



After the disappointment of the cancellation of CSW64 last year it was my pleasure to take the opportunity to engage with CSW65 online in 2021. I registered for a number of online webinars and took copious notes. Here are some of the highlights I shall treasure:

The Orientation day organised by Ecumenical Women was introduced by the dynamic Rev Dionne Boissiere and Phumzile Mlambo –Ngcuka UN Women Executive Director welcoming us and speaker Lopa Banarjee.

Hearing the voices of women reminded us that women have suffered greatly through the pandemic – loss of income and jobs, risking infection as carers on the front line, suffering increased domestic violence.

25 years after the Beijing declaration, only 48 out of 135 countries have taken steps to end Gender-Based Violence. Men are resisting shared leadership. The proportion of women in parliament has doubled but is still only a quarter. 119 countries have never had a woman in political leadership.

A Call to respond: to encourage partnerships and collaboration, mobilise for political action, support and strengthen young activists, and remember that worship is a form of advocacy.

In the closing worship, The Lord's Prayer was spoken in turn in different languages, then each continued reciting as they walked around the table laden with global items.

Ecumenical Women morning prayers Theme: Judges 4: 9 'We will go together; to the glory of God'. I enjoyed sharing, on 17 March with other World Federation women, using the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. I also greatly appreciated the worship led by women of other denominations during these daily services. On 25 March, the International Day of Remembrance for Victims of Slavery and Trafficking, the morning worship was led by members of WCC introduced by Nicqi Ashwood with items from the CSW choir. Rev Sonia Hinds from Barbados who spoke on the story of Hagar Genesis 16 'You are the God who sees me. I have now seen the one who sees me!' God sees the vulnerable in our society. In so many countries, women are still vulnerable to attack. They need to know that God sees them. God has no eyes but ours. We must galvanise our churches to give out messages of hope.

Virtual Town hall meeting Secretary General and Women's Civil Society 16 March

UN Women exec director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

General Secretary Antonio Guterres called us to 'Address gender –based violence (GBV) and increase women's leadership to achieve gender equality'.

Quotes from opening remarks: 'Gender equality is a question of power. We still live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture. A few women leaders are not enough. It is when we have many women in power that we transform power itself.'

‘Women’s full representation and leadership are prerequisites for making the best use of all our resources. Women have proven this once again during the pandemic.’

Questions from participants raised issues of including younger women; concern for LGBTQ older women; poverty and child marriage; holding nations to account regarding GBV and gender equality; punishment for violations of human rights; primary health care, child marriage and universal health care. Women in leadership meets a culture of resistance. How can we ensure women thrive and make a positive impact? The after-shocks of colonisation still resist change. We need to de-colonialise society.

The Sec .Gen. concluded (my paraphrase): The central question is POWER in political, private, economic and family levels. Only 22 countries have women leaders; less than 25% parliamentarians are women. We need to mobilise MEN till they understand parity is good for society. He has worked for parity in UN and has achieved it. He will ensure GBV is added to the UN agenda each year.

He ended his closing remarks with the call to SEIZE POWER!

I also attended:

- **Migration and human trafficking**

Carmille Schmoll had interviewed many women arriving in Europe from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Motivations – poverty, war, violence, oppressive regimes, forced marriage, FGM, GBV always present.

Some formed relationships with others on the way, and experienced violence on the route. Some were reluctant, others prepared, to tell the stories of horrific violence and the stigma of rape/multiple rape/travelling pregnant. Crossing of Mediterranean meant hunger, fear, cold, wind, risk for women particularly vulnerable at sea. Arrival in Europe is a disappointment to many. Insufficient consideration of their trauma and need for help with reproductive health and psychological trauma. Need to recognise violence experienced EN ROUTE as well as in country of origin.

All they want is to settle down, learn local language, and build relationships. They lack official documents and freedom to travel. We must trust them.

- **PAN Africa Women of Faith Re-imagining the future**

Rev Karen Georgia Thompson Jeremiah 29:10-14

Lent reflection of journey to the Cross and resurrection. Pandemic of Covid and GBV and racism, What are we asking for when we return to normal? A space that is post-covid, working differently using virtual spaces. Those in exile wanted to go back home and be released from oppression. We are called to be healers, prophetic witnesses to the grace of God. **How?**

Nicqi Ashwood (A TiB Ambassador with WCC) advocated discipleship, mentoring and succession planning, with new, more effective means of collaboration. Others urged hospitality – to all people at all times so that churches become safe spaces for stateless people. Listen with an open ear and deep understanding and engage and pick up on cues. Ask more than once ‘Are you ok?’ As mentors, see not just limitations but enable women to be all they can be, resurrection power. Is my church a safe space, open enough for such women to walk in?

- **21st Century reset: Human development , Volunteering and the New Social Contract**

How to promote inclusive dialogue between Volunteers and Human Development programmes. Role of volunteering can make a decisive contribution. Volunteers are implementing SDG actions but not always involved in state policy decisions. 80% global population think it is important to protect the planet but only 50 % want to make changes to their behaviour.

Volunteers act as agents for change, offering high potential for society –wide change.