

Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

2012 • Issue I



Photo by Laura Lee, Presbyterian Women

Presbyterian Women learned during its 2011 Global Exchange trip to India just how serious the challenges are that face women there. By joining the PW-NGO effort, members of PW can strengthen efforts to make equality a reality for women everywhere.

Every year, thousands of members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—both faith-based and not—gather during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW). Groups exert tremendous amounts of energy to influence commission outcome documents, and to enforce the resolutions and conventions on which UN member states have agreed. These advocates work to impact political processes, to tell their stories and to share their lives.

Background*

The United Nations (UN), chartered in 1945, affirms in its preamble “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.” During the first UN meeting, a subcommission on the status of women was created under the Commission on Human Rights, now the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and soon after became a full-

fledged commission. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has met annually since its founding to ensure women’s equality and promote women’s rights. Since the beginning, CSW has had a close relationship with NGOs, such as Presbyterian Women, Inc. Many NGO contributions have been incorporated into CSW’s agreed conclusions and resolutions.

In 2006, the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT/PW) sent representatives to the 50th session of CSW. On recommendation from the representatives, the CCT began an effort to continue and to increase PW presence at CSW meetings, with the goal of adding our strong voice to those of other NGOs advocating for justice for girls and women.

The CCT’s Justice and Peace Committee calls on all Presbyterian women to consider participating in the annual CSW meeting. PW has advocated for the justice work of the United Nations since the UN’s founding, when equality for women with men was claimed. By joining the PW-NGO effort, members of PW can strengthen efforts to make equality a reality for women everywhere.

CSW 56: Women in Rural Areas

This year, the CSW theme was “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.” In discussion about the 56th CSW, CCT Synod Representative Shirley Novak, from the Synod of Alaska/Northwest noted that the phrasing “rural women” limited our view of who women living in rural areas are. From a rural area herself, Shirley noted that there is much more that defines women anywhere than simply where they are from. Using the words “rural women” to define a group of people contributes to the oppression they experience. Because of this awareness, Presbyterian delegates to the CSW made a special effort to change the official phrasing from “rural women”

to “women living in rural areas,” or “women from rural areas.” Three women from rural areas in the United States were given scholarship funding to attend and share their expertise with the Presbyterian delegation. You can watch them tell their stories on YouTube:

http://youtu.be/6RFZ2O_-3mA

<http://youtu.be/X5HoVR45qDI>

<http://youtu.be/pko9yILKvcU>

How Do Presbyterians Relate?

Presbyterian Women and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participate in the UN CSW through the PC(USA)'s office of Presbyterian Ministry at the UN (PMUN). According to the PC(USA) website, “the Presbyterian UN Office is one way in which the church responds to Christ’s call to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free.” For more information, visit <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/un>.

The CCT’s Justice and Peace Committee and PW’s churchwide moderator keep CSW before PW at the national level and work to include women throughout the organization. Meagan Manas, PW justice and peace program specialist, staffs the Justice and Peace Committee and supports this national effort.

Ecumenical Women

Through the PC(USA)'s UN office and through Presbyterian Women’s Justice and Peace staff specialist, PW and the PC(USA) are part of a coalition called Ecumenical Women at the United Nations. Ecumenical Women is an international coalition of church denominations and ecumenical organizations that have status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Grounded in faith and a commitment to global justice, Ecumenical Women trains and empowers an expanding network to advocate for gender equality at the United Nations.

Ecumenical Women not only provides a network of collaborators that amplifies all of our voices, it also provides critical theological reflection on how faith and justice interact, and why we advocate at the UN as people of faith. Through Ecumenical Women, arrangements are made for worship services that occur every morning during the two weeks of CSW. At these worship services, daily debriefings and group dinners, women experience traditions from around the world, get to know one another and strategize about how best to advocate. For more information, visit www.ecumenicalwomen.org.

Personal Reflections from UN CSW 56

Throughout CSW, Presbyterian Women contributed to a blog with Ecumenical Women at the United Nations.

Personal reflections posted by Presbyterian women at www.ecumenicalwomen.org

(Click on “Previous Entries” to read more.)

I’ve been increasingly dismayed about the state of the world—until today. Four thousand women are gathered in and around the United Nations, this week and next, to address the challenges faced by rural women from around the world. Yesterday Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile, reported on the first year of UN-Women, the new organization which she heads. Her words were appreciated, but she was challenged by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee of Liberia to connect faster with civil society, with women on the ground. Leymah expressed the impatience that rural women from Egypt and Japan to Colombia and Gambia are feeling. They are determined to break through the barriers that have held them in poverty, invisibility, violence and fear. They are on the move, and they will be heard!

This morning, I listened to a discussion by a woman from rural Panama who is fighting to keep the rainforest in Darien from being destroyed by tea plantations. These monocrop plantations are pushing local farmers off the land. Next, four women who are connected through Women’s Federation for World Peace, spoke about projects they have designed in Mongolia, Haiti, Philippines, and Cameroon. The first speaker, an American living in Oregon, connected with a woman from Mongolia who lives in her town. Together, they have started a scholarship fund that has allowed 20 women from rural Mongolia to go to university. I look forward to learning more and more about what is working in the days ahead.

—Cathy Surgenor
Presbyterian pastor

As I sat in the Women, Spirituality and Transformative Leadership workshop, I was reminded of the power of influence and expectation. Two mentees described their introduction to the Women of Spirit and Faith group. No one asked them for their credentials. They were not required to pay their dues first before they could have a voice that was valued within the larger circle. Rather, they were accepted as leaders with gifts to bring to the larger group. They were surprised by this reception, as many of us would be if we all had this experience. We know the unwritten rules of advancement, acceptance and gaining respect in our society. The ethos of the group brought a question to mind: What happens when we imagine “that we can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens us?” What happens when we internalize that “the one who calls us also equips us for that in which we are called?” I left that experience inspired to see people already equipped, already in process, and already blessed. In the days ahead, I will look to see what difference this will make as I encounter others. I will consider more deeply what will happen within me if I assume this new position of the faith.

—SanDawna Gaulman Ashley
Associate for gender and racial justice, GAMC

Biblical/Theological Dimensions

Luke 18:1–8a, The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to the judge and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while the judge refused; but later thought, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And Jesus said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to the chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.”**

Questions for Discussion

1. This parable is introduced as a parable about how we need to “pray always and not lose heart.” What does prayer look like in your life? How might we consider branching out to *prayerful action*?
2. If we watched the stubborn widow continually returning to the unjust judge, what would we think of her?
3. Where are the places in our world that we regard as lost causes? Have we lost heart and stopped returning to pester the unjust judges?
4. More often than not, advocacy looks like repetitive, sometimes hopeless, trips to pester the unjust judge. What advocacy does Jesus call you to today?



UN Women/Ryan Brown

Angelique Kidjo performs in a concert aimed at raising global awareness of and support for global efforts to end female genital mutilation. The concert was held in the UN General Assembly Hall during UN CSW 56.

How You Can Get Involved

- **Connect with the office of Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations (PMUN).**

PMUN hosts regular seminars on many topics for visiting groups—bring your PW group to a seminar experience in New York City. You also can follow PMUN on Facebook and on the blog they share with the PC(USA) Presbyterian Peacemaking Program: <http://presbyterian.typepad.com/peacemaking>.

- **Engage in Beijing Circles.**

The Beijing Platform for Action, the document resulting from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, lifts up 12 areas where progress remains to be made for the equality, health and full involvement of women in all societies. Beijing Circles provides resources for exploring these 12 areas and taking action in your own community. Find out more at <http://beijingcircles.wordpress.com/about>.

- **Consider sending a woman in your synod to the 57th CSW.**

Start planning now for late February/early March 2013! The theme for CSW 57 is “Violence Against Women.” Start saving and raising money now to send your representative! Contact Meagan Manas at meagan.manas@pcusa.org for more information.

- **Visit UN Women online.**

By clicking on www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/csw, you can read more about this year’s CSW theme, the agreed conclusions and more.

- **Check out Ecumenical Women’s resources.**

To learn more about CSW, the UN as a whole, and what advocacy means in the context of faith, download Ecumenical Women’s advocacy guide, *Faith at the UN, Gender in the Church*, available at http://ecumenicalwomen.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/ew_report_single_pages.pdf.

Notes

*Excerpted from Louise Davidson, “UN Commission on the Status of Women Provides Another Avenue for Advocacy,” *Justice & Peace Links*, 2007:3.

**Scripture quotation from *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*, copyright ©1995 by Oxford University Press. *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* is an adaptation of the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright © 1989 by the division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.