

Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

2013 • Issue 1

The 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women



Photos from 2013 CSW. Courtesy of Mary Scott



Introduction

Every year, thousands of members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—both faith-based and not—gather in New York City during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW). Groups exert tremendous amounts of energy to influence the commission’s outcome document, 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.

CSW 57: Preventing and Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls

This year, the CSW theme was “The Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls.” Together with partners in Ecumenical Women (see page 3), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and PW advocated for the inclusion of three main areas in the Agreed Conclusions: acknowledging structural, cultural and economic violence against women; committing to education of both women and men; and paying special attention to women in rural areas and minority communities. These advocacy priorities were culled from a survey sent throughout the world to each of Ecumenical Women’s grassroots networks in the summer of 2012. Many Presbyterian women had a chance to contribute, and sent in their ideas, suggestions and thoughts related to the theme.

Under the three broad categories, 13 specific points were fleshed out, using language from other documents previously agreed upon at the UN. Read the talking points document here (<http://ecumenicalwomen.org/2013/02/22/ews-recommendations-to-member-state-governments>). Throughout the two weeks of the commission, Presbyterians and members of Ecumenical Women shared points with delegates and other NGO delegates. The Agreed Conclusions will be posted soon here (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/agreedconclusions.html). Compare the original talking points with the Agreed Conclusions. How successful do you think the coalition was in advocating for its points?

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); this subcommission soon 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, 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 UN 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’s Justice and Peace Concerns 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.

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’s Justice and Peace Concerns 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 Concerns Committee and supports this national effort.

Personal Reflections from UN CSW 57

“This is a fantastic opportunity for young women to get involved in advocacy work with the church. I really enjoyed meeting and experiencing the week with other young women, particularly sharing and debriefing together after long days of learning and advocating. At the end of the week, my mind is full and my heart is full. What a great experience.”

— *Jaime Staehle*

“This week has been interesting in that it has felt like a roller coaster. What we heard in workshops, and the stories of the range and depth of pain perpetrated by men (and in some instances, women) upon girls, was overwhelming. But women of faith always lifted me up and made the work seem possible because we all remembered that we do not do this alone and that God stands with us in all circumstances.”

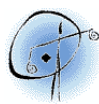
— *Anonymous*

“The parallel events that took place during the second week were the most informative for me. For those of us who work/volunteer in systems and institutions that deal with violence against women, the second week offered a plethora of solutions and prevention techniques—all of which were fully inclusive, involving men and including marginalized women.”

— *Annanda Barclay*

Watch videos of this year’s four scholarship recipients reflecting on their experiences at www.youtube.com/presbyterianwomen.

Throughout CSW, Presbyterian women and other women of faith contributed to a blog coordinated by Ecumenical Women at the United Nations. To read the blog posts, visit www.ecumenicalwomen.org; scroll down and click on “Previous Entries” to read more posts.



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 get to know one another, experience traditions from around the world and strategize about how best to advocate. For more information, visit www.ecumenicalwomen.org.

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 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?

How Can You Get Involved?

Learn More

Invite a UN CSW participant to speak at your summer or fall gathering!

We can put you in touch with a woman in your presbytery or synod who attended the UN CSW this year or in past years. Why not invite her to speak at your next retreat or gathering about her experience? Contact Meagan Manas at meagan.manas@pcusa.org or 718/839-3782 to get connected.

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>.



Visit UN Women online.

By clicking on 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.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/ew_report_single_pages.pdf.

Take Action

Join the UN for Orange Days to unite to end violence against women

The UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign proclaims every 25th of the month as Orange Day! Initiated and led by the UNiTE campaign Global Youth Network, the action strives to highlight the issue of violence against women and girls, not only once a year, on 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women), but every month. Orange Day aims to spark worldwide interest and conversation, highlight the fact that violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights, and call for its eradication without reservation, equivocation or delay. Find out more about what you can do here:

<http://www.pcusa.org/blogs/swords-plowshares/2013/3/24/orange-your-day-today-october-25/>

Engage in Beijing Circles.

The *Beijing Platform for Action*, a 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 58th CSW.

Start planning now for March 2014! The theme for CSW 58 is: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Start saving and raising money now to send your representative! Contact Meagan Manas at meagan.manas@pcusa.org for more information.

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

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