SPECIAL EDITION

POVERTY

at the center of this year's CSW at the United Nations in New York
EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

A whole journal full of interesting reports about this year’s Commission on the Status of Women is in front of you – the 2024 special issue is here!

Since 1947, the International Alliance of Women has had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council – the highest status a non-governmental organization can have at the UN. We are proud to participate with our delegates in this important conference every year.

In this year’s edition, 17 delegates report on their impressions and experiences. Task Force member Sibylle von Heydebrand tells us in an interview how this year’s participation was prepared, what the focus of the commission was – and according to which particular aspect she herself put together her program.

I wish you an interesting read!

Kerstin Löffler
IWNEWS EDITOR

P.S. Our next issue will be about Women & Peace. Let me know if you would like to contribute an article, just send me an e-mail at iawiwn@womenalliance.org

Many thanks to Alison Brown and Kathleen Montgomery for proofreading the texts, as I am not a native English speaker. And to editorial designer Katrin Hoffmann, who (again) gave us her time and turned this issue into a solid magazine!
**PRESIDENT’S LETTER**

**Alison Brown**

**IAW President**

Raising the status of women would better the quality of life for their families — not just their children, their menfolk, too — and in so doing would improve the wellbeing of the entire society around them.

We tend to think of the annual CSW Sessions as a single event. Everybody gets together and shares their expertise and works out the best solutions for the many world-wide problems that prevent women from achieving their full human potential. Raising the status of women would better the quality of life for their families — not just their children, their menfolk, too — and in so doing would improve the wellbeing of the entire society around them. This is a worthy goal and the attempt is still worth the effort, but over the decades, the structure of this global occasion has mutated and, instead of a single effort, the Sessions have become trifurcated: Deliberations, Side Events and Parallel Events.

In the original Sessions during which governments come to “Agreed Conclusions”, there are mammoth disagreements about words and phrases. In the early days, International Non-Governmental Organizations would be sitting right in the room, on the edges, of course, but where the action was. They knew what was happening and could lobby at the source. As the decades have rolled on, a couple of things have happened to change this collaborative effort.

First, not all governments are pleased to have representatives of the population figuratively “breathing down their necks”. They appear to believe that they are the government (whether democratically chosen or, as is getting to be more often the case, though force) and therefore they always know best for their citizens. Slowly they moved the NGOs from the back rows, to the corridors and finally to other floors. The dislocation is getting more extreme. The much anticipated “Summit of the Future” with the goal of UN reform and revitalization of CSW will be held in New York City in September. NGO activity is confined to a conference in Nairobi in the spring — apparently no option for in-person representation in September is foreseen.

The other factor is that, not only has the number of nation states massively increased, but the number of NGOs with Status at the UN has grown exponentially. There is simply not enough room for all the women on every level seeking to share their expertise to be within the limited space of the UN campus. Now the realm of NGOs is in buildings outside the strictly controlled perimeter of the United Nations. At least in New York, NGOs are in the same city at the same time and some governments even invite their countrywomen to regular briefings. At the legendary Beijing Women’s Conference, the NGOs were established (banished?) in Huairou, miles away from all decision making.

Some countries do have civil-society organizations with whom they cooperate, whom they bring into the sacred UN spaces in a series of CSW-related Side Events. This is the second structure of a modern CSW Session. In a stand-alone program, countries which are proud of their work in the topic under discussion (always some aspect of women’s rights under CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals) present programs about their accomplishments in tackling thorny issues like unpaid or under-paid women’s work, structural impediments to women’s access to means of production, even women’s ownership of the fruits of their own labor. Two weeks can be profitably spent sampling the governments’ wares. Not all Side Events present viewpoints that feminists would consider progress, but regressive States proclaim what they consider beneficial regarding the status of women in their territories. Interesting publications are presented (sometimes financed by the States) and an enormous amount of useful information is exchanged — which might even make it into the outcomes of the primary CSW conference.

Finally, we come to the Parallel Universe where the grassroots activists vie for eyes and ears. Ideally these would be eyes and ears of their government representatives, but the bulk of the audience is sister activists (with the occasional brother). All this activity (informative, enlightening and fascinating) keeps NGOs busy and out of the government’s way as they lumber along towards “Conclusions” which mostly consist of conclusions agreed upon in sessions past. Progress is maddeningly slow — I would say glacial, but global warming is showing us how fast glaciers can “move” when the conditions change! Perhaps the image of the receding glacier is apt for what is happening at CSW sessions in the recent past. Like the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland, NGOs at CSW find themselves running as fast as they can to stay in the same place — relieved that we are not yet faced with the prospect of “living backwards”.

“States proclaim what they consider beneficial regarding the status of women in their territories.”

My thanks go out to the members of NGO-CSW who, on a shoestring budget, arrange venues for the thousands of NGO women to meet, exchange knowledge and ideas. We get inspiration from regions of the world we often are not sufficiently acquainted with. One may profitably spend the entire fortnight of CSW just in the parallel universe of Parallel Events, in person or virtual, awed by amazing activists whose creative solutions to the problems their compatriots face should goad governments into support and emulation. As it is, we (NGOs) will try to emulate our clever sisters, in so far as the solutions can be tailored to fit other cultural and social circumstances.

Lastly, I must confess, this year was only my second Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), but not my second experience as an IAW representative at the UN. I spent several years at the UN in Vienna, some of those as head of delegation. As I look at the situation at UN Headquarters in March, I begin to think that the CSW sessions are a victim of their own success and show signs of collapsing under the great weight of the many attendees. The adoption of Agreed Conclusions — the original focus of CSW — is really an afterthought when no breakthroughs occur. Brilliance takes place among the vibrant NGO community, year after year.

Alison Brown is IAW’s president. She is a member of our Commission on Protection of Privacy/GDPR.

*President’s Letter*
Ending child marriage is an emergent issue

High quality public infrastructures must be built to end discrimination

Single motherhood and single parent poverty is another emergent topic. Most of the single parent households are headed by women. The situation is very critical in many countries. We need to overcome discrimination. High quality public infrastructures must be built. Women have lower retirement savings. Without professional support nothing is possible. There is devastating poverty due to the rise of cost of living. Empowering single parent families must absolutely be supported.

As a last point: patriarchy… Manifestation of a gender based discrimination is present day by day. Women’s equal and full participation in society is important. International law can accelerate it. Individual responsibility can make a global standard and can change the traditional patriarchy approach. Gender parity gains importance.

The battle of women and girls will never end. Let’s stand by each other and fight together for women!

The 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), the UN’s largest annual meeting on gender equality and the empowerment of women, took place in New York from March 11 to 22 this year. The priority theme of this session was “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by tackling poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective”.

A day before CSW68, the NGO CSW68 Consultation Day was held. It is a significant event that provided a platform for engaging discussions, insights from experts, and thought-provoking sessions.

Currently, 10.3 per cent of women live in extreme poverty, and they are poorer than men. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, progress towards ending poverty must be 26 times faster. The solutions to ending women’s poverty are widely recognized: investing in policies and programs that address gender inequalities and strengthen women’s self-reliance.

A key outcome of CSW68 was the recognition that sovereign debt restricts the fiscal space for investments in women and girls living in poverty, and debt relief can thus play an important role in achieving the SDGs.

We hope governments should consider the agreed conclusions as a blueprint for action that guides concrete domestic actions.
The topic of male values (masculinity) in the education of boys must be reintroduced in order to raise awareness of stereotypical patterns.

One visible success is the inclusion of the younger generation. 18 year old Toniyah made a statement: As African-American she belongs to Black Girl Rising Inc. (Ohio) which accompanies black girls and focuses on their mental and emotional health in a research project. These want to change the narrative that black voices are not important enough to be heard. So Toniyah can say: “We are the youth, so therefore we are the future.”

Cultural or (female) human right?

An African woman reported a “pushback”: In 2015, Gambia banned female circumcision by law and with a punishment up to three years imprisonment. Now politicians supported a controversial bill to lift this ban. Gambia would be the first country in the world to remove legal protection from such a harmful practice for millions of women and girls.

The (male) petitioner argues that the ban violates the rights of citizens and genital circumcision or genital mutilation represents an ancient culture and religion. It is internationally classified as a harmful practice and contradicts universal human rights.

Then Gambia organized a side event on “Empowering Women and Girls by addressing Poverty through Sexual and Gender Based Violence financing in the Gambia”. The reports focused on measures against violence such as the establishment of “Shelter”. The issue of violence against women and girls was described in general terms, without including FGM. No possible change in the law was mentioned. One journalist asked directly and the official answer was: this bill would not be presented to parliament. It remains open whether women in the Gambia will sufficiently oppose such a bill.

Could this example indicate a new trend? Or will it create opposing forces and help deepen the issue of cultural and religious identity?

Intergenerational and intersectional learning
Solutions must be guided by specific contextual needs

At the Commission on the Status of Women, UN campaign „Génération Égalité“ organized an event focused on feminist financing, sharing innovative solutions for advancing gender quality, economic justice and women’s rights.

I was inspired to see a session I attended where a significant commitment from the women’s movement was used as a tool for change, through the sharing of women’s leadership improvement project initiatives, to build peace, economic justice, acting in concert to optimize the use of resources.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of intergenerational and intersectional learning, particularly on the part of the women’s movement, which has become a tool for providing technical and financial resources to directly support women human rights defenders, civil society and youth groups. In so doing, ensure that the lived experiences of women and girls are at the forefront. And that solutions are guided by specific contextual needs.

My thanks to the President and the IAW’s Task Force in the hope that the next session will foster renewed common energy, increasing the wisdom of the Board and its Task Force through continued efforts to integrate concerted action among delegates at side events. I recommend that the IAW advocate funding for our projects. However, we look forward to the strengthening of the UN through the possible election of a woman as its head.

Ilyassou Diallo is a member of our commission on education as well as president of RAPEP, the African Network of Women in Fishing.
CSW68
Commission on the Status of Women

Child poverty is a country’s choice

Girls are unlikely to climb out of poverty while they continue to do much more unpaid work than boys

More than two billion people around the world will head to voting booths in 2024 and chart the course for our collective future. Will voters push back against the erosion of human rights for women and girls and elect women to leadership positions? Will we ring in Beijing +30 with resounding worldwide support for women and girls?

CSW68 highlighted ways that women and girls are diminished, overlooked, harassed, and abused, all in the name of maintaining the status quo arising from age-old patriarchy norms and religious doctrine.

A key moment during CSW68 came with the release of the UN Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy. The strategy calls for transformative actions to decrease poverty and provide social protections to 70% of women. It calls for investment in the care economy, gender responsive budgeting, reform of the social protection systems for self-employed women and protections against women’s vulnerabilities across the entire life cycle. The African Development Bank claimed that digital money leads to women’s accountability and effectiveness. The Oxfam representative from the Philippines concluded with the refrain “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

At the end of the event the Director of Social Policy for UNICEF focused on adolescent girls and reaffirmed its initiative “We Deserve Better.” The initiative leads with the premise that child poverty is a country’s choice and girls are unlikely to climb out of poverty while they continue to do much more unpaid work than boys.

Political will is necessary to make transformative change. So, get to the polls and vote for women’s human rights.

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Young women featured in CSW side events through the week. At the Scottish Women’s Convention Child Poverty session, I shared a panel with two students. They emphasized childcare workers’ underpayment, yet positive Scots’ advances with free school meals, housing providing a secure environment for children, and tax credits for every child (not simply the first two as in England). One gap is no enforcement of court-ordered child support, where I could provide overseas information.

Australia’s Child Support Scheme has a government agency chasing non-custodial parents’ (non)payments. Existing since the 1980s, it has flaws; however, it is worth investigating for possible implementation elsewhere. Child poverty lies here – women’s poverty: women remain child-responsible, taking breaks from jobs, with overall sex-based discrimination creating gross disparities between women’s and men’s economic position, underpinning child poverty.

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Valuable Ideas for Guiding Young Women into Leadership

I have six granddaughters, each with aspirations to build a better world. Several CSW sessions showcased ways to encourage our young women to become impactful leaders. Below I highlight two especially worthwhile sessions with this theme in mind.

**Daughters as Change Agents: The Power of Mothers, Grandmothers, and Aunts**
Organized by Dr Donna Cill, founder of Mother-Daughter Connect and Dr Mamatha Achanta, founder of Tharuni.

The session featured commentary from five leaders in the field:
- Jerrie Ueberle, founder and president of Global Interactions and World Academy for the Future of Women, stressed the importance of teaching girls to have a voice, including telling their mothers what future they envision for themselves, as well as expressing gratitude in “Honoring Mothers” events.
- Jacqueline Leduc, UN Rep from Make Mothers Matter, emphasized the role of mothers in breaking stereotypes, including those represented by toys as a “miniature version of society.” She also addressed the unrecognized unpaid work done by mothers, noting the “3R” solution: Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute.
- Dr LaShawnda Pittman, founder of Real Black Grandmothers and author of Grandmothering While Black, in which she reports on the power of grandmothers as role models preparing their grandchildren for the future, and as safety nets—often the last line of defense in households with absent parents.
- Karen Chambers, editor of Sisters from AARP, described her digital newsletter for older women to share stories about their experiences, enabling mothers and grandmothers to describe how they maintained a sense of self when facing barriers.
- Dr Pamela Maraldo, CEO of Girls Inc of New York City, spoke of the value of mentoring and role models, along with opportunities for girls to gain confidence through training in public speaking.

**Empowering Futures: Advancing Leadership of Women and Youth Through Education**
Organized by Dr KG Vijayalekshmy, head of Sandepani School in Kerala, India, described as a stress-free environment, nurturing young girls as essential agents of change by promoting advocacy and activism, along with critical thinking about stereotypes and biases. These goals are accomplished by opportunities for students to participate in decision-making and to develop communication skills. The school also teaches kindness, patience, gratitude, and goodness—considered essential qualities of leadership.

Comments by Alison Brown, IAW President, highlighted the need for families to fully support girls’ education, with high expectations and ensuring that young girls have adequate rest, sleep, and food, as well as a space to study. She also cautioned about the need to foster—and document—opportunities for girls to participate in the classroom on an equal footing with boys.

**Financing for Gender Equality, Ending Poverty, Ending Colonialisation and War**

*Again a challenge for us – The Agreed Conclusions of the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations*

With thousands of civil society attendees from around the globe, CSW has grown into an annual UN Women World Conference. Attendees participated in person in New York City and virtually. Especially useful for virtual attendees was the virtual lounge with eleven chat rooms. Virtual attendees also appreciated the improved and easier-to-access NGO/CSW platform.

IAW’s co-sponsored event, Cities for CEDAW, showcased the successful story of this project, which many hope will lead to ratification of CEDAW by the United States.

The decision to make the Beijing+30 evaluation the priority issue for CSW68 promises to bring us together globally, including opportunities to network more closely with women in Saudi Arabia.

The outcome of CSW68, the Agreed Conclusions, represents both advances and setbacks I was active in advocacy consulting for Germany and the EU on sections pertaining to Gender Budgeting and Financing for Gender Equality. Several paragraphs in the Agreed Conclusions are addressing this and the main economic root causes of poverty, including unpaid work unequally shared between women and men for a caring economy.

Unfortunately, many parts of the Agreed Conclusions repeat content from previous years and fail to adequately address the impact of war, colonialization, and debt release. Also, while Paragraph 54 contains a list of dozens of actions that relevant stakeholders can take to integrate a gender perspective into financing for development commitments and poverty reduction for women and girls, many of these actions are imprecise and are lacking sufficient details of the methodology and to achieve effective impact.

Marion Böker is an Executive Committee member of the Board of the European Women’s Lobby as well as an IAW Board member. She is a member of IAW’s Commission on Peace.
INTERVIEW
with Sibylle von Heydebrand

A Window into the World

Our main representative at the UN in Geneva and task force member Sibylle von Heydebrand shares insights from the United Nations’ largest Women’s Conference

Sibylle, the IAW was represented at the CSW this year with 27 delegates. What was the composition of the delegation?

Of the 27 delegates, 19 delegates were on site, 3 were online and 5 were IAW members of member organizations or individu-
als attending with their organization’s badge. IAW delegates from four continents participated from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. A total of around 5,000 repre-
sentatives of civil society took part in the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

5,000 participants, that’s quite a lot!

This was a record: in addition to those attending in person, there were numerous online participants. The pandemic has taught us to meet online. We must not harbor any illusions: It is difficult for delegates from developing countries to attend in person. On the one hand, there are financial hurdles, and on the other, it is often difficult to obtain a visa for the USA.

As a member of the task force, you were closely involved in the preparations. What is the task force’s job?

The task force has an advisory function. Its aim is to structure the IAW’s participation in the CSW. The task force for the CSW was initiated by Yvonne Pokropek, Camilla Wagner and myself. The idea was born at the 67th session of the CSW in March 2023 when we realized that a better structuring of the IAW’s presence at the CSW was necessary from our point of view. We have described the process over the course of the year leading up to CSW68. This document was approved at the Board meeting in September 2023.

What is the delegates’ task?

In addition to monitoring the events on site or online, the delegates undertook to deal with the topic of CSW68, poverty, in advance, to take part in briefing and debriefing sessions and to report on their experiences in the social media and in a written report. In this issue of International Women’s News, the delegates report on numerous official meetings, side events and parallel events. They reflect the wide variety of topics and solutions that were discussed at CSW68.

What is the delegates’ working method?

The delegates are basically free to choose the focal points and events they wish to attend. Self-organization and personal responsibility are very important. As the number of events increases every year, putting together a personal program is a growing challenge. There were 270 side events and more than 760 parallel events. For the next CSW, the task force plans to provide first-timers with a mentor to help them master the challenges of the CSW.

You took a critical look at your work after CSW68. What were the results?

The delegates expressed several points that could be improved, such as more on-site meetings of the team. The challenge here is to find a suitable room. The task force itself took a critical look at its work and revised the process description.

The priority theme of CSW68 was poverty. With what concerns and positions did the International Alliance of Women participate?

The position is set out in the written statement that the IAW submits to the CSW in advance. In its written statement, the IAW draws attention to the current “cost of living crisis” almost everywhere in the world, which is hitting women and their children particularly hard. The IAW’s priorities are therefore closing the gender pay and pension gap by introducing equal pay, the implementation of gender budgeting in all budgetary policies and (digital) education throughout the life course, including older women and women and girls with disabilities.

What is the IAW’s priority in its written statement regarding the review theme social protection systems?

The International Alliance of Women expresses concern at the low levels of birth registration among migrant women and girls, among others, and expresses further concern that all persons without birth registration may be more vulnerable to marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, violence, statelessness, exploitation and abuse.

What is the result of the CSW?

The result of the CSW are the Agreed Conclusions. The negotiations begin in the run-up to the CSW. NGOs such as the IAW will or should be invited by their governments to submit their proposals for amendments and additions to the so-called Zero Draft. Together with around 30 other NGOs, I attended the briefing meetings of the Swiss government and raised the issues mentioned by the IAW in its written statement. Negotiations on the final version take place during the CSW. Only government representatives take part in these, not NGOs.

How did the negotiations between the governments on the Agreed Conclusions proceed?

Due to the tense political climate, the negotiations were extremely difficult and polarized. Many countries would have liked even stronger wording on women’s rights and gender equality. In addition, this year’s negotiations were under severe time pressure due to the UN’s liquidity measures.

Are there any new topics that have found their way into the Agreed Conclusions?

Three important topics were newly included in the Agreed Conclusions: The impact of armed conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls, persistent inequalities such as economic inequality, racism, sexism and discrimination against different religious and social groups worldwide. The feminization of poverty due to gender stereotypes and the unequal burden of unpaid care work, the significant contribution of women and girls of African descent to the development of societies.

What are the takeaways from CSW68 for you?

Participating in the world’s largest gathering of civil society representatives, government officials, policy makers and experts to make progress on gender equality, discuss pressing issues and agree on actions to transform the lives of women and girls everywhere is a powerful inspiration.

What criteria do you personally use to choose what you take part in?

I am particularly interested in examples of best practice. I enjoy seeing how a particular problem has been solved positively elsewhere in the world - and what we can perhaps learn from elsewhere. In the past, for example, I have reported on Tanzania - how the construction of water pipes there has improved the education of girls and women because they no longer have to spend so much time fetching water. There are numerous good examples of how the challenges on the road to equality can be tackled, for example to distribute care work more fairly or to encourage more women to participate in politics or increase the proportion of women in parliaments.

Can you briefly describe for our readers how the CSW in New York works?

Briefly said, there are three types of events. The official United Nations events, side events organized by governments and parallel events, organized by civil society. The IAW successfully organized eight parallel events at CSW68.

You have been involved with the IAW for almost six years. How did you get involved?

I have been committed to women’s rights in Switzerland for many years, first at local, then regional and finally nationwide level. It was in this context that I met Ursula Nakamura-Stöcklin, who encouraged me to become a member of the IAW in the fall of 2018. I liked the fact that it is an international organiza-
tion and that you can talk to women from all over the world. That is also a nice aspect of the CSW in New York: I have met some women there every time for years, and even if I don’t trav-
el to Asia or Africa myself, such encounters are a window into the world of women and girls, especially the world of the most vulnerable, to whom the IAW gives a voice.

You are our main representative at the United Nations in Geneva and you have made it a priority to promote younger women within the IAW. Why is this so important to you?

I want to promote intergenerational dialogue and give younger and young women in particular a stronger voice. I am com-
mitt ed to ensuring that younger women are heard in the IAW - not only at the United Nations in Geneva, but in the IAW in general. We should ensure that the IAW’s bodies are made up of women from all generations. When we stand up for the rights of women and girls, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Our older members are the pioneers on whose shoulders we stand. We reach great heights by building on the achievements of our pio-
nering women. Let us learn from the pioneers, let the pioneers actively pass on their knowledge to the younger generation. This process can be expanded.

Let’s look to the future: the 69th session of the CSW will take place form March 10 to 21, 2023. The sixty-ninth session will focus on the review and evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Instead of Agreed Conclusions, there will be a Polit-
ical Declaration to be adopted on Day 1 of the CSW69. CSW69 should be marked by a stronger and more efficient involvement of NGOs and civil society. The Task Force already started its work.

Sibylle von Heydebrand is a IAW Board Member and our Main Repre-
sentative to the UN Geneva as well as Head of IAW’s Delegation to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York. She is a member of the CSW68 Task Force and chairs the CSW69 Task Force.
I was an IAW delegate to the 68th Meeting of the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in New York this past March. Since IANGEL’s mission is to harness the power of pro bono legal services to promote gender equality globally, we were in our element at CSW, and CSW68 did not disappoint.

On March 18th, 2024, IANGEL and Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) presented “Force Multiplier: How Global Networks and Intersectionality Fight Poverty and Inequality.” HBS panelists from Tunisia were HBS gender activist Mahassen Segni and Dr. Ramy Khouili, with Lawyers Without Borders. We were joined by Stella Odife of the Women’s Organization for Gender Issues in Nigeria, and Columbian lawyer Natalia Urzola moderated the lively discussion.

Mahassen and Ramy explained the importance of bringing an intersectional lens to the struggle for gender equality, and Stella provided a keen perspective on how global networks created power to effect change. I explained how global networks are a “force multiplier” – not just because of numbers, but because of what our networks do for each of us, on the inside.

When we connect with each other across borders, we learn, we support, and we inspire each other. We remind each other that the future we seek to build for our children is worth the struggle, and we each have within us the power to make a difference. The audience applauded our comments, and we all felt a warm bond from sharing this event with each other.

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I am so glad I made the journey across the US to be part of CSW68 in person. I am grateful to our HBS panelists who traveled from Tunisia to join us, to my indefatigable friend Stella, and wonderful Natalia. I look forward to CSW69, and a new dose of sisterhood, inspiration, and hope.

Other opportunities included the Town Hall, attended by the Secretary-General and Civil Society and an interactive dialogue with youth representatives. Other valuable events were a session with the World Academy, the CEDAW Challenge for Future Generations, Gender-Responsive Financing, Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs, Gender Equality and SDGs, and more.

It was a great learning experience that helped me to discover how to become more involved with IAW. One statement that stood out to me was: “We have spoken, we have data and narratives, and there’s a call to action and treaties signed — BUT, are we ready to act?”

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this delegation.

When we connect with each other across borders, we learn, we support, and we inspire each other.

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Women lead to peace

International Alliance of Women (IAW) delegation for the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) from March 11 to 22, 2024 at United Nations Headquarters, New York.

Over 7,000 delegates from across the globe attended the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) from March 11-22, 2024 at United Nations Headquarters, New York City. CSW is the largest global gathering of civil society representatives, government officials, policymakers, and experts, designed to review progress on gender equality, discuss pressing issues, and agree on actions to transform the lives of women and girls everywhere. This year’s priority theme was Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

A few takeaways for me include the experience of attending sessions with UN Secretary-General António Guterres: During the CSW68 opening session in the General Assembly Hall, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized the importance of women’s participation in peace building. “The facts are clear. Women lead to peace,” he said, calling for more funding and new policies to boost women’s participation and investment in women peace building.

In addition, the Secretary-General called for collaborative efforts to end poverty in all its dimensions, reiterating, “Let’s do it by investing in women and girls, betting on women and girls, and pushing for peace and dignity for women and girls everywhere.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres
The tragedy of poverty, shame and stigma is inextricably linked and cyclical. "A man who has gone even a week on bread and margarine is not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs," the profound quote of George Orwell acutely captures the essence of demeaning poverty in his thought provoking quote.

Unequal access to basic rights feeds a vicious cycle of disadvantage and exclusion. Poverty is intertwined with the risk of inadequate health care, a polluted environment, lack of access to safe water and sanitation.

Climate change has had a devastating impact in Zimbabwe; most water sources have dried up. In rural areas villagers have no option but to drink water from shallow wells and inevitably there has been a plethora of cholera reports and water-borne diseases. The scarcity of water has had an adverse effect on the girl child, without the precious liquid, poor menstrual health is on the rise, causing infections in the reproductive and urinary tracts.

Most youths are reluctant to seek specialized care fearing stigma and lack of confidentiality. Colleta*, who averred that she was a virgin, tearfully explained that after getting infected with HPV, she was not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs. The youths were reluctant to present themselves for medical services at such a young age. Given the predominately shaming and stigmatization of youths suffering from sexual or non-sexual diseases, the youths were reluctant to seek specialized care fearing stigma and lack of confidentiality. Colleta*, who averred that she was a virgin, tearfully explained that after getting infected with HPV, she was not a man any longer, only a belly with a few accessory organs.

In 2001 – 2006 the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) proposed equal participation of both women and men in decision making (Krook and True, 2012). In an effort to address gender inequality and remove gender based discrimination the Zimbabwean Government created the 1999 Nizaram-sanga Commission. It dismal failure.

According to Chabeya et al (2009) gender stereotypes continued due to restrictive laws, cultural diversities and practices, institutional barriers, as well as disproportionate access to quality education, healthcare, and resources.

Africa can benefit massively from creating opportunities for the institutionalization of women’s visible involvement in decision-making. The acceleration of sustainable developmental goals on the continent can create a myriad of opportunities. The governments should be instrumental in creating engagement strategies for the institutionalization of women’s visible involvement in decision-making at all levels.

To lift women out of poverty, there is a dire need for substantive representation of women in decision-making positions. International agencies can also play a huge role and making a tangible difference by continuing to support women’s organisations’ visible engagement in decision making.

*) Not her real name

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**Balancing Expectations and Experiences**

Town Hall Meeting with António Guterres was pinnacle of inspiration

Isn’t it ironic that the CSW68 discussed „poverty“ in one of the world’s most expensive cities? Attending such events requires time and money; making it difficult for those affected by poverty to participate. Did this fact actually receive mention anywhere?

Germany hosted the side event “Breaking the Single Parent Poverty Trap,” where panelists from different countries acknowledged this widespread challenge, particularly impacting women—mothers. Challenges such as systemic inertia, decision-makers’ reluctance, financial constraints, and misconceptions compounded the issue. Single parents also need financial stability to support their children effectively, yet there seems to be a lack of awareness of this need.

Another of Germany’s side events, „Agism & Poverty“, affirmed that single-parent poverty has lifelong effects on women. Additional factors discussed included inadequate education, wage gaps, divorce, inheritance denial, unpaid caregiving. Poverty in old age isn’t just about reduced consumption; it may result in problems like malnutrition, homelessness, limited healthcare access, decreased life expectancy. Surprisingly, only 1 suggested some simple ideas in the Q&A session, such as salary transparency or mandatory marriage contracts.


Nevertheless, the pinnacle of inspiration was the Town Hall Meeting with António Guterres, „Feminist in Chief“ (Sima Barhou’s quote). UN Secretary-General, renowned for his wisdom and dedication to gender equality and peace, captivated with his adeptness in articulating uncomfortable truths and choosing the appropriate words for any circumstance. His responses to unprepared questions showcased his competence, elevating the event to a memorable and enriching experience.

Is it astonishing that my doubts about the thematically and ecologically questionable trip have disappeared? I might reapply as a delegate.

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**Poverty, Shame and Stigma**

Climate change has had a devastating impact in Zimbabwe

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Building a Future Where Care is Valued and Shared

On a high-level Side Event on March 15, 2024, the Chair, Vice-Chair and members of the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW called for challenging stereotypical, traditional male and female roles, recognizing the economic value of care work and exploring models for its valuation and remuneration.

Leveraging CEDAW to Advance the Care Economy

Care work supports the economy and society, but is often undervalued and unrecognized. On average, women spend 2.8 hours more per day than men on unpaid care and domestic work. The predominant role of women in unpaid care work contributes significantly to their higher propensity to poverty.

Recognizing the Economic Value of Care Work

CEDAW plays a crucial role in combating unpaid care work, care systems and the care economy. CEDAW calls on states to ensure women’s equal access to employment opportunities, free from discrimination based on gender or family responsibilities. This underscores the need for policies and infrastructure that support women’s participation in the formal economy, such as affordable and accessible childcare and long-term care services.

Integrating the Care Economy in the Economic System

This requires recognizing the economic value of care work and exploring models for its valuation and remuneration. The experts called for adopting a paradigm-changing model and creating a new financial architecture by integrating the care economy in the economic system.

Challenge Stereotypical, Traditional Male and Female Roles

In addition, CEDAW promotes shared responsibility within families and communities for care tasks. This challenges traditional gender norms that disproportionately burden women with unpaid care work and advocates for the redistribution of care responsibilities between family members and the inclusion of men in caregiving. By promoting these principles, CEDAW contributes to building a sustainable and equitable care economy that values care work, supports caregivers and promotes gender equality.

High-Level Panel Discussion with CEDAW Experts

The panel discussion included among others CEDAW Chair Ana Pérez Narváez, Vice Chair Esther Eghobamien-Mshelia and members Nicole Ameline and Rangita De Silva de Alwis. The topic was Building a Future Where Care is Valued and Shared: Leveraging CEDAW to Advance the Care Economy. The opening speech was given by the Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Sami Balanced.

The Fight Against Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan

The seizure of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan has not only stripped women and girls of fundamental rights but established a regime of gender apartheid. This urgent issue, resonating with the CSW68’s focus on poverty, calls for a collective global response.

The Rise of Gender Apartheid in Post-2021 Afghanistan

Since August 2021, when the Taliban reclaimed power, Afghanistan has witnessed a stark regression of women’s rights, likened by experts to gender apartheid. The CSW68 side event “ Crimes Against Humanity in Afghanistan with a Gender Lens: Strengthening Global Coordination” urgently calls for an international response to this human rights crisis. The absence of educational opportunities for girls not only hinders personal growth but also limits the broader economic development of the community. This systemic disenfranchisement exacerbates existing inequalities, leaving women and girls vulnerable to cycles of poverty and exclusion.

Visual Recommendations: A Blueprint for Action

Recommendations, visualized in the graphic below, underscore the need for targeted actions. These include discouraging recognition of the Taliban, promoting the identification of gender-based persecution as apartheid, and advocating for justice through international courts. Such steps are vital in disrupting the impoverishment cycle perpetuated by the denial of education and economic opportunities.

Empowerment Through Global Coordination

The graphic also highlights the necessity for a platform supporting Afghan women and human rights defenders. These measures are critical to dismantle the structures supporting gender apartheid and to foster a global environment conducive to safeguarding human rights and alleviating poverty.

Conclusion: A Unified Stance Against Inequality

In conclusion, the call for action at the CSW68 side event, co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Afghanistan and Malta, and by Canada’s Feminist Forum for Afghanistan, ICAN (International Civil Society Action Network), Peace Direct and the Women’s Regional Network, represents a pivotal moment in the movement against gender inequality. It envisions a reformed legal framework that not only prosecutes gender apartheid but also recognizes its role in the broader context of poverty. The collective commitment to protect and empower Afghan women and girls is an acknowledgment that gender equality is integral to global development.
As UN representative for IAW and founder/co-director of the Cities for CEDAW History and Futures Project, I moderated an NGO CSW/NY/UN Women briefing on Beijing + 30, held on March 15 during CSW68.

Dr. Qi Shujuan, Director General of the All China Women’s Federation publication, Women in China, presented data showing the amazing progress Chinese women made. For example, the ACWF launched the Women’s Action for Scientific and Technological Innovation after the UN Fourth World Conference in 1995. This initiative encourages women entrepreneurs, medical workers and technicians to devote themselves to scientific and technological tasks, support emerging industries and tackling problems in technological research that hinder the country’s development.

Bandana Rana, CEDAW expert from Nepal, called for the CSW to reform and ensure that CEDAW is an integral agenda item every year. Esther Eghobamien-Mshelia, CEDAW expert from Nigeria, said that the Cities for CEDAW campaign that makes CEDAW a local ordinance should be replicated in all 189 countries that have already ratified the women’s human rights treaty.

The IAW moderates the NGO CSW/NY/UN Women briefing on Beijing + 30 and CEDAW

Chinese women made amazing progress

Female genital mutilation is still a big problem

Survivors talk about change during side event

Financing the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation was one shining exception during this year’s CSW for me. Even if forbidden, female genital mutilation is still a big problem not only in Africa, but also in Europe – in Sweden, our organisation, Fredrika Bremer-förbundet, could not afford to send us to CSW68 – neither our president nor me.

Otherwise, let me be honest, I found it difficult to follow digital events. Often because of the time difference but also because the other events I began following were of bad quality. I would have loved to follow CSW in person and was „prepared to my teeth“ to go, with a ticket in my hand. However, because of the backlash against women’s rights and equality we see today, also in Sweden, our organisation, Fredrika Bremer-förbundet, could not afford to send us to CSW68 – neither our president nor me.

So I had to follow my fellow IAW colleagues as well as the representatives from UN Women on Sweden on social media. Hopefully, I will find a way to participate in CSW69 in person.
Sumita Sanyal has passed

Her global outlook and advocacy extended beyond local borders

It is with profound sorrow that we share the passing of our cherished and esteemed Sumita Sanyal who departed for the heavenly abode on January 24th, 2024. Her legacy of compassion and dedication to the empowerment of women and children stands as a shining example for all. Sumita Sanyal served the Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association – an IAW member since 1986 – with unwavering commitment and distinction, holding various roles within the organization.

Commencing her journey with the Association in 2006, Sumita Sanyal's tenure as President was marked by remarkable progress and transformative leadership. Her stewardship continued until her untimely demise, during which she served as the esteemed Chairperson, guiding the Association with resilience and grace through all challenges and triumphs. The Saroj Nalini Dutt Association will forever cherish her invaluable contributions with profound gratitude and admiration.

Under Sumita Sanyal’s visionary leadership, significant advancements were made both at the Association’s headquarters and in the community of Mirpur. Renovation initiatives revitalized the aging infrastructure of the Sayanneh and Dinante old age homes, while groundbreaking projects, such as the Child Project and Income Generation initiative empowered village women and fostered sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, her efforts led to the establishment of a primary school in Mirpur, offering quality education at nominal fees, thus opening doors of opportunity for village children.

Sumita Sanyal’s global outlook and advocacy extended beyond local borders. Her active participation in the Area Conference of Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) in Kolkata underscored her commitment to international collaboration and shared goals. Furthermore, her instrumental role in organizing the International Alliance of Women Conference in Kolkata in 1996 showcased her dedication to fostering dialogue and exchange on a global scale. Her presence at the ACWW Conference in Greece further exemplified her unwavering commitment to the advancement of women’s rights and welfare worldwide.

In Sumita Sanyal’s passing, we mourn not only the loss of a remarkable leader but also a compassionate soul whose impact will be felt for generations to come. Her legacy of service and advocacy will continue to inspire us as we strive to carry forward her vision of a more equitable and just society.

Sumita Sanyal was the former President of our Associate Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association

SEPTEMBER

International Meeting in Bulgaria

Our International Meeting is approaching - we will gather from September 5-9 in Bankya, outside the Bulgarian capital, Sofia.

Bulgaria is home to our newest IAW member organisation, the Bulgarian Platform – European Women’s Lobby, and therefore we will be welcomed by European Women’s Lobby President, Ilana Balabanova.

At the International Meeting, the Board of the International Alliance of Women will meet with the leaders of Associate and Affiliate organisations to discuss the direction, plans and goals of the organisation’s members and their directions to their umbrella organisation. Afterwards, the Board meets to take actions guided by the advice received.

Looking back over the 120 years of International Alliance of Women, President Alison Brown will speak about the great potential of the Alliance as an international network, highlighting the IAW’s key achievements and future organisational and political development.

A central topic will be our Congress, which takes place every three years. Dr. K.G. Vijayalekshmy, Founder of IAW Affiliate Women Empowerment and Human Resource Development Centre of India, will invite us to the south of India in 2025, offering Thiruvananthapuram as venue of the XL Congress. In accordance with the Constitution the International Meeting will decide the theme and outline of that meeting.

A seminar on the tradition of women’s networking will be held with a roundtable featuring the two newest organisational members and a keynote address by Susan M. Brenll, judge in the Superior Court for the City and County of San Francisco, Co-Chair of the San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking, a network of over 50 government and law enforcement agencies, non-profit organizations and faith-based groups. Finally, Ursula Nakamura will present the status of our light-house project, “Water and Pads for School Girls”, which reaches girls through Affiliates and Associates in Africa and Asia.

But it’s not just about organisational matters, the opening programme is also impressive. Honorary President Rosy Weiss from Austria will be presenting her IAW memoir: Traveling in Friendship and Politics. Younger members of IAW will have the opportunity to interview her about her experiences as IAW UN representative and officer of our organisation.

And for those who want to take the opportunity to get to know Bulgaria better, we have organized a three-day tour of the country around Sofia after the meeting. See our website for more information.

We will of course report on everything afterwards!
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S NEWS is an open Forum for information and opinion on matters of importance to women. It is published by the International Alliance of Women. Items for publication in English should be sent to the Editor:
Kerstin Löfler, email: iawiwn@womenalliance.org
Individual membership of IAW includes an annual subscription to International Women's News.

You can easily make a payment directly to IAW bank account by using the online payment system on our website. To do so, please go to the website: www.womenalliance.org, choose JOIN US! MEMBERSHIP > Membership fee+Donation in the top menu and follow instructions.

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To avoid possible difficulties in the identification of the payment, we would be grateful if you could mention your name and purpose of payment in the subject of the transfer. Membership enquiries, change of address, and back numbers: contact the Membership Officer, Lene Pind, email: members@womenalliance.org

Les NOUVELLES FÉMINISTES INTERNATIONALES, publiées par l’Alliance Internationale des Femmes, constituent un forum ouvert pour l’information et l’opinion sur des question importantes pour les femmes. Les textes en français destinés à la publication dans les NFI doivent être envoyés à la rédactrice : Kerstin Löfler, email: iawiwn@womenalliance.org
Merci de choisir l’une de ces options pour envoyer votre cotisation.

Il est facile de faire un versement direct sur le compte de l'AIF en utilisant le système de paiement en ligne sur notre site Web. Pour cela merci de vous rendre sur le site : www.womanalliance.org et de choisir JOIN US! MEMBERSHIP Membership fee+Donation du menu en haut de la page et de suivre les instructions.


Afin d’éviter des problèmes d’identification du paiement nous vous serions reconnaissantes de bien vouloir mentionner votre nom, avec l’objet de votre transfert. Pour des informations concernant l’adhésion à l’AIF, pour informer des changements d’adresse, ou pour se procurer des vieux numéros particuliers, contacter l’Officier des adhérents, Lene Pind, email: members@womenalliance.org

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