



Commission on the Status of Women 2009 Report to Community Sector from Caroline Lambert

This report has been prepared by Caroline Lambert, YWCA Australia, who attended the 2009 meeting of the CSW as a representative of the community sector.

It was a great honour to be part of such an influential delegation, a delegation that demonstrated to the world that Australia is back in the business of women's human rights. From the Minister's participation in the International Women's Day Panel, to the screening of FILM, to the ability to provide our good offices during the course of the negotiations, it was a delegation that restored Australia to a leadership position in the promotion of women's human rights on the international stage.

About the CSW

The CSW (established in 1946, one year after the UN was established) is the highest policy making body on women at the UN. Its responsibilities are twofold:

1. To review internationally agreed standards for the achievement of women's equality (ie, documents associated with Fourth World Conference on Women process and the Millennium Development Goals)
2. To develop new standards for the promotion of women's equality (ie, CEDAW, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action)



Australia has a proud history of involvement with the CSW, Jessie Street was a founding member of the CSW and the only Australian woman delegate at the meetings which founded the UN.

The CSW has, in recent years, operated by adopting "Agreed Conclusions" – documents which address key issues for women's equality and resolutions on particular topics.

About the 2009 CSW meeting

The CSW meeting in 2009 considered the following issues:

- A major focus on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS – culminating in the adoption of a set of "Agreed Conclusions" on this topic
- A panel discussion on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels
- A panel discussion on the gender perspectives of the financial crisis
- A panel discussion on the gender dimensions of global public health commitments
- Looking forward to "Beijing Plus Fifteen"

Australian NGO and Government preparations and activities

Support for NGO participation

This year, in a welcome first, the Australian Government provided financial support for two women to join their delegation, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative and a community sector representative. Lesley Salem fulfilled the first function and Caroline Lambert (YWCA Australia) the second function. The photo also shows Beth Delaney, AusAID delegate.



Pre-CSW Roundtable

The National Women's Alliances, OFW and AusAID staff members met in October 2008 for a pre-departure expert roundtable. The roundtable provided an important opportunity for the Alliances to consider the CSW topic, an opportunity which is often quite difficult to carve out of the day-to-day work of Alliance members. The meeting was instrumental in identifying the need to recognise the impact of the global financial crisis on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS, an issue which was picked up in the priorities for the Australian Government delegation to the CSW.

The meeting was also the first step in identifying a collective advocacy agenda for the Alliances, which ultimately resulted in the Alliances advocating that the following issues be taken up by the Australian Government Delegation to the CSW:

- Promote the adoption of strong anti-discrimination and equality frameworks, particularly measures to support workers with family responsibilities
- Promote the adoption of paid parental leave schemes
- Recognise the detrimental impact of violence against women on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men
- Recognise the importance of an intersectional discrimination analysis in addressing the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men
- Recognise that the Global Financial Crisis may have a detrimental impact on government expenditure and ensure that government's maintain budget allocations to support the achievement of gender equality
- Promote 50-50 representation in decision making
- Promote strong mechanisms to achieve the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including through reference to Australian agencies and procedures such as the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities at Work Agency
- Promote the accreditation of national human rights institutions to the CSW
- Promote the establishment of a new UN Agency for Women



NGOS at CSW in the UN corridors

The meeting was also an important opportunity to lobby for Australian Government support of the participation of Pacific colleagues at the CSW, with AusAID supporting both government and NGO participants.

Pre-departure Briefing

The Australian Government hosted a pre-departure briefing prior to the CSW which afforded NGOs and Government with the opportunity to meet each other before hand and discuss in general terms our expectations of the meeting. The Government shared as much of their negotiating agenda as they were able to (at that time).

At the CSW

Delegation composition



The Australian Government accorded significant priority to the CSW meeting, agreeing that Minister Plibersek should lead the delegation in the first week. Minister Plibersek was joined the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick in the first week of the CSW. The Australian Government delegation also included the Branch Manager of the Office for Women, Sally Moyle, the Director of the Sex and Age Discrimination Unit, Cassandra Goldie, the Director, Gender and Policy Coordination Unit of AusAID, Beth

Delaney, the Acting Section Manager, International, OFW, Caroline Hughes, Lesley Salem and Caroline Lambert. Joining the Australian Human Rights Commission team were Emily Carter and June Oscar from the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing.

Pre-CSW dinner

On Sunday evening, the Minister hosted a dinner to welcome Government and NGO delegates to New York. It was an excellent opportunity for people to put names and faces together, and to make initial plans for the first part of the week. The Minister's attendance, along with Ambassador Robert Hill popping in, contributed to the view that we were launching into a period of important work.



NGO workshops

A number of Australian NGOs or international NGOs with Aussies in leadership roles hosted well-attended workshops which contributed to networking and information sharing. In particular I gained useful insights into the UN System of National Accounts in the Pacific Forum workshop where Professor Marilyn Waring provided a historical perspective on how

women's caring labour had been excluded from the way the UN accounts for a countries economy.

NGO Briefings

Building on the practice of previous years, Australian NGOs and Government delegates met regularly during the CSW to share information, particularly on the state of negotiations. Early in week one I prepared a briefing note for the Government identifying key recommendations that had arisen from the NGO Consultation Day on the Sunday prior to CSW, early offerings from caucuses and "corridor" lobbying. Issues raised included a better integration of kinship and cultural obligations, commentary on the Gender Architecture Reform process (see below for further details), the gender impact of



NGO Delegates take over the conference room on IWD

trade agreements (identified particularly by Pacific colleagues) and a broader definition of care than that promulgated in the draft text.

Negotiating framework and Australian Government Priorities

In an excellent initiative, the Australian Government this year adopted a negotiating framework, along with priority negotiating areas. The framework enabled the Australian delegation to negotiate with confidence and also to offer leadership when required. Getting a whole of government commitment to provide timely clearance for the framework will be a growth opportunity in the future, with the lack of clearance in the HIV/AIDS area limiting our work on this topic.

Prior to departure the Australian Government identified four priorities for the Agreed Conclusion negotiations and added another during the course of the meeting

- Lobbying for inclusion of a reference to the impact of the global financial crisis on women
- Supporting the participation of National Human Rights Institutions at CSW
- Promoting texts which highlighted new ways for men and boys to contribute to the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men
- Recognising the importance of time use surveys in better understanding the contribution of caring work to our communities
- Pushing for the inclusion of kinship obligations in the Agreed Conclusions

The negotiating framework also enabled a careful engagement by the Australian Government delegation with NGO advocacy documents – the delegation met over the weekend to go through each lobbying document we had received to integrate, where we could, NGO advocacy in to our language recommendations.

Country Statement

Minister Plibersek delivered the Australian Government Country Statement in the first week, outlining steps it had taken to address the gender impact of the GFC, the ratification of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, government actions in the areas of economic equality

(including reference to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Parental Leave and provision of childcare), decision making processes (including reference to the National Women's Alliances), Violence Against Women (including reference to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children), work with indigenous Women (including reference to the National Apology and the Indigenous Women's Leadership Program) and work within Australia and the Pacific in relation to HIV/AIDS. The Minister finished with a tribute to the work of Jessie Street. Please contact me if you would like to read a copy of the statement (ed@ywca.org.au)

The Agreed Conclusion Negotiations – we call it a 6am thing

The negotiation of the Agreed Conclusions was an incredibly difficult process, with broader geo-political considerations informing the negotiating positions. Over the years, the negotiation of these documents has become increasingly contested, and this year proved no exception. The final document was adopted at 7.20pm on the last day of the meeting, following a 6am finish on the Thursday night into Friday morning session, and a couple of very late nights/early mornings in the earlier part of the week.



Delegates, somewhere between midnight and 2am

The Australian Government delegation played a really important role in the negotiations, in large part because of the depth of skills and experience we brought to the meeting, with a number of our members having attended previous CSWs. The advantage this provided was threefold

1. We knew how processes should work and were able to “nudge” things along (for example, we suggested that difficult paragraphs on HIV/AIDS should move into parallel negotiations, and we conducted our own informal negotiations on the floor of the meeting room to put forward compromise text on the section that included references to the equal sharing of responsibilities for men and boys (indeed, the adoption of this section was seen by a seasoned Swiss colleague as a “miracle”).
2. We knew previous language, and how to use it, we had links with NGOs who could provide real-time advice when we couldn't find the precedent language ourselves.
3. The Australian Government delegation took an open approach to negotiations – talking with all delegations. In our view this was instrumental to the adoption of the global financial crisis language – as we had spoken with all parties during the negotiations and had played a “good offices” role.

The Agreed Conclusions – and what they can mean for NGOs in Australia

While the final set of concluding comments contain compromises for all sides we were delighted to see all five of the Australian Government priorities included.

The Agreed Conclusions contain some very useful statements on the role of women and men in the economy and caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS which can be used by Australian NGOs in their advocacy with government. These included recognition of:

- the importance of transforming the current gender-based division of labour in the current economic systems (paragraph 7)

- the impact of unequal sharing of responsibilities on women's labour force attachment and the flow on effects of that for women (paragraph 8)
- recognition of kinship obligations in caring work (paragraph 9)
- the detrimental impact of the global economic crisis on women's equality (paragraph 11)
- Calls for ratification of germane ILO standards (paragraph 15c)
- Recognition of the importance of gender budgeting and mainstreaming gender into government policies in the context of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men (paragraph 15f)
- The establishment of goals and benchmarks and the adoption of positive actions and temporary special measures to achieve the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men (paragraph 15g) – a particular win for our Pacific Colleagues
- Recognition of the underlying impact of violence against women on a range of issues (paragraph 15k)
- The importance of public education campaigns in transforming culturally and gender based understandings of care (paragraph 15o)
- The importance of measuring, in quantitative and qualitative terms, unremunerated work that is not captured by national accounts (paragraph 15q)
- The adoption, implementation and monitoring of decent working conditions for both paid and unpaid caregivers (paragraph 15s)
- The development, expansion and funding for equitable, quality, accessible and affordable care and support services, taking in to account a range of factors including kinship obligations (paragraph 15bb)
- The integration of gendered analysis of caregiving in the context of national HIV/AIDS policies (paragraph 15jj and kk)
- The importance of prevention of HIV as a means of reducing infections and consequently the caregiving burden of HIV (paragraph 15ll)
- A comprehensive statement on the types of programs that could be adopted to increase the role of men in caregiving work (paragraph 15qq)
- The promotion of time use surveys (paragraph 15vv)
- Strong language on gender sensitive measures in responding to the GFC (paragraph 15xx)

Disappointments included

- The loss of reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Roll back of equality and discrimination language (paragraph 15d, lost in the last minute negotiating crisis)
- Difficult negotiations on the HIV/AIDS sections
- Limited references to the Gender Equality Architecture work being undertaken at the UN

Resolutions

As per usual, the CSW also adopted a series of resolutions

- Women, girl children and HIV/AIDS
- The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
- The themes for the Commissions 2010-2014 period, noting that the 2010 session would focus on a review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

- That there be a commemorative meeting held during the 2010 meeting of the CSW to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- A procedural resolution on the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women

Side event – blockbuster screening of “Yajillara”

Emily Carter and June Oscar from the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre in Fitzroy Crossing were the star attractions at the Australian Government Side Event, a screening of *Yajillara*, a film which focused on their work in the Fitzroy Crossing community to address the devastating impact of alcohol abuse. It was standing room only event, full of inspiring and moving stories. Ambassador Robert Hill introduced the proceedings, and following the screening June and Emily were joined by Minister Plibersek and Commissioner Broderick in a panel discussion. It was an extraordinary moment to hear Minister Plibersek acknowledge that Indigenous Policy in Australia had been “stuffed up”.



Minister Plibersek, Emily Carter, June Oscar, Commissioner Broderick, in the General Assembly Chamber

International Women's Day Panel

As part of their commemorations for International Women's Day the UN held a high-level panel. General Secretary of the UN Ban Ki-Moon spoke on the panel, highlighting the UN's work on violence. Minister Plibersek was also invited to speak, which caused great excitement among Australian NGOs. The Minister's



The Minister shares the podium with the Secretary General

speech was greeted with spontaneous applause from the audience – not something achieved by any other panellist!

“GEAR Campaign”

The UN is currently reforming its “gender equality architecture” – known by the UN acronym “GEAR” (standing for gender equality architecture reform).



Commission on the Status of Women 2009 Report to Community Sector from Caroline Lambert

NGOs used the CSW to further their campaign for what is known as the “composite” model – where a new UN agency for women would be established, combining both the field presence and the policy function.

The GEAR Campaign used the CSW to launch an online petition supporting the composite model: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/gea.html>

CSW 2010

It remains unclear what the UN have in mind for the fifteen year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. From the negotiations at this CSW it is clear that the negotiation process is becoming increasingly fraught. While we had some significant gains in a couple of areas, in many instances we were defending previously agreed language, and in many instances (particularly given the last minute chair’s text) weakened previously agreed language.

In this context, developing a meaningful agenda for the Plus Fifteen review is quite challenging. The Country Questionnaire’s have been circulated, which suggests some intention to conduct a “review of implementation”. The regional UN meeting agendas also suggest that the impact of the Global Financial Crisis on women, climate change and women, women and armed conflict, and globalisation and women, food energy crisis, and engaging men and boys are to be considered. Reflecting on the Plus Five and Plus Ten approaches we could expect a declaration, reaffirming the PFA (though this too is contentious!) and an “outcomes document”, which would presumably focus on the four areas discussed at regional preparatory meetings. If this goes forward, ensuring the brevity of the document, strong chairing, appropriate use of “side meetings”/“contact groups” and other UN mechanisms would be key. It would also be important, if a variety of issues are to be addressed, to ensure that adequate negotiation time is set aside.

Presumably part of the UN process would therefore be High-Level Panels on these issue areas. While it is a wonderful thing to have a Minister for Women at a High-Level Panel it would be quite arresting to promote the idea that women who are living with the day-to-day reality of the GFC or climate change share the podium with leaders.

NGOs are planning a Beijing +15 Global Women’s Forum on 26 and 27 February 2010. The ESCAP Preparatory Meeting is scheduled for 27-29 October 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Fifth World Conference on Women

There continues to be talk of a Fifth World Conference on Women, although there has been no confirmation of activities at this time.