



VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Report of the UN Representative, **Brenda L. Smith**, to the PRESIDENT, MRS. ALISON JUDD, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, AND MEMBERS OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

I am, indeed, grateful for the opportunity to serve as the main representative for the WFMUCW to the United Nations, which has given me the opportunity and pleasure to learn more about the significant work of the United Nations and to represent, with so much pride, our organization that has been recognized by the UN for working diligently to support and encourage the work of the United Nations.

We had some twenty delegates on hand to represent WFMUCW. The majority of those registered included many from Methodism – AME ZION, AME, who will also provide a brief report to the World President. It is important to note here that Joan Capel and I were very involved in the planning of Orientation with Ecumenical Women for CSW 65, which gave us an opportunity to explore the theme and the worship experience in which all would have the opportunity to participate as well as to review, together, the theme of our worship services, decide which day we would be in charge of the worship as well as meet and plan with other women. In my opinion, this was perhaps the best year that I have experienced since 2006 as far as the orientation and worship services are concerned. I must attest that, although I had faith, I was very concerned that it would be very difficult trying to navigate from workshop to workshop. Some delegates who were computer literate, however, boasted of not having difficulty navigating from workshop to workshop.

I must note here, that Reverend Dionne Boissiere did a masterful job in working with and leading her team, and hired Brother Darin Kent, one of my former students who resides in South Carolina, to serve as our technician, which ensured that our orientation and worship services were flawless. Albeit virtual, God's presence filled the atmosphere! We express our appreciation to Rev. Boissiere for her guidance, love and for helping us to realize, first-hand, that God's love is constant even in the midst of difficulties. In my mind's eye, I immediately

thought about 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV) which states: “But he said to me. ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Unlike previous years, when I had the opportunity to sit in one of the main conference rooms, side by side, with some 7- to 8000 women from the world over, this year the Pandemic prevented us from meeting face-to-face. However, albeit virtually, as we knew that it was for our own safety and good, from the comforts of our homes, we were still afforded the opportunity to address and discuss the theme of CSW 65, which was **“Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”** and we were afforded the opportunity to attend many sessions. In order to gain a clear and more precise understanding of what was going on, one would have to sit through a full session! Since pre-registration for each workshop was a prerequisite, you could not skip from workshop to workshop. Well in advance of March 15th, prior to choosing a workshop, each delegate had the privilege of reviewing the workshops and webinars that would be offered March 15-25.

In 2019, I took one of the wonderful fliers that our World Vice President, Mrs. Matilda Johnson, prepared, and which our World President, Mrs. Alison Judd, approved which highlighted the 17 SDG’s and shared the work of all of our Areas in relation to what the SDGs would be addressed throughout the Areas, in general, and our world organization, in particular. I am so proud of our organization because our areas do have both a Global and local Vision in order to address the needs of all women, regardless of their condition in life.

Although they could not fly to New York to attend CSW 65 in person, our World Secretary, Mrs. Mataiva Robertson, introduced our distinguished World President who brought a wonderful, soul stirring message on Wednesday, March 17th, during which time the WFMUCW was in charge of the Ecumenical worship service, held during the two weeks and sponsored by Ecumenical Women at the UN.

Our Organization, as in previous years, joined with other Ecumenical groups in the development of the one-week worship services and we were significantly involved in the one-week orientation program, which we also held virtually. Without equivocation, I must admit that this Pandemic did not stop us from joining with our sisters to make a difference, as we, the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, are known for doing.

I had the opportunity to attend an interactive dialogue on the priority theme...“Eliminating Violence against women in public life,” and was delighted to share that some of our members had the opportunity to attend the meeting in Beijing twenty-six years ago. The Beijing Platform for Action and the agreed conclusions that each delegate would receive at the conclusion of CSW 65 would be discussed.

I am very delighted to share that last year, UN Women requested that each organization that had representatives in Beijing complete seven questions regarding the representatives’

experience in Beijing and how the “Beijing Platform for Action (directly) influenced the work/and or structure of our organization? I am certainly grateful to Mrs. Emmylou John for completing the seven questions because it demonstrated that our 9 geographical areas of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women are working to ensure that the needs of our members and their communities are being addressed. (Document attached)*. A copy of this document was forwarded to UN Women, as requested.

Thank you, Madam World President, Emmylou, Becky and Mataiva for forwarding this completed document for me to share with Ecumenical Women and UN Women. This document is outstanding and speaks to what our organization has done and is doing since Beijing +25. It was reiterated or reinforced several times that the United Nations and the Beijing Platform for Action has made women’s equality one of its founding principles. As a matter of fact, the United Nations Charter, signed in 1945 by 156 men and women, was the first international agreement to recognize the equal rights of men and women. It was in 1975, that the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW.). Unfortunately, very few countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which is, indeed, a challenge for all organizations to accept. Organizational representatives were charged with the responsibility of “rekindling the spirit” of the Beijing Conference. It is well worth noting that the General Assembly convened governments together at its twenty-third special session in June, 2000 as well as again in 2015, for the express purpose of reviewing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It was at this special session, we learned that governments agreed on further actions to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action and to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace were fully realized.

As I was reviewing the various topics, I came across an exciting “live” session which I love to attend each year as it gives me the opportunity to hear the welcome statements from the Chair of Commission on the Status of Women; the UN Secretary General, His Excellency Antonio Guterres; the youth leader, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. This session was very valuable, for it discussed at length, the priority theme...”Eliminating Violence against women in public life.”

According to Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, “no country has achieved equality for women and girls, and significant levels of inequality between women and men persists.” Although not surprised, it was also shared at this session that “critical areas of insufficient progress include access to decent work and closing the gender pay gap; rebalancing of the workload; ending violence against women; reducing maternal mortality and realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights; and participation in power and decision-making at all levels.”

Without equivocation, I am very delighted to share that the virtual experience gave me an opportunity to review sessions that had been pre-recorded as well. Although I had good intentions of attending more workshops than I attended, many sessions were held in late evenings that were sponsored by various organizations.

If I am to be truthful and straight-forward, and I will, there were so many workshops held that I wanted to attend; however, the “zoom” experience is rather tiring. I am, however, thankful to God that we had this platform. It worked marvelously for our worship services and orientation.

I also had the opportunity to attend the session titled, Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This session was of great interest and was recorded. Topics included, History, Human Rights and the Power of One; A Discussion of the Permanent Memorial to Honor the Victims of Slavery at the United Nations; and the History of the design of the memorial to honor the victims of slavery located at the United Nations. For more information, visit Twitter @rememberslavery; Facebook.

www.facebook.com/rememberslavery; Website
www.un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday/

Unfortunately, unlike other years, we were unable to visit the memorial designed by the architect Mr. Rodney Leon this year due to the Pandemic. However, for those who might be interested in viewing it, please use the UN link above.

While there are other workshops that I attended, it is expected that the Delegates will report on those that they attended, which will give all an idea of the significance of this meeting, albeit virtual.

The final workshop that I attended was sponsored by Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., an organization founded on November 12, 1922, at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. This organization has more than 500 chapters in the United States, Bahamas, Bermuda, Canada, Germany, Korea, and U.S. Virgin Islands. The aim of this organization is to enhance the quality of life within the community through public service, leadership development, and education of youth. The organization also addresses concerns that impact society educationally, civically, and economically.

On Thursday, March 18, 2021, this organization and the International Black Women’s Public Policy Institute hosted a virtual panel discussion titled, “Promoting the Safety and Security of Women of African Descent”. The panel convened experts and world leaders to speak on the exploitation of Black women and girls in the underground Human trafficking world, and other forms of violence. The panelists were as follows: Rasheeda S. Liberty, the International President of the Organization; Barbara Perkins President and CEO, the Honorable Paula Cox, Former Premier of Bermuda; Dr. Deirdre Cooper Owens; historian and professor at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Campus, Michellene Davis, Health Equity Strategist/President & CEO of M.D., Clarida Drew, LLC; Ouleye Ndoeye, human rights activist; and Teresa Stafford, Chief Programs Officer, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.

The presenters were extremely knowledgeable and shared their experience with so many. It was revealed that “In the United States, there are more than 600,000 to 800,000 people being trafficked annually across international borders and 40% percent of sex trafficking victims are

Black women and girls. The panelists discussed the vulnerabilities of Black female trafficking victims, gaps in services, public policy, and the historical context of the oversexualization of Black females dating back to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. These elements coupled with poverty, racism, and a wide array of social determinants feed into the vicious cycle of human trafficking.

International leaders and activists promoted strategies for grassroots action to inform, prevent, and address violence against women including intimate partner-based violence, physical and mental abuse.

The President revealed that this Sorority is proud to be a part of such powerful work to amplify the importance of protecting women and youth for nearly 100 years. It was noted that the vision of the International Black Women's Public Policy Institute is to connect and advocate for Black Women globally through acts of kindness and public policy. The mission of the organization is to be the convener of hearings and discussions that evaluate the impact of current public policies, and to advocate for new policies and legislative remedies that address major threats to the well-being of Black Women, their families and their communities. They also noted that we can learn more about their organization and their work at <http://www.sgrho1922.org>.

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