

**INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES**

IAW website: <http://www.womenalliance.org>

**Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities
Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales**

IAW NEWSLETTER – SPECIAL CSW Edition -March 2007



Equal Rights

Dear IAW members,

This Special Newsletter is about statements and reports by two IAW representatives. IAW President Rosy Weiss reports on the Commission on the Status of Women and Hélène Sackstein provides the IAW statement on Maternal Mortality made during the 4th session of the Human Rights Council.

Your special attention is also drawn to the IAW side event, organised by the All India Women's Conference at CSW, on "Missing Girls".

CSW- REPORT of IAW President Rosy Weiss,

**Commission on the Status of Women
51st Session, 26 February-9 March 2007**

On the agenda:

In accordance with its new methods of work, the Commission had before it the new Priority theme: "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" and the Review theme: "The role of men and boys in the elimination of discrimination against women and girls" (which was dealt with by the Commission's 48th session in 2004).

Chairperson's Conclusions

Agreed conclusions were negotiated among governments on the priority theme; the outcome of the review theme, in conformity with the multi-year programme of work, was presented in the form of Chairperson's Conclusions. (All documents can be found on the CSW website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm>)

Personal remarks:

a) "Of more than 100 million children not in school, the majority were girls. Out of more than 800 million adults who could not read, the majority were women. Violence against women and girls continued unabated in every continent, country and culture". (SG Ban Ki-moon in his opening statement.)

Yet, the most disturbing issue for me, personally, was the most under documented fact that against the background of ill treatment of all sorts (including traditional practices and ritual violence and torture), malnourishment, illiteracy, forced marriage, the little girl is not even allowed to begin her life.

It seems to me that she is just seen as garbage in some regions of this world, something to throw away as unwanted and superfluous. This is going to have serious social, cultural and economic consequences, including the threat to national security.

These consequences are already being felt in South-East Asia, the Caucasus and North Africa. Yet, it is to be feared that they will not lead to more girl-friendly societies, instead they are likely to increase the already intolerable amount of violence against women and the girl child. (See the IAW side event on the missing girl below!) It is up to us women's organisations to see to it that solutions do not only cater for the needs of men only!

Girls were present at this session of the CSW, they had the right to speak out during CSW sessions and particular space had been reserved to them during the various events. The girls tent was situated outside the UN premises (I guess for security reasons), just behind the security tent representing the

official NGO entrance. This, of course, was not the ideal way to accommodate the girls' wishes and needs – and they did speak out!

In conclusion, this CSW session turned out to be one of the most interesting for several years. Responding – as I guess – to the pressure felt in the course of the on-going reform of the UN gender architecture (see below), DAW had organised high-level and expert discussions on various important themes with interesting speakers and, thanks to its new working methods, was able to trigger several innovative approaches. The Commission attracted 1658 NGO representatives; 24 oral statements were made.

International Alliance of Women

c) Generally speaking, the visibility of IAW was – once again - increased by our presence in the various regional and thematic linkages, discussion groups, by means of joint petitions and statements as well as individual initiatives.

Personally speaking, I took the opportunity to contact as many NGO representatives as possible in order to explore ways and means to strengthen ties and enhance co-operation. As it is, the NGO Committees on the Status of Women, established at UN headquarters in New York, Geneva and Vienna are determined to work more closely in the future.

Encouraging contacts have been made with the President of the International Council of Women and CEDAW expert Anamah Tan, with All-China Women's Federation, the International Federation of Women Lawyers, the International Association of Women Judges as well as the representative of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of ILO.

IAW representatives

d) IAW representatives: Rosy Weiss, President, Lyda Verstegen, Executive Vice-President (Vrouwenbelangen), Marilyn La Tona and Inga Jónsdóttir, Board members, Susanne Riveles, Peace Commission Convenor, Manorama Bawa, President AIWC, Rakesch Dhawan, AIWC treasurer, Sudha Acharya, AIWC permanent representative N.Y., Anje Wiersinga, Netherlands, Monique Bouaziz, Danielle Levy, Renée Gérard, individual members, France, Mrs. Norma Lozano and Dr. Evelyn Natividad from the Women's Right Movement of the Philippines. IAW participants held two meetings at Kay's new library space at the basement of the Church Centre and came together for one friendly luncheon at the UN Staff Café.

Two successful IAW side events

1. On violence against the girl child in work situations: challenges and responses, co-sponsored by the International Federation of Women Lawyers and the New York Women's Bar Association. Speakers included Anita Amorim, ILO, Judith Gordon, ICW and Denise Scotto, IFWL.

2. On the missing girls, co-sponsored by All India Women's Conference. Speakers included Dr. Manorama Bawa, President of All-India Women's Conference and Zhang Caixia from the Department of International Affairs of the All-China Women's Federation.

The event on the missing girls dealt with such painful issues as prenatal sex selection, sex-selective abortion and female infanticide – ironically called “harmful practices” in the finally withdrawn draft resolution sponsored by the Republic of Korea and the United States of America. (see my remarks at the end of this report).

A third side event by IAW and IFWL

A third side event organised by the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers was co-sponsored by IAW and dealt with the **CRC and CEDAW**, legal mechanisms for eliminating discrimination and violence against girls.

Speakers included Denise Scotto, Vice-Chair of the N.Y. NGO CSW, Jonathan Todres from the New York University School of Law and Dubravka Simonovic, CEDAW Expert.

IAW signed Open Letters

Together with other NGOs the IAW signed - an open letter from the NGO linkage caucus regarding women's gender equality architecture at the UN; a petition for a 5th women's world conference and wrote letters to the UNSG, the President of the UNGA, the members and observers of the CSW and the Iranian Mission at the UN protesting against the imprisonment of Iranian women during a peaceful demonstration outside the Revolutionary Court in Tehran.

Other Issues at CSW

The special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women

The Commission did not discuss the issue.

Gender parity within the UN system:

There was no significant progress.

Approved draft resolutions

- * Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (recorded vote of 40 in favour to 2 against, Canada and US, with no abstentions);
- * the need to increase HIV/AIDS protection for women and girls;
- * ending female genital mutilation;
- * curbing the practice of forced and early marriages. (After several changes made to the latter by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union, the draft's main sponsor, the US, removed itself from the list of sponsors.)
- * In an explanation of position **the US**, while reaffirming the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, stated that these documents did not create legally binding obligations under international law, in particular no recognition of the right to abortion.

Withdrawn resolutions

- * The Commission withdrew a proposed text on the elimination of harmful practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. (All draft resolutions can be found on the website of the CSW).

The Document

- * **The agreed conclusions on the Commission's main theme were adopted** and the document will be sent to the event on a "World fit for Children".

The 52nd session of CSW 2008

- * The Commission adopted the provisional agenda for its 52nd session with the following themes:

- 1. Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women;*
- 2. Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace building as review topic.*

- * As to the new theme, the President, and as such the IAW, is a member of the respective NGO preparatory committee.

- * At the first meeting of its 52nd session, the Commission elected Olivier Belle from Belgium as chairperson, En-na Park (Korea), Ara Margarian (Armenia) and Julio Peralta (Paraguay) as its vice-chairpersons. The first vice-chairperson from the African Group was left pending.

A PAINFUL ISSUE - MISSING GIRLS

The event on the missing girls dealt with such painful issues as prenatal sex selection, sex-selective abortion and female infanticide.

From Newsweek Health, January 2007:

"For years Rukmini Devi helped couples choose the sex of their children. But in her decades of work, she never once used PGD (preimplantation genetic diagnosis). The province she worked has few ultrasound machines and fewer fertility labs; many of its towns lack even basic health clinics, and

most couples don't know their children's gender before birth. But boys are a treasured commodity there, and if a couple can't choose a child's sex prenatally, they can see a *dai* like Devi. For 80 cents, says Devi, who is now retired, a *dai* will help a woman give birth. For 80 cents more, she will take a newborn girl, hold her upside down by the waist and "give a sharp jerk", snapping the spinal cord. She will then declare the infant stillborn. "Many couples insist that we get rid of the baby girl at birth", Devi says. "What can we do?"

The cumulative impact of the killing of females was demonstrated by Nobel prize-winner Amartya Sen's groundbreaking work on the "missing Woman". Her results indicated that male-to-female ratios in China, South Asia and North Africa were higher than normal. And she concluded that if these regions had normal sex ratios, there would be more than 60 million more females alive today.

With prenatal sex selection, sex-selective abortion and female infanticide we have to deal with the less documented forms of violence against the girl child. They now make their appearance in population statistics rather than in statistics of criminal courts, and it is to be feared that the demographic aspect of the problem will get most of the attention.

It is up to women's organisations such as the International Alliance of Women to point to the threats to national security and to an increase in violence against women and girls as a result of sex selection and female infanticide. Bachelors already try to purchase wives (from 2001 to 2003 China's police had freed more than 42,000 kidnapped women and children).

A country's stability is threatened by the growing number of surplus – very often low-status – males. The pressure on prostitution is likely to rise.

As in the majority of other forms of violence against women and girls, possible solutions are obvious and cannot be stressed too often: These are ***the three E's: education, empowerment of women and eradication of poverty.***

A selection from the report on CSW by IAW President Rosy Weiss

The Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking

26 March 2007 – The United Nations, Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) jointly launched The Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, choosing the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to fight a modern scourge that may entrap up to 27 million people at any given time in a market valued at \$32 billion.

"Slavery is a booming international trade, less obvious than 200 years ago for sure, but all around us," UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa told a ceremony in London, which is also the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire.

"Perhaps we simply prefer to close our eyes to it, as many law-abiding citizens buy the products and the services produced on the cheap by slaves," he added, noting that most victims of this modern-day slavery are women and young girls, many of whom are forced into prostitution or otherwise exploited sexually.

Trafficked men are found in fields, mines and quarries, or in other dirty and dangerous working conditions. Boys and girls are trafficked into conditions of child labour, within a diverse group of industries, such as textiles, fishing or agriculture.

Because human trafficking is a crime, and therefore clandestine, accurate numbers are not available. Many believe 2.5 million, the number given by international experts for those held in bondage through physical and/or psychological force at any one time, represents the tip of a much greater iceberg.

The UN International Labour Organization (ILO) calculates the minimum number of people in forced labour at 12.3 million, while research by Free the Slaves, a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in the United States, puts the number at 27 million.

Big Business

Human trafficking has become big business. The UN and other experts estimate the total market value

of illicit human trafficking at \$32 billion, about \$10 billion derived from the initial “sale” of individuals, with the remainder representing the estimated profits from the activities or goods produced by the victims of this barbaric crime.

Human trafficking is a global problem, which UNODC believes has reached epidemic proportions over the past decade. No country is immune, whether as a source, a destination or a transit point for victims of human trafficking.

The countries involved

A recent UNODC report called ‘Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns’ identifies Thailand, China, Nigeria, Albania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine among the countries that are the greatest sources of trafficked persons. Thailand, Japan, Israel, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Turkey and the US are cited as the most common destinations. Overall people from 127 countries are exploited in 137 nations.

The UN Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, in effect since December 2003, makes human trafficking a crime, and has been ratified by more than 110 countries, but participating governments and their criminal justice systems have not effectively curbed the practice. Few criminals are convicted, and most victims never receive help; on the contrary, many victims themselves are convicted of offences such as illegal entry or unlawful residence.

A massive Human Rights Catastrophe: Maternal Mortality

In his excellent report on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, Mr. Hunt [IS HE the Special Rapporteur](#) challenges human rights civil society organizations and health professionals alike to pay more attention to economic, social and cultural rights in general and the right to health in particular. In short, the right to health needs a boost.

One shocking example of this general lack of interest underscored in the report is maternal mortality. The report notes that each year there are 500.000 maternal deaths, or one every minute; 95% of these are in Africa and Asia and most could be avoided. The burden of this scourge falls disproportionately on women in low income countries and on women living in poverty in affluent countries.

There is no single cause of death and disability for men between the ages of 15 and 44 that is close to this magnitude and maternal mortality reveals sharp discrepancies between men and women in their enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health rights.

Maternal mortality exposes profound and multiple inequalities - global ethnic and gender.

It’s not just a health issue, argues the report, it is a human rights issue which violates women’s rights to life, health, non-discrimination.

Since 1980, the WG on Enforced Disappearances has taken up about 50.000 while cases there have been well over 10 million maternal deaths during the same period.

The report encourages human rights NGOs to campaign against maternal mortality and other egregious health and human rights issues just as vigorously as they taken up the death penalty, torture, or disappearances. This massive human rights catastrophe, has not attracted the attention it deserves. NGOs have now duly taken note of the challenge.

Fighting maternal mortality could become a powerful vehicle for strengthening health systems accessible to all, thus providing a concrete entry point for the implementation of the full scope of the right to health and all related rights on which it is dependant such as the rights to drinking water, to food, to housing, to privacy, to education, to information, to healthy occupational and environmental conditions, etc.

It is also hoped that a concerted effort to fight maternal mortality will serve as an equally powerful vehicle to better integrate the human rights of women in the implementation of the full range of economic social and cultural rights for all special groups on the Council’s agenda, such as minorities, indigenous peoples, children, migrants, etc. and as indicator of this integration in the work of the Council?

The link to the report: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/4session/A.HRC.4.28.pdf> (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable

standard of physical and mental health, Paul Hunt). His previous reports can also be found on www.ohchr.org/treatybodies/ESCR
Hélène Sackstein – Statement made during the 4th session of the Human Rights Council, 12 -30 March 2007, Geneva.

Note

We are sending this Newsletter as an attachment, saved in Word 97.
Please be so kind to advise Pat Richardson if you know of any IAW members or affiliate/associate organisations with an e-mail address, so we can mail them this Newsletter too.

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