

**APPENDIX L**

**50<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (UNCSW)**

From 27 February until 10 March, 117 women came together in New York to form the Anglican Consultative Council's (ACC) delegation at the 50<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). Of all the NGOs attending the conference, the ACC delegation was, by far the largest, being made up of 67 women from every province in the Anglican Communion and 50 women from ECUSA.

Since 1995, the agenda of the UNCSW has been an assessment of the progress of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BpfA). The two themes of the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCSW were:

- enhanced participation in development, education, health and work
- equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Each day, the UN session consisted of countries outlining the progress made regarding women's rights. Rosy pictures were painted and statistics given to back these up. The UN delegate to the Holy See was one of the few speakers to mention the rights women should have. She spoke about the contribution women make to society in different categories in the work place, or in the home. She spoke about respecting elderly women, emphasising the importance of recognising and celebrating their achievements at an earlier age.

Issues covered by other UN delegates included:

- gender mainstreaming as a multisexual issue (China)
- parental leave for fathers (Iceland)
- personal security, poverty reduction strategies, decision makers (Austria)
- use of NGOs to carry out development programmes (Cuba)
- women's issues as family issues (Angola)
- HIV / AIDS and its consequences (Namibia)
- women's access to education and technology (Ghana)

It was interesting to see that those who understood the UN system best could use it to their own advantage. On one occasion, proceedings were suspended because some members stated that their delegations were tied up elsewhere in the UN with Economic Talks: even though they represented a few countries only, the Chair decided to suspend proceedings for an unspecified period. On another occasion, USA and Japan decided that the NGOs should not be allowed to hear some discussion and we were instructed to leave. Several delegations thought this should not be allowed but the room was cleared of NGOs, nevertheless.

NGO Parallel/Side Events were many and varied covering a broad spectrum of women's issues. All NGOs, 160 in total, took the opportunity to inform and to provoke discussions. Because there were several happening at the one time in the UN Church

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Building, it was possible to flit from one to the next until an interesting, relevant session was found. The ACC held one on 'Women's Leadership: partnering Faith and Finance' which had nothing to do with Finance but a lot to do with Faith and finding one's inner resources. A Craft Fair was held in the UN Church Centre. It was an opportunity to buy gifts for home as well as supporting and encouraging women in small industries in the developing world. Pashminas joined leatherwork, bags, jewellery and more and both customer and seller was content with the result. The session held by the Mothers' Union was simple in presentation but caught the imagination. 'Bound together, knot tied down' demonstrated how poverty, lack of education, shortage of health facilities affected a family. The ensuing discussion was so engrossing that a number of the ACC members were late for the Ash Wednesday Eucharist.

Worship formed an important part of the time. 'I rise, I rise and I rise again' was the name given to the Devotional Booklet used each morning for Ecumenical Worship at 8 am in the UN Church Centre. Each service contained contributions of prayers, poems, reflections and commentaries from women of different countries. On Women's World Day of Prayer, the Mothers' Union members led the International Service devised by the women of South Africa.

On Ash Wednesday, a Eucharist was held at the Church of the Good Shepherd. The Preacher was the Secretary General of the ACC, Canon Ken Kearon. On Sunday 5 March, the ACC delegates along with the ECUSA delegates attended Eucharist in Trinity Church, Wall Street, where the celebrant was the Presiding Bishop of ECUSA, the Most Rev. Frank T Griswold III and the Preacher was the Rev Canon Anne Mallonee, Vicar of Trinity Church.

In 815 Second Avenue, the home of ECUSA, there is a daily Eucharist at 12.10pm at which all are welcome to attend. As some of the early morning meetings coincided with the Ecumenical Worship, some ACC delegates preferred to attend this daily Eucharist.

The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) Resolution 13/31, calling for equal participation of women in decision-making, was discussed in depth and the importance of implementing this resolution was reinforced. The Closing Statement of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) Delegation to the 50<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNCSW (2006) is included at the end of this report.

On several evenings, IAWN gathered and stories were shared. In countries in Africa, women experience many hardships due to war where rape is a common weapon: violence towards women is rampant: education for women is not considered as women stay at home to work: women's health problems are neglected: property rights for women are non-existent. In Pakistan, Christians suffer discrimination: churches have armed police guards when worship is in progress; advancement in work is hindered for Christians: the construction of new church buildings is forbidden. In Palestine, communities suffer because of the wall which has been built by the Israelis: families are separated: pregnant women cannot get through to maternity hospitals to deliver their babies: residents are separated from their workplaces and shops.

There were many other stories exchanged at breaks during the day. Every day, I heard stories of the practical assistance given by the Mothers' Union. The Literacy and Development Programme in Burundi, Malawi and the Sudan stands out. This programme

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is provided for men and women and has destroyed some of the prejudices against women. Health and counselling services were also mentioned. For many of the women from Africa, there is magic to the sound of ‘Mothers’ Union’ and ‘Mary Sumner House’. At this point, I would like to state that I am not, nor have I ever been, a member of Mothers’ Union.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Archdeacon Tai, the ACC Observer at the UN, for the invitation and to Mrs. Phoebe Griswold, Chairman of AWE who made all the arrangements and fundraised to ensure that there was no expense to the delegates or to their churches. Lastly, I would like to thank the many members of ECUSA who made all of the ACC delegates welcome and assured us that they appreciated our presence.

Joan M Bruton

### **Notes on Terms used**

#### **Anglican Women’s Empowerment (AWE)**

Women of the Anglican Communion gathered together, compelled by the gospel to speak and advocate for the dignity of every human being in our churches and the world:

- by participating as Anglican Consultative Council delegates at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) through the Office of the Anglican Observer to the UN
- by creating a network of Anglican women (International Anglican Women’s Network or IAWN) whose mission is to link Anglican women worldwide through communication and prayer; to ensure that the needs of women are heard; and to advocate change for women’s voices and agenda through the Anglican Communion
- by being a catalyst for connecting women globally through a shared sense of purpose, exchanging and creating information, learning constantly; paying attention to the results of our efforts as we work toward realising God’s mission

Mrs Phoebe Griswold is a Founding Member and inspiration behind AWE. She headed the committee who raised the funding to bring women representatives of all the 78 Provinces of the Anglican Communion to the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCSW. One of the major sources of funding was Trinity Trust, Trinity Church, Wall Street.

#### **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)**

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) was established as a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (EcoSoc) in 1946 to prepare recommendations and reports to the Council on promoting women’s rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. The Commission also makes recommendations to the Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women’s rights.

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In 2006, the UNCSW celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the beginning, it met every 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Hence, 2006 is the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

#### **Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)**

In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women meeting in Beijing, the UNCSW adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). This declaration stated its “determination to advance the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity.” It identifies critical areas of concern, “poverty, healthcare, violence against women, armed conflict...” The implementation of the BpfA is also one of the “Ways Forward” in the IAWN’s mission statement. Women’s rights are listed as the first priority for the Office of the Anglican Observer at the United Nations. The present holder of the office is Archdeacon Taimalelagi Fagamalama Tuatuagaloa-Matalavea (usually known as Archdeacon Tai). Her term finishes this summer.

Since 1995, the agenda of the UNCSW has been an assessment of the progress of the implementation of the BpfA.