

Commission on the Status of Women 59th – 20th March 2015

I had the great honour of attending CSW59 with approximately 80 Soroptimists from around the World (16 from SIGBI). CSW first met in 1947 it is the global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The CSW promotes women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women was formed in 2010 its main roles are to support the intergovernmental bodies such as CSW in formulating policies and global standards. It helps member states implement standards and holds the UN system accountable for commitments on gender equality.

The 59th session this year was particularly important as it was the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference in Beijing (1995). This session undertook a review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and implementation of Platform for Action by member states around the world. This review looked at challenges to implementing Platform for Action and to use opportunities to integrate a gender perspective into economic, social and environmental dimensions in the post 2015 Development Agenda Sustainable Development Goals.

Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) identified 12 critical areas of concern:

1. Women and the environment
2. Women in power and decision making
3. The girl child
4. Women and the economy
5. Women and poverty
6. Violence against women
7. Human rights of women
8. Education and training of women
9. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
10. Women and health
11. Women and the media
12. Women and armed conflict

BPfA is not legally binding. There is a moral obligation on member states to comply whereas the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) is legally binding and has been ratified by 188 countries.

A political declaration is normally drawn up in the first week of CSW but this year it was submitted by the Chair of the Commission in advance of the session. A draft declaration had been sent out to all Governments and NGO's in advance to allow submissions be made by individual member states. NGO's could then lobby their own governments.

Soroptimist International had the following key asks:

- **Eliminating Violence Committed Against Women and Girls.**
The lack of progress in this area is unacceptable. The voices of victims must be included in policy development and implementation, and solutions must be contextualised, culturally specific and tailored to communities. Progressive and safe indicators must be developed and implemented.
- **Promoting Women as Leaders and Decision Makers**
Women remain under represented in positions of power and influence at all levels. The participation of women and girls must be seen as a cross-cutting issue and their voices must be a part of policy setting at every level on all issues.
- **Ensuring Access to Education for Women and Girls**
Accessing available, quality, safe, affordable and lifelong education is crucial to ensuring women and girls achieve their full potential. A life course approach to education is important to achieving equitable employment and economic empowerment, allowing women and girls to contribute to their communities.
- **Provisioning Proper Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms**
All collected data must be disaggregated by sex. This would ensure that progress and current challenges in achieving gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls, can be properly overcome.

Prior to attending CSW I wrote to An Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald with SI 's requests and these were subsequently sent on to Aodhan O Roirdain Minister for State who was the governments representative at CSW 59.

What happens at CSW?

The session opened on Monday 9th with the arrival of Ministers of member States. The opening ceremony was attended by International President Ann Garvie and Federation President Jenny Vince. Whilst Ministerial round tables are going on in the main assembly room parallel events are held by government missions within the UN building and also side events are hosted by NGO's in buildings around the UN. Soroptimist International hosted 6 side events during the 1st week. There were over 450 side events so it was essential to plan out a calendar for the week. The majority of Soroptimists attended for week one only.

A brief outline of my week was as follows;

Saturday 7th March-I arrived in the afternoon and following check in at the hotel a number of the SIGBI delegates accompanied by Sue Biggs went to the UN Building to register and get our security passes.

Sunday 8th March-We started a beautiful sunny International Women's Day in New York by attending the NGO CSW Consultation Day at the Apollo Theatre. We were accompanied by International President Ann and fellow Soroptimists from around the world. The event chaired by Mrs Soon Young Yoon of NGO CSW New York brought together delegates from global NGO's all working towards gender equality. Speakers included Phimzile Mlambo Ngcuka Under Secretary General of UN Women who stated in "the next 15 years are the last mile we must break the back of gender inequality after all we have a lot of work to do. We were addressed by Dr Gertrude Mongella Under Secretary General at the UN who led the Fourth World conference in Beijing. Dr Mongella said it's time to "step it up" laws have been put in place but not implemented. We must aim to achieve gender equality by 2030. NGO CSW's woman of the year is Ruchira Gupta an Emmy award winning film maker and women's rights activist who has been inspirational in leading the fight against sex trafficking in India. As a journalist Ruchira noted on travelling in Nepal villages had many men but few women and girls? When she asked she was told the women are in Mumbai. Girls as young as 7 yrs had been sold by their poverty stricken families to the brothals of Mumbai. Ruchira highlighted the horror of Sex Trafficking in her film "The Selling of Innocents" Panelists from around the world discussed progress in their own regions related to Beijing Platform for Action.

Mary Robinson spoke of her work as a human rights activist starting with her election to the Senate in 1969. In the early 70's she received a lot of backlash as she tried to progress women's rights and family planning. Mrs Robinson encouraged young male and female activists to continue to stand up for what they believe in. Mrs Robinson discussed the negative devastating impacts of climate change which particularly effects women. Climate change must be on our Agenda's.

Leaving the Apollo Theatre we joined the women's march and rally at Times Square. There was a fantastic atmosphere and it was really exciting to be present on International Women's day calling for gender equality by 2030. My only regret not to have my 17 yr old daughter Sarah standing with me for this momentous occasion. As we left the rally we had the pleasure of meeting Mrs Mary Robinson.

We attended a Soroptimist reception in the evening which gave us a chance to relax and catch up with Soroptimists from the 4 federations. What a most memorable International Women's day.

Monday 9th March-I attended the following

- **NGOCSW orientation** for first timers which was a useful overview of how the UN works and how to plan our week.
- **Present but Invisible**- (hosted by SI) I joined Soroptimists from SI India and SI Nigeria in a presentation focusing on areas of discrimination against women including violence, forced marriage, treatment of Widows and mental health issues. The presentation focused on projects which have resulted in social change within our communities. I gave an overview of our award winning project Positive Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. (Thank you to Sarah Mc Cormack for helping me to prepare this before I left)

- **End to Sex Trafficking –we can do it** (hosted by SI) This was a very powerful event with a panel including **Dianne Redsky (Canadian Women’s Foundation)** Dianne has led a National task force on trafficking of women and girls in Canada. The task force made 34 recommendations on how to end trafficking. 90% of victims are Canadian citizen’s average age 13years.
FBI Special Agent Marty Parker-Has been working in San Francisco 16years in child exploitation and prostitution.” All child prostitution is human trafficking” 10.000 children have gone missing since 2004 in USA. How are they recruited? schools, malls, facebook, friends ,family. NGO’s need to educate the public. Criminalise the purchasers; make PIMP a dirty word (now glorified by rappers)
Linda Witcome-Prosecutor and cold case investigator stated that 1/3 of runaways are solicited within their 1st 48hrs on the streets. “The best victim is someone who doesn’t see herself as a victim”
We were shown an emotional video made by SI Marin County which interviewed “Cody“a 28yr old survivor of trafficking.

Tuesday 10th March-I attended:

- **Advocacy & Networking Strategies for Legislative Reform to End Prostitution.**-(hosted by Ruhama) **Sarah Benson** CEO of Ruhama spoke passionately about Ruhama’s work with women across the sex trade including women trafficked into Ireland. We have a highly active sex trade which is criminally controlled. ”Prostitution is intrinsically damaging to those who are involved in it” Sarah spoke about Ruhama’s work with the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Turn Off the Red Light campaign which calls for prosecution of the purchaser while at the same time decriminalising the women involved and providing holistic services to allow them to exit the trade.
Minister of State Aodhan O Riordain-“people don’t want to talk about prostitution, what Ruhama has done is to build an alliance of truth” The Sexual Offences Bill will hopefully pass before the end of the year.
Taina Bien Aime Executive Director of Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) “Without the demand for prostitution there would be no trafficking”
- **Unlimited Potential Business Partners for Gender Equality**
Ban Ki Moon- Discussed his Women’s Empowerment Principles launched in 2010 to engage businesses around the world to include these 7 principles in their business plans.
Hilary Clinton-“189 nations pledged at Beijing to work for human rights which are women’s rights. The voice spoke and the world began to listen. It’s time to keep the ambition of Beijing alive and keep moving forward” We need economies that work for everyone.
Mary Robinson-This is a monumental year with Beijing 20, the Climate Change Treaty and Sustainable Development Goals, we need to see much more ambition at all levels to see real transformative change. Many women suffer the double injustice of gender inequality and the effects of climate change. Climate change must be on all our agendas.

- **Women Fighting Extremism in Gods Name-The Role of CEDAW (hosted by UN mission of France)**

Moez Daraid- Director of UN Women- Extremism is thriving extremism effects women's rights over their bodies and decision making. He discussed Boko Haram in Nigeria and ISIS in Syria– women and girls are being removed from school , brutally raped, forced into marriages and many killed.

Nicole Ameline Former Chair of CEDAW & former French Minister for Parity and Equality appealed for international communities to resist all forms of extremism and fundamentalism. Women must be allowed to speak out and help to rebuild their countries.

Pascale Boistard-French Secretary of State for Women's Rights

.Extremisms are forms of violence which threaten women's most basic rights to education, control of their bodies, whom they chose to love and their choices for their futures. We must help the victims by providing assistance and humanitarian aid.

Lucy Freeman-Director at Amnesty International-Spoke of the displacement of women to camps which have dire living conditions and poor security. We must also support and protect human rights defenders. Violent extremism is the newest form of violence against women and girls.

- **Empowering the Next Generation (hosted by Ireland UN mission)Chaired by Minister of State Aodhan O Roirdain.**

Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Trocaire presented findings of research into women's and young persons participation in Parliaments world wide and the barriers effecting women's entry to politics. Barriers include politics being seen as a male space. Potential solutions include gender quotas, confidence building workshops, mentoring and involvement in youth parliaments and youth councils. Women's participation in community spaces requires key elements; Voice opportunities to express their views, Power to bring about change, Rights women's rights are named and claimed, Agency women's ability to analyse a situation, prioritise and make strategic decisions.

Rosaleen Smith-MP Sierra Leone spoke of her experience as a women getting into Parliament where she is the only female cabinet member.

Zita Gurmai-MEP Hungary .Women are essential to bring about economic recovery we must empower women and we must have women leaders. There must be a specific priority on gender in election manifestos.

- I attended the NGO CSW reception with the presentation of an award to Ruchira Gupta for her work in Sex Trafficking.

Wednesday 11th March-I attended;

- **Women's Mental health and the Sustainable Development Goals**(hosted by the World Federation for Mental Health)
Nancy Wallace-Depression is the world's 2nd leading cause of disability. How women function in their communities is greatly effected by mental health issues. We must help women to develop the skills to help them to meet the challenges that face them. Mental Health was omitted from the Millennium Development Goals this was a serious omission. It must be given priority in the Sustainable Development Goals which will be voted upon in September. We must think about women as whole human beings including their psychological health. Mental health has low priority even in high income countries. In most countries it is allocated <1% of health budgets. The risk of mental illness is greater in certain conditions, poverty, conflict zones, violence, changing gender roles.
Dr Chuen Chang-WFMH-Mental Health is a human right and must be included in all policies. You cannot separate mental health from physical health. We need to develop data-mental health statistics, impact assessment, mental health awareness training and mental health budgets.
Janice Wood Wetzel-Author of "Women and Depression"
"If its not sustainable for women its not sustainable" Before health policies are written listen to women, empower women to change their communities.
- **Empowerment of Women in Iran lessons learned and achievements** (hosted by the Republic of Iran) This was an interesting review of changes for women in Iran since the Beijing Conference.
S Molaverdi- Vice President for Women and the Family Affairs. The Iranian government has worked hard despite economic sanctions to improve the lives of its women and girls creating equal opportunities free from discrimination. There has been great success in Education in particular eradication of illiteracy with the provision of free quality education and an increase in women's participation in Sciences. Improvements in nutrition and health care have increased life expectancy. Laws have been put in place to reduce violence against women. Services have been established including provision of family courts, female members of the police force, safe houses to provide shelter. Areas of weakness include the poor representation of women in Parliament and women in the media. Priorities over the next 5 years include strengthening the family foundation and allowing women to take advantage of legal and Islamic rights.

Thursday 12th March I attended-

- **What Beijing+20 means to Afghanistan** (hosted by The Afghan Women's Network-AWN) This was one of the most powerful presentations I attended.
Mary Akrami-Chair of AWN It was the first time AWN were presenting at CSW. They are an umbrella organisation representing 120 women's groups in Afghanistan.

Afghan women have faced many highs and lows since Beijing. Many laws have been passed to improve the lives of women but since 2010 things have gone backwards with the Government reviewing laws that protect women. In the past 4 years women have been excluded from many important issues most importantly they are excluded from peace talks. Afghan women themselves are trying to push forward and to hold on to the achievements they have made. They called on International NGO's to be their voices and to support them in their fight for equality.

Zarqa Yaftali-AWN Access to the judicial system has been difficult .The Sharia system can violate women's rights. There is insufficient lawyers, lack of law enforcement, not enough courts and negative attitudes towards women suffering violence. There is insufficient shelter for women experiencing violence.

Samira Hamedi-AWN There have been times when there have not been any women in Government. Some improvements came after 9/11 due to International support. AWN have been pushing for gender sensitive laws and to raise awareness of women's needs. In 2014 a quota system in place reduced the number of females in Government from 25 to 20. There continue to be people who do not want female participation." We are here to ask for your support be our voice outside Afghanistan" Women's rights activists are in danger of kidnapping and murder. A female MP was murdered in Kabul the day before this presentation.

Surya Pakzad- Women must be included in peace and security talks to create lasting sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Women can bridge the cultural divides. Increase the numbers of women in Judiciary, Police, Military, Government .Progress has happened because women want it and are fighting for it.

- **Uniting our Voices Against Violence Against Women and Girls(hosted by Soroptimist International and World Association of Girl Guides WAGGS & YWCA)**

Minerva-YWCA Spoke about violence against Palestinian women. Poverty, social limitations and male dominated communities have led to high levels of violence against women including early marriage and honour killings. 77% of women in Gaza have experienced some form of violence. Fear and cultural factors prevent women from speaking out.

Hendra Murphy-Petra WAGGS Slovenia- WAGGS are working to create a global community to end violence and discrimination through education to empower girls. "Voices Against Violence" .

They are working with UN Women to challenge gender stereotypes and to provide tools for boys and girls to prevent violence in their communities.

President Ulla Madsen SI Europe-1 in 3 women will experience violence in their lifetime. SIGBI and SIE announced a joint project on prevention of violence with an emphasis on developing prevention strategies built around awareness raising. The project will look at risk factors for violence and this will be followed by development of an education programme with books and films for schools for boys and girls and training materials for responders.

- **Women Peace and Security (hosted by Ireland UN mission and Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence)** Ireland recently launched its second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security following on from UNSCR1325 relating to the impact of conflict on women and girls.

Rosamund Bennet Chair of Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence which works to increase knowledge and understanding of GBV with policy makers, educators and peacekeepers. Experiencing GBV reduces women's active participation in society every woman has the right to achieve her full potential. We must give victims a voice.

Colm Byrne-Oxfam Members of ICGBV realized there was little understanding on GBV when working with women and girls on the ground in Darfur in 2005 . The consortium was established in response to reports of ongoing and systematic sexual violence in Southern Sudan.

Captain Deirdre Carberry Irish Defence Forces detailed the dramatic changes the force has undergone since 2000. There are specific gender based strategies and the Defence forces have worked with other members of the consortium on Ireland's 2nd National Action Plan. The Irish Army has a Gender Advisor and gender training is included for all recruits.

All teams in conflict zones include female officers and female interpreters to make it easier for women and girls who have experienced violence to come forward.

- In the evening I attended a reception hosted by SI Manhattan which was attended by Soroptimists from each Federation. We received warm hospitality from President Angelina.

Friday 13th March –I attended:

- **A Modern Response to Modern Slavery(hosted by the UK Mission and National Alliance of Women's Organisations)**

Kevin Hyland-UK Anti Slavery Commissioner spoke on the Modern Slavery Bill which aims to increase the number of victims referred for appropriate support and to increase the rate of prosecutions of slave masters and traffickers. Slavery is high profit low risk you can sell a human a number of times.

John Iannarelli-FBI Arizona. Technology is used in recruiting and selling of humans. Technology can be used to fight these crimes with International co-operation. We need to educate people to what is going on and support the victims of trafficking.

Sr Linda Dearlove-CEO Women at the Well in Kings Cross which provides trauma services for women who have been trafficked and involved in prostitution. Sr Linda is calling for the Nordic model which criminalises purchasers of sex but at same time services must be provided to allow women exit the sex industry.

Pakhshan Zangara-Kurdistan Regional Government and President of the High Council of Women's Affairs. Mrs Zangara spoke of how ISIS has caused destruction in her country. Over 1500 women and girls have been abducted as sex slaves. The young girls are forced into marriage. There is a high risk of the girls being trafficked into other countries. These women must be saved. Kurdistan is struggling with over 2

million displaced people living in camps mostly women and girls. The international community must help them.

Kate Lappin-spoke of "the new slave in the kitchen" in particular Indonesian women forced to work as domestics in places including Hongkong. Their passports are confiscated many will have a debt bondage paying their salary back to an agent

- **Beyond Zero Campaign** (hosted by Kenyan Mission)

HE Margaret Kenyatta spoke of her campaign launched in early 2014 to provide medical care to the most vulnerable throughout Kenya. 21 mobile medical clinics have been provided to go into hard to reach communities which would otherwise not have medical care. Mrs Kenyatta and her team have raised funds by participating in marathons around the world. The clinics are providing ante natal care, HIV treatment, immunization and some surgery. To date over 20,000 people have received medical care. The campaign hopes to add a further 26 mobile clinics. At the end of Mrs Kenyatta's presentation representatives of the Kenyan Parliament stood up. All were women (approximately 12) this was very impressive.

- **Body Confidence and Self Esteem-Unlocking Girls Full Potential** (hosted by World Association of Girl Guides, Dove and UN Women)

Meaghan Ramsey-Dove –Body confidence relates to how you feel and think about your body. 72% of girls feel pressure to be beautiful, this impacts how they live their lives. 9 out of 10 girls would change at least one thing about their body. The stereotyping and scrutinizing of women's appearance through the media puts value on beauty which is unattainable and unrealistic. This has broad implications including undermining academic achievement and damage to health and wellbeing. **Emily Milton-Smith-WAGGS**. Australia is one of 16 pilot countries using the "Free Being Me" Education programme. The programme works to improve body image through fun activities. Girls are encouraged to share their feelings about their bodies. Body confidence is an important building block to building self esteem and for girls to enjoy the full spectrum of their human rights. Free being me can be downloaded free online.

Nanette Braun-UN Women-There is a need to reverse the stereotyping of women, we should have women in senior positions in Media. We need to educate women and girls formally and informally. The Free Being me campaign aims to reach over 3 million girls by 2016.

Helene Readon-Deputy Director UK Government Equality Office. There is overwhelming evidence of the harm low body confidence causes to young girls. The Government can play a vital leadership role in bringing groups into the debate EG the Advertising industry. "Pretty as a picture" researched what kind of models consumers want to look at. Based on this research Boots do not airbrush and are using real consumers in their advertising. Research is also being carried out with leading academics into how older women are impacted by body confidence.

- **Voices From The Grassroots** Economic Empowerment of women living in poverty (hosted by Soroptimist International)

SIE President Ulla Marsden-Women and the economy is a major issue of concern. Girls are more likely to live in poverty and to be denied access to education. We must make girls visible by giving them resources and we must teach parents that girls are better off in school.

SI Barbados- New Horizons Project. SI members work on a 1 to 1 in juvenile institutions for girls on Saturday mornings. They have established a library and run education workshops on gender violence, trafficking, dance, Art. Speakers from 3rd level institutions come to speak with the girls on possible education courses they may take on leaving the institution. This is to encourage them to set goals and to know that education is their route out of poverty.

SI Auckland-What keeps girls in poverty-lack of access to resources, lack of a voice, sex, race, disability, discrimination, violence. Discrimination manifests from stigma and creates barriers to economic empowerment. Women earn 1 % of the Worlds income but do 2/3rds of the worlds work. Lack of female representation on boards and in politics make it very hard to change things like the wage gap. Environmental degradation including droughts impacts mostly on women. Lack of education is linked to poor physical and mental health. We must challenge cultural norms through primary prevention programmes.

SI America's-Live your Dream Award gives financial help and mentoring to women in difficult situations to help them to access education.

SI Japan-Educating Women in Nepal- Soroptimists have built schools for indigenous women in Nepal to teach them how to read and write. Night classes have been provided for women who must work to provide for their families during the day.

All projects were very inspirational and provided practical help to enable empower and educate women.

This was the final presentation of the day. We all met to say our goodbyes as many were leaving the following day. The second week of CSW was attended by Pat Black and it was the negotiating phase on the wording of the final political declaration. There was some disappointment that the wording in the draft declaration was weak. Sustainable Development Goals will be agreed by September 2015

This was a wonderful learning experience for me in many areas and I very much appreciate having had the opportunity to attend CSW59.

Catherine Giblin
SI Dublin

To read SI Caroline Leach's Oral Presentation to CSW 59 on behalf of Soroptimist International see below.

**Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non
governmental organization in consultative status with
the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is
being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of
Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Women as leaders and decision makers

Women are still underrepresented in positions of power and influence at community, national and international levels. The participation of women and girls must be seen as a cross-cutting issue, and the voices of women and girls must be included in policy-setting at every level on all issues, not just those labelled “women’s issues”. Including women as leaders and decision makers empowers them not only as individuals, but as equal partners in a just, equitable and inclusive world. This will be possible only if women are as equally empowered as men in all areas of their lives.

Access to education for women and girls

Gender stereotypes enforced by societies continue to create a world in which women and girls are barred from achieving their fullest potential. Accessing available, high-quality, safe, affordable and lifelong education is crucial to the empowerment of women and girls as individuals and as members of their communities. Literacy, sexual and reproductive health education, vocational skills and other forms of education and training all contribute to equitable employment and are key to improving the lives of women and girls. A lifelong approach to education must remain as a prominent issue in any new development agenda.

These core areas of concern for Soroptimists are still as present today as they were 20 years ago. They must not be present in 15 years’ time. The Beijing Platform for Action and the post-2015 development agenda need to cohere in order for gender inequality in all its forms to be brought to an end.

The global review process provides an opportunity for civil society to remind Member States that when they are negotiating the new development agenda, they are not just talking about language, they are talking about people. Gaps between ratification and implementation need to be closed. International agreement cannot be in words only. It must be enacted.

To this end, proper monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be introduced, and all collected data must be disaggregated by sex. This would ensure that progress and current challenges in achieving gender equality can be properly exposed and better solutions provided.

The year 2015 will see renewed focus on agreeing and achieving a development agenda that puts people at its centre. To do this, the voices of women and girls across the world must be listened to and their needs and opinions incorporated into that development agenda. Therefore, this review is a critical resource for Member States, as it provides a platform for women and girls. It is possible to overcome the structural and social barriers of gender inequality. At this juncture, the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action requires concrete action to make a difference to the lives of women and girls. Soroptimists call, therefore, on member Governments to take action to educate, empower and enable women and girls. We must all continue to look at the world through women's eyes.
