

Report to Anglican Consultative Council On the Participation of Anglicans at Beijing+5 June 2000

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The United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly: Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century.

5-9 June 2000 New York, USA

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS), 5 to 9 June 2000, was held to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (NFLS) and the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), and to set targets for the future. Each member nation was asked to report on the actions taken since 1995 on upholding and promoting the status of women. These were summarized into an outcome document (prior to 5 June) which the UN delegates discussed in detail during the Special Session.

In many of the nations, women studied the report of their country and wrote a critique. These, too, were summarized and published as the "NGO Alternative Global Report." These data were used by the NGOs to lobby delegates, delegations, and caucuses in an attempt to strengthen the final document.

The Anglican Communion has Observer status at the United Nations and is in consultative status with ECOSOC (the UN Economic and Social Council). The interim Anglican Observer is the Right Rev. Herbert A. Donovan, Jr.

The Anglican NGO delegation had three members:

Ann Smith, United States

Dr. Pauline Muchina, Kenya

The Rev. Canon Alice Medcof, Canada

Many other Anglican women were present, as delegates, as members of delegations, and as members of a variety of NGOs. Each had her own responsibility and focus.

Smith, Muchina and Medcof went specifically as women of faith. They linked with other women in two caucuses:

Ecumenical Women 2000 Plus is comprised of

- Church Women United
- General Board of Global Ministries
- Lutheran World Federation
- Presbyterian United Nations Office
- National Council of Churches of Christ

- World Young Women's Christian Association
- Episcopal UN Office

Religion Counts, as international inter-faith group with members from:

- Ecumenical Women 2000 Plus
- Roman Catholic
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist

The two caucuses, Ecumenical Women 2000 Plus and Religion Counts co-sponsored an event each day from 1:15 to 2:30 p.m. in the Chapel of the United Nations Church Center, attracting many women.

At the United Nations itself, the ACC was given two passes, which were shared by Smith, Muchina, and Medcof, who were able, thereby, to observe the Special Session at work and attend NGO briefings.

Here are some highlights:

Domestic Violence

As a result of pressure from many sources, the subject of domestic violence is commonly known. When domestic violence was named in various paragraphs, there was very little resistance compared to 1995. With satisfaction, it is noted that "honour killings" was specifically named in 130b, together with the call for national legislation and other measures.

Deletion of Water Quality and Sustainable Food Production

One paragraph on the environment, number 106b, was deleted. The original wording was:

"Reorient environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms to incorporate a gender perspective so that all governments in cooperation with civil society begin monitoring and informing women on water quality, and support women farmers with education and training in sustainable food production, particularly organic."

The Environmental Caucus sees the loss of wording regarding water quality and sustainable food production as very grave.

Role of Religion

Paragraph 132c generated a lot of discussion and was referred to a small group for negotiation. It states (all suggested phrases included):

"Encourage a greater appreciation for the central role that religion, spirituality and belief play in the lives of women and men, in the way they live and in the aspirations they have for the future. Respect and promote the right of women and men to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Protect and promote women's rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as inalienable rights which must be universally enjoyed."

That women be able to worship god, freely, is a contentious issue.

Brief History of UN Women's Conferences from 1975 to 2000 From the International Women's Tribune Center

In 1995 nearly 6,000 official delegates from 189 countries and over 30,000 women gathered in Beijing united in their desire to achieve equality, development and peace for all women. The Fourth World Conference on Women resulted in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (PFA) which were adopted unanimously by government representatives. The Declaration and the PFA built on the agreements reached at the previous World Conferences for Women:

- World Plan of Action, Mexico City, 1975
- A Programme for Action, Copenhagen, 1980
- Forward Looking Strategies, Nairobi, 1985

The PFA constituted a powerful plan for empowering women and achieving gender equality. It defined a set of [strategic objectives](#) and spelled out actions to be taken by national governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to remove obstacles to the advancement of women in twelve critical areas. In addition, Beijing was the first global conference in which women's issues were explicitly linked to human rights--the PFA mentions "rights" approximately 500 times and includes human rights as one of the twelve Critical Areas of Concern. With this new legal authority women activists left Beijing full of optimism, re-energized and determined to lobby their governments and the international community to make sure the Platform for Action would be implemented quickly and effectively.

Assessing Progress Five Years after Beijing

Beijing+5 gives us a chance to assess the work of the last 5 years and has begun an important discussion about the need for targets and indicators to measure what progress has been made. Targets make progress visible and measurable and they allow activists to monitor change--or lack thereof. the majority of existing targets for women's progress relate only to health and education--hardly sufficient to examine all areas of women's lives. Using the few measures that we have available to us, what progress have we made?

What do the Indicators Show?

So far, the results are in from more than 100 countries which have responded to a questionnaire requesting information about the implementation of national action plans. Despite a few isolated examples where women's lives have been improved, in most cases progress has been slowed and in some cases, governments have even moved backwards.

Women in only six countries have achieved "equality" using the three composite indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment selected by the UN indicator framework:

- Approximate gender equality in secondary school enrollment
- At least a 30 percent share of seats for women in parliaments or legislatures; and
- An approximate share of nearly 50 percent of paid employment in the non-agricultural sector for women.

The national reports, supplemented by other studies also reveal:

- Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor--a situation often referred to as the feminization of poverty.

Globalization and Poverty

Structural adjustment policies required for World Bank loans and economic globalization affect women more than men. Removing local banks from the decision-making process for the allocation of credit gives big corporations easier access to loans and impedes small businesses (micro-enterprises) from getting loans. These small businesses are often the sites for women's economic participation.

Donor nations have been unable to meet commitments to increase development assistance.

Further structural adjustment policies have forced governments to reduce spending on social welfare eliminating an important source of support for single mothers with young families and the disabled or elderly. Government cuts have also decreased the level of state-provided health care affecting the availability of reproductive health care and education and maternity care.

Women's Participation in Power and Decision-Making

In Beijing, governments endorsed the goal that 30 percent of decision-making positions should be held by women by the year 2000. While 22 countries have adopted laws and policies to advance equal participation of women in decision-making, this goal has not been attained.

Only in the Nordic countries, where women constitute 50 percent or more of elected officials, have women achieved any real results. Meanwhile, women's presence in parliaments in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, which

averaged 30 percent under communism, has fallen drastically during political transition, and is down to 3 percent in many of the newly-independent states.

World-wide, women are just 11.7 percent of parliamentarians and at the United Nations itself, only 8 of 180 Ambassadors to the UN are women.

Violence against Women

Despite the widespread adoption of laws against domestic violence, women continue to fear violence in their homes, in their communities and in conflict zones.