

APPENDIX S

Report on the 51st Congress of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for the Standing Committee by the Rev Canon Doris Clements - April 2007

It was an honour to be invited to represent Ireland at UNCSW, as the Anglican Consultative Delegate Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and also as the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) Link. I thank The Primate and the Standing Committee for sanctioning my appointment. I also thank Helen Wangusa, the newly appointed Anglican Observer to the UN, under whose office we gathered, and the Anglican Women's Empowerment (AWE) who funded the trip. As I was a late nominee I had little time to prepare for such an experience! This made my first few days very exhausting, coping with all the terminology, UN rules and regulations, orientation, advocacy training and hundreds of new faces and names to learn. About 7000 people attended the Congress, between Government delegates from over 180 countries and NGO's from all over the world. The Anglican delegation (ACC) of more than 80 women and 11 teenage girls, from 34 countries of the worldwide Anglican Communion, was the largest non-governmental representation (NGO) present. This year the theme of the Commission was "*The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child*". And it was the first time that girls attended a UN congress on the Status of Women.

I have never worked so hard at a conference as I did at the UN! Because the Episcopal Church, AWE, ACC and IAWN were so involved with us it was like attending two conferences at the same time. My day began at 6.30am and usually ended at 8.30-9pm, Saturdays and Sundays included! UN-related work took place from 8am to 6pm and then ACC, AWE and IAWN related activities, discussions, reporting, took place between 6pm and 9pm. Worship played a big role in my two weeks and it was interesting to experience different formats. I began each weekday with Morning Worship in the UN Chapel and was honoured to be asked to plan and lead worship with our two Welsh ACC/IAWN Representatives on March 1st, St David's Day. ACC had been asked to lead on two mornings and other Christian NGO's led on other mornings. I didn't always attend the evening meditation in the ECC chapel at 6.15pm. However, our opening Eucharist in the Episcopal Church Centre Chapel was very inspirational. The Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefforts Schori, preached and celebrated. So too were the two Sunday services that I attended ...one was in a wealthy middle-class area in Manhattan, St Bartholomew's, and the other in a predominately coloured area of Brooklyn, St Mark's. Both churches were packed, the singing wonderful and in the Brooklyn church, the congregational participation an eye-opener for me! We also had an 'event' in Holy Trinity Church, Wall St, a dinner hosted by the Suffragan Bishop of New York Diocese for the ACC/IAWN delegates in St Andrew's church Hall, Harlem and I visited St Paul's church where the firemen and other helpers rested and were fed during 9/11. So a variety of churches viewed!

The morning debriefings of NGOs at the UN were useful as we learned about some of the Parallel Events (organised by NGO's) due to take place on the day. These were numerous, took place all during the day and were very interesting. There were also opportunities at them to participate. Some of the Parallel Events were entitled '*Working*

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to change Girls Lives from the ground up. *The role of Young People in the Rebuilding of Iraq*. *Women on the Edge*. *Global Campaign to combat Child Pornography*. *Role of Men and Boys in achieving Gender Equality*. *Rural Women and Violence against Girls*. *The Importance of Mothers to the Girl Child*. *Female Infanticide*. *Violence against Girls in Togo, Ghana and Haiti*, *Working at the Grassroots in Rural Africa to eliminate FGM*. It was difficult to decide which to attend! I mostly attended some of those that covered domestic violence as I had decided that that was where my interest would lie.

The UN Plenary Sessions were held from 10am-1pm, and 3pm-6pm where keynote speakers and government delegates made statements. Expert Keynote Papers included *'Girl-Children in vulnerable situations'*, *'From the kitchen to the classroom'*, *'The impact of harmful traditional practices on the girl child'*, *'Counting invisible workers-girls in domestic activities within their homes'*, *'Teacher identities and empowerment of girls against sexual violence'*, *'The girl child in armed conflict...the violation of girls' human rights'*. Our own Mr. Frank Fahey, TD, Minister of State in the Dept. of Justice and Equality, gave a well-received statement about the situation in Ireland. He admitted that there are 'significant gender inequalities' once women/girls have completed their education, in pay and in decision-making roles! The Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at the UN, in her opening statement, reminded delegates that the Convention of same had been ratified by 185 countries and that these countries were obliged to 'ensure the practical realization of the principle of gender equality'. The new Deputy Secretary-General of the UN emphasised the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and stated that the involvement of men and boys was paramount in order to change stereotypical attitudes and behaviour. Ms. Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF claimed that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without addressing violence against girls and women as 'this hinders the social and economic progress in nations'. These statements were echoed throughout the Congress and indeed by the Anglican women in their discussions and final statement.

I usually attended the morning Plenary Sessions and the afternoon Parallel Events, so by the time I got to the ACC/IAWN sessions at 7pm I was almost 'brain-dead'!

I met some wonderful people - of all faiths, colour and creed! They were all advocating for basic human rights for women and girls. They were all highly educated and erudite. Those I spoke to, whether from Africa, India, Australia, China, the Americas or Europe, all had a determination to do something about the inequality and violence against women. The three Muslim Medical Doctors from Egypt, the Trade Union Members from Eastern Europe, the lawyers from Pakistan and China, the psychologist from Africa, the Commanche from the Indian Reservation, the 16 year-old 'Restavek' (ex-slave!) from Haiti, the 14 year-old from Togo, the Norwegian involved in 'Heifer International', all had a common cause- equal educational and work opportunities, better home life, less violence and more government enforcement of UN Conventions.

We heard from and met many Anglican women dedicated to their church and to the advancement of women - the Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefforts Schori, a wonderful speaker, preacher and very inspirational and yet gentle and kind; Rev. Margaret Rose,

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Director of Women's Ministries in the ECC; Amanda Akes, the very patient staff member from the ECC office who organized our accommodation and funding; Ann Skamp, an Australian and Chairperson of the Steering Committee for our delegation; Virginia Davies, a fund-raiser for AWE who hosted a dinner for us in her penthouse suite; Phoebe Griswold, wife of the recently retired Presiding Bishop, whose commitment to increasing the voice of women throughout the Anglican Communion led to the founding of AWE; Kay Meyers, the US President of the Episcopal Church Women; Ruth Choi, the ACC delegate from Sth Korea and the World President of GFS; Phyllis Gomaz, the Provincial President of the MU in the USA; and of course all the ACC/IAWN delegates from around the Anglican Communion.

There were men at the Congress too! Jonathan Crooms, from the UN office of the Presbyterian Church, noted that the active involvement of men and boys, starting at family and community levels, was vital in order to change attitudes that condone, and practices that sanction, discrimination and violence against women and girls. Rev Roger Schmidt, a German belonging to the Lutheran World Federation, said that although the focus at the Commission on the Status of Women was on women and girls it was important to raise the problems of men and boys too. They needed to be informed and included in discussions.

I managed to meet our Irish Government delegates, Alan Gibbons, the permanent representative to the UN in the Irish Mission and Pauline Moreau from the Dept of Justice and Equality. She has promised me substantial Government funding if I wish to raise awareness of domestic violence in the community. This I hope to do, whether as a Mothers' Union (MU) member, a Church of Ireland member or as an individual! A few days before I travelled to New York, as All-Ireland Co-Ordinator of the MU Faith and Policy Unit, I had been informed of the rape of two MU members, in their own homes, in Ireland, in recent months, and was frustrated that we in the MU can do little to help such victims. Both had been 'ashamed' to report these violations. I was also told about a domestic violence situation, in a Church of Ireland home, where the media was most unhelpful. If I can get support from MU and the Church then Ms Moreau's offer of funding will help to raise awareness of domestic violence, hopefully encourage victims to seek help, and progress some of the Beijing Millennium Development Goals and the UN Convention policies, here in Ireland.

As ACC/IAWN delegates we had little contact with the MU delegation of four this year. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they stayed in a different hotel, ours being too expensive for Mary Sumner House to fund! Two of these were from England, one from Africa and one from the West Indies, three of them being Trustees. As there was a shortage of staff in MSH before Christmas, there was no time to write a submission to the UN. Hence no statement or presentation by them. However, over 20 of the ACC/IAWN delegates were very active MU members in their own countries. The MU provides a 'ready-made' network for IAWN in particular, and MU policies and concerns with family life ensure that the MDG's are being implemented rather than discussed. I hope to use my involvement in the MU to inform others about what I have heard and learned at the UN and I have already given a short presentation to the All-Ireland Council.

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At the end of our time together, the ACC and IAWN delegates put together a statement to present to the UN for consideration. This included the role of the Church in the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls. We also wrote a statement to present to our Provincial Primates. This I have already done and I understand that it was well-received. As Dr. Jane Williams, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, has said, “Women united could bring about much of the healing needed throughout the Church”. In 2005, the ACC received and adopted Resolution 13/31, and asked that all Standing Committees in the Anglican Communion identify ways to implement the Millennium Development Goals. As the delegates to UNCSW 2007, we were asked to insure that ACC 13/31 has been implemented in our own countries. I have already completed a questionnaire about this and will be asked to complete another in July. I will have some questions for the Standing Committee then regarding a Women’s desk in Church House, and equality representation on all our Church committees, at local, diocesan and National levels!

Many times during those days in New York, I thought how true Kofi Annan’s (the retired UN Secretary General) words are... “Women are the last undeveloped resource on this planet”. Perhaps, when the world sees its way to *eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child* then this ‘undeveloped resource’ will be developed and used to improve life for all throughout the world. In the words of our statement to the UN, I was ‘proud to represent our Church, privileged to be part of the UNCSW and humbled by the opportunity to gather with women of all faith and spiritual traditions’.

A marvellous experience and opportunity, greatly appreciated and, hopefully, I will make good use out of it all.

In conclusion, I would recommend that Church House/The Primate respond as soon as possible to the ACC’s invitation to send an ACC and or IAWN delegate to UNCSW next year. This will enable the committee at the UN, in the Episcopal Church Centre and IAWN to plan funding and accommodation, to debrief and enrol delegates and it will provide the delegate with time to research, prepare and book flights!