

A Statement from Anglican Delegates to the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

This year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was focused on the priority theme: *the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS*. The Anglican Delegates at CSW 53 worked hard to ensure that they took part in all aspects of the two week programme. They were delegates representing the Anglican Communion and supported by Anglican Women's Empowerment (AWE) and by a worship framework which in itself was challenging and sustaining.

The delegates in reporting to their provinces recognize the progress which has occurred in many countries. The number of women in decision making roles has increased and girls' access to education has improved. The delegation learned about innovative services for those living with HIV/AIDS; those involving faith communities, including Anglican churches, were of particular interest.

While we focused on areas of success, there were multiple examples of gender inequality that led the Anglican delegation at CSW to voice considerable concerns. Of special concern was the slow implementation of the MDGs, their relation to gender equality and the resulting increased suffering of women and girls. This is further exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We recognize that women and girls are overwhelmingly the caregivers in areas of high HIV prevalence. We especially note that girls leave school and are being deprived of education as they act as caregivers for ill parents or orphaned siblings. Women find themselves forced to choose between working to support their families and caring for infected family members at home. Support services are often limited, and offered by women in the community who are under similar strains themselves. Some formal programmes exist to target aid to these women but rarely include them in decision making, and often continue to 'employ' them as volunteers.

It is recognized that the financial crisis which is affecting the Global Economy will affect women to a greater extent than men. This crisis is an opportunity to involve women as equal participants in decision making, and to ensure gender perspectives in financial decisions. This requires vigilance on the part of governments, civil society and the church in targeting funds to women.

The clear statement made at a plenary session by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon that 3 million girls are still undergoing female genital mutilation each year requires urgent further action by all concerned. Multiple presentations highlighted the association of this, other acts of violence against women and girls, and the spread of HIV. The lack of sexual and reproductive rights and education puts women and girls at increased risk of HIV and in some areas of the world married women are at highest risk. Innovative prevention measures are desperately needed. The vulnerability of women and girls in areas of armed conflict and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is an area of deep alarm. The delegates also recognize the challenges faced by migrant and indigenous women and girls; work is required throughout the world to support and empower them.

It is evident that gender stereotyping is a major hindrance in moving ahead and now needs to be addressed by clear action throughout the world. Work must be done with men and boys as well as women and girls to address harmful societal norms and practices. We ask churches across the Anglican Communion to examine how they can champion the equality of men and boys, and women and girls particularly with regard to caregiving.

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