

# Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

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## The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

### Overview

Every year, thousands of members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—both faith-based and not—gather during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW). Groups exert tremendous amounts of energy to influence commission outcome documents, and to enforce the resolutions and conventions on which UN member states have agreed. These advocates work to impact political processes, to tell their stories, and to share their lives.

### Background\*

The United Nations (UN), chartered in 1945, affirms in its preamble “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.” During the first UN meeting, a subcommission on the status of women was created under the Commission on Human Rights, now the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and soon after became a full-fledged commission. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has met annually since its founding to ensure women’s equality and promote women’s rights. Since the beginning, CSW has had a close relationship with NGOs, such as Presbyterian Women, Inc. Many NGO contributions have been incorporated into CSW’s agreed conclusions and resolutions.

In 2006, the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT/PW) sent representatives to the 50th session of CSW. On recommendation from the representatives, the CCT began an effort to continue and to increase PW presence at CSW meetings, with the goal of adding our strong voice to those of other NGOs advocating for justice for girls and women.

The CCT Justice and Peace Committee calls on all Presbyterian women to consider participating in the annual CSW meeting. PW has advocated for the justice work of the United Nations since the UN’s founding, when equality for women with men was claimed. By joining the PW-NGO effort, members of PW can strengthen efforts to make equality a reality for women everywhere.



### Personal Reflections from UN CSW 55

*What did Presbyterian women learn during the 55th UN Commission on the Status of Women?*

“That inequality, violence and slavery of girls and women is indeed global. Many facets of women’s issues have changed over time—some are better or are no longer an issue at all—but there are now other violations of our human rights that are accompanied by unimaginable acts of violence around the world.”

“The way others in the world are making transformative changes. It confirmed my belief that we have a say in what the world does through CSW and its agreed conclusions.”

“I learned about the ways that NGO groups can advocate to the member states through the office of Presbyterian Ministry at the UN, about UN policy.”

“Advocacy requires persistence, working as a coalition, and partnering with other like-minded groups. There still is much work needed to address the issues of rural women, women’s mental health, and inclusive language in schools, workplaces and religious institutions.”

## CSW 55: Education, Job Training, Science and Technology

This year, the CSW theme was “access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work.” Education and training are included in the 12 critical areas of concern of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action that resulted from the Fourth World Conference on Women (for more information, visit [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform)). Each year a previous year’s theme is chosen for “review” to evaluate progress made (or not made) in that specific area. The review theme for CSW 55 is “the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.”

### How Do Presbyterians Relate?

Presbyterian Women and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participate in the UN CSW through the PC(USA)’s office of Presbyterian Ministry at the UN (PMUN). According to the PC(USA) website, “the Presbyterian UN Office is one way in which the church responds to Christ’s call to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free.” For more information, visit <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/un>.

The CCT Justice and Peace Committee and PW’s churchwide moderator keep CSW before PW at the national level and work to include women throughout the organization. Meagan Manas, PW justice and peace program specialist, staffs the Justice and Peace Committee and supports this national effort.

### Ecumenical Women

Through the PC(USA)’s UN office and through Presbyterian Women’s Justice and Peace staff specialist, PW and the PC(USA) are part of a coalition called Ecumenical Women at the United Nations. Ecumenical Women is an international coalition of church denominations and ecumenical organizations that have status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Grounded in faith and a commitment to global justice, Ecumenical Women trains and empowers an expanding network to advocate for gender equality at the United Nations.

Ecumenical Women not only provides a network of collaborators that amplifies all of our voices, it also provides critical theological reflection on how faith and justice interact, and why we advocate at the UN as people of faith. Through Ecumenical Women, arrangements are made for worship services that occur every morning during the two weeks of CSW. At these worship services, daily debriefings and group dinners, women of faith experience traditions from around the world, get to know one another and strategize about how best to advocate. For more information, visit [www.ecumenicalwomen.org](http://www.ecumenicalwomen.org).

“I heard many personal stories from women and girls who have been victims of violence.”

### *What will Presbyterian women do with what they have learned?*

“Educate myself and others on these issues, so we may all learn how we can help and so we can name these issues in our prayers.”

“Encourage women to mentor girls and to be role models.”

“Visit Presbyterian Women circles in our presbytery, and think about fundraising for scholarships for next year.”

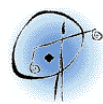
“Start writing letters about CEDAW” [The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, a UN treaty ratified but never signed by the United States; learn more at [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw)].

“Continue to be an advocate and share advocacy strategies with women at my church.”

“See that our organization is active in following up with the government on its commitments to the agreed conclusions of the CSW.”

### **Biblical/Theological Dimensions** *Luke 18:1-8a, The Parable of the Persistent Widow*

“Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to the judge and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while the judge refused; but later thought, ‘Though I have no fear



## How Can You Get Involved?

**Connect with the office of Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations (PMUN).**

PMUN hosts regular seminars on many topics for visiting groups—bring your PW group to a seminar experience in New York City. You also can follow PMUN on Facebook and the blog they share with the PC(USA) Presbyterian Peacemaking Program: <http://presbyterian.typepad.com/peacemaking>.

### **Engage in Beijing Circles.**

The Beijing Platform for Action, the document resulting from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, lifts up 12 areas where progress remains to be made for the equality, health and full involvement of women in all societies. Beijing Circles provides resources for exploring these 12 areas and taking action in your own community. Find out more at <http://beijingcircles.wordpress.com/about>.

### **Consider sending a PW in your synod to the 56th CSW.**

Start planning now for late February/early March 2012! One theme for CSW 56 is the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, so help us identify those Presbyterian women who have experience working with rural populations in the United States and elsewhere. Start saving and raising money now to send your representative! Contact Meagan Manas at [meagan.manas@pcusa.org](mailto:meagan.manas@pcusa.org) for more information.

### **Visit UN Women online.**

By clicking on [www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/csw](http://www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/csw), you can read more about this year's CSW theme, the agreed conclusions, and more.

### **Check out Ecumenical Women's resources.**

To learn more about CSW, the UN as a whole, and what advocacy means in the context of faith, download Ecumenical Women's advocacy guide, Faith at the UN, Gender in the Church, available at <http://ecumenicalwomen.org/advocacy>.

Read more stories and watch videos from the UN CSW on Presbyterian Women's blog, <http://presbyterianwomenblog.blogspot.com>, on the PW website, [www.presbyterianwomen.org](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org), and in the September/October issue of *Horizons*.

\* Excerpted from Louise Davidson, "UN Commission on the Status of Women Provides Another Avenue for Advocacy," *Justice and Peace Links*, 2007:3.

of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And Jesus said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to the chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.'\*\*

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. This parable is introduced as a parable about how we need to "pray always and not lose heart." What does prayer look like in your life? How might we consider branching out to *prayerful action*?
2. If we watched the stubborn widow continually returning to the unjust judge, what would we think of her?
3. Where are the places in our world that we regard as lost causes? Have we lost heart and stopped returning to pester the unjust judges?
4. More often than not, advocacy looks like repetitive, sometimes hopeless, trips to pester the unjust judge. What advocacy does Jesus call you to today?

\*\* Scripture quotation from *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*, copyright ©1995 by Oxford University Press. *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* is an adaptation of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

