

Consultation Day of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)

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Consultation Day of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) took place on March 11, 2018 at Tribeca Manhattan Borough Community Center of the Arts. Every year, when thousands of women from all over the world descend on New York for the annual CSW conference, it is an exciting, yet also exhausting time. All participants want their voices to be heard in the forums, events, and hundreds of discussions that are going on during those two weeks in March. Beyond that, the voices continue in all the unofficial networking that occurs in the hallways of the UN buildings, and many venues around New York, even in the streets. Women always find a way to connect, and for that alone, this CSW62 was a great success!

Consultation Day, which marks the official opening of the CSW events, usually sets the tone and focus of what is to follow. As always, there is a level of excitement in the air on that day, when only 500 women who registered on time can attend, and come together for the new year with much hope for progress. This year's theme was: **Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls.**

Without going into all speakers of that day, here are some highlights and observations I made which I would like to share in bullet form:

- A striking difference in this year's summit is the emphasis on the idea of making yourself heard: all women must be heard!
- In order for rural women to be heard, they must "leave no one behind."
- 10,000 women registered to participate in CSW62 events, only half of whom were able to come for various reasons. In some cases, women of certain countries were denied their visas.
- "The most beautiful gift of all is encouragement." -An Irish priest
- **Gender equality implementation is not happening as quickly as we would like. A key step for that to change is for women to stand up for themselves.**
- The lack of water and sanitation is a very crucial issue for children.
- Many young girls are also at risk of being raped!

- **Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women:**
 - **We need extraordinary political will to hold everyone accountable. Access to information is crucial because often laws are in place but not implemented. Tell your story! All politics are local!**
 - **Women working in peace building is a very practical solution and women can bring the breakthrough!**
 - **Solidarity is imperative, but never lose connectedness. Never forget that when you win, you win for everybody!** Connections are important.
 - Fail, fail again, and fail better. Resilience and conviction are important to us women. Find our voice to rock the cradle and the system.
 - **We need a person-centered approach, not a general approach, which can then be taken globally!**
 - **Migrant women are most vulnerable to trafficking.**
 - Diversity is divine.
- **Sizani Ngubane, Founder of Rural Women's Movement, South Africa** (*from Keynote address*)
 - "There are Zulu women without education who are advocating for better conditions. They have been silenced too much and suffer too much, but because they are forever bound together, they will continue to persist in spite of challenges."
 - **Although it is estimated that between 75-80% of the African Continent is cultivated by women, women only own about 2% of the continent's land.** They get up 1 am in the morning to dig holes and wait for water to come from the river for 8 hours. **Despite the violence they encounter in their lives, they will not be intimidated into silence.**
 - **Women in Africa are silenced by male leaders in the community and parliament.**
 - **Sizani Ngubane** became empowered with the thought: "I must travel to all the African nations and learn from women how to defend ourselves from this kind of oppression."
 - She recruited young women to give workshops to create awareness of the oppression and their constitutional rights.
 - **She proved that it takes only one woman to change things, not many women!**
 - Sizani's organization Rural Women's Movement won a court case because she educated herself about the existing laws and insisted on their implementation. "The RWM was instrumental in declaring the Communal Land Rights Act 11 of 2004 unconstitutional and enshrined in gender bias..."
- **Anastasia Markova** (*showed a film their group created*)
 - **Markova wanted to show the strength of women and connect us all, so she made movie as part of an invisible movement.**
 - Women want to talk and be heard, and many woman want to share their story. The film includes interviews by men and women.
 - **The resilience of women is the most amazing. Women are strong but often don't realize how strong they are.** It's possible for men to open the door and understand women.
- **Esther Mwaura, GROOTS in Kenya** (*moderator*)
 - It's important to think about a holistic approach to development.
- **Maria Luisa Mendonca, Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, Brazil**
 - Climate change is the most defining issue of our age. One island has been lost completely already. Clean water issues force migrants to urban areas, where they then live in poverty. Subsidies and infrastructure are missing. There is a food movement with women's organizations in the North and South,

which involve rural and urban collaboration.

- **Lilly Be'Soer, Voice for Change, Jiwaka Province, New Guinea**

- In New Guinea, there is violence and inequality on all sectors. Still, women continue to raise their voices, even though they have no access to information about their rights and laws. They hope to make a difference for the next generation of women who are isolated.

- **Ruth Faircloth, Rural Migrant Ministry, Upstate New York**

- Ms. Faircloth spoke about growing up in a rural area in Upstate New York, where she was abused. She had to fight her husband's rage. Often, the men stay on the farm while some women/mothers move to urban areas and live with 4- 5 children in hotels. This causes men to feel left behind, and in their anger, they beat up their women.

- Prejudice is prevalent in rural areas.

- **We want to see change. Let's do it not talk about it.** Many women are hurting, give them a voice, so they can heal!

- **Hon. Marilou McPhedran, Senator (Canada) Committees: Human Rights, Aboriginal Peoples, and Security and Defense**

- Are you living your rights? It's time to go local: let's not just talk in conferences like this, but do something to take it local!

- Every woman is a human rights defender.

- **All efforts for peace are interconnected. There is a diplomatic bubble and communication between us needs to happen so that actions can be taken!**

- There is much money but not given where it is needed. Be bolder! Less should be spent on the military.

- **Question: what are men doing in your rural areas to support women?**

- My comment is the urgent needs to change are in educating the human heart and training women to get funding.

- Train women to be able to support other women

- Do it!

- Rural area women are badly treated by NY families around the town.

During the Q and A session, one question was asked: **“What is sensitive, effective leadership?”** which the moderator answered by saying: **“Those who work for others for a long time, and are consistent and passionate in what they believe in. That is all of you here at this Consultation Day!”**