schools then the formal school system. Children need to know their culture, value systems and respect morals from parents”.

Q 2. How do you secure equal pay for Cambodian women at the UN or in their own country?

A. “Need to increase the Minimum Wage. Organised a mass demonstration and pushed for the Minimum wage to be increased by 45 every 5 years. After that demonstration, a review of wages is now done annually, and wages have increased by \$20.

In Cambodia, migrant domestic workers are in isolation and need to be organized. I formed a Union for them and out of the 500 contacted, 200 became members. However only 15 remained in membership. Education is important to get to know their root problems and manage their expectations. Joining the movement cannot bring immediate solutions. You need to get them to know their power, they need to speak out for themselves. You need to empower them as they are the solution”.

Comment: “Early marriage is on the increase in Mozambique despite the Family Law. The cultural norms still exist in the rural areas”.

Ecumenical Women were assembled to participate in a Silent Walk to eliminate GBV- Gender-based Violence at 1pm, from the Church Center, however due to the severe weather conditions, the walk was cancelled but we assembled outside the Church center (about 30-45 mins.) facing the UN building. Rev Dionne led the women and briefly talked about the plight of women worldwide and that we were standing in solidarity with them.

Day 4 16 March 2017

Daily worship at the Church center was led by the Anglican and Episcopal communities. Their theme was Lydia, taken from Acts 16. Lydia the industrious woman who traded in purple fabrics, who believed in the Lord and accepted baptism together with her household. The same woman who opened her house to other Christians as a meeting place and who hosted Paul and Silas when they were freed from prison.

Advocacy Dinners organized by Ecumenical Women at the Church Center – 2nd Floor- brought together numerous peoples from various faiths and background to meet, socialize, network and learn from each other. Members of the organizing team spoke on faith- based Advocacy, and gave brief presentations on their experiences and stories, real stories of inequality, human right violations, poverty etc. experienced or witnessed. Critical areas of concern for women were highlighted, and delegates encouraged to approach their government’s missions at the UN, or with their governments back home.

In Conclusion, my attendance at CSW61, though short, has been of immense benefit to me, especially the use of WORDS. There is power in what we say and discuss which end up as recommendations, resolutions, press releases, reports and even legal conventions. In Mark 4: 14- we are told that “the sower sows the word” and in Mark 4: 20- “but there are some with whom the seed is sown on good soil; they accept the word when they hear it, and they bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold”. (RSV).

We have all been tasked to go back and make our voices heard, not to be shy but bold as governments need to hear the religious and moral perspectives.

Matilda Johnson

World Vice-President