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UNCSW: Elimination & Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women & Girls

By Revd Numia Tomoana



I am deeply grateful and humbled to the Women's Study Centre, our Archbishops, and the office of the General Secretary Michael Hughes, Marissa Alix and Heather Skilling for the once in a life time experience at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's 57th conference in New York. This year's theme was the Elimination and Prevention of All forms of Violence Against Women and Girls, I represented our Province. As many know, this trip was planned for last year's UN conference but my beloved father passed away a few days before my planned departure and so a year later, I boarded my flights three days after his first anniversary and the unveiling of his memorial stone, He Hura Kohatu. I knew he was by my side.

I arrived at JFK Airport two days early in order to acclimatise and release some anticipated New York endorphins. A good move as two days later, skates buckled, I joined with our ACC Delegation for a debrief dinner at their Hotel, Manhattan Hilton, three streets and one avenue from my Hotel, a nice brisk winters walk away. As most of us were first timers to UNCSW (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women), formal introductions, hellos, hugs, and soup full tum-

my's complete, we were briefed by Ann Skamp our CSW57 Leader from Australia, Beth Adamson (Anglican) member of UN Girls Working Group, and Rachel Char-

don our Anglican UN co-ordinator. Emphasis was on our role and the process at UNCSW, and our personal, group, country, time management in the next two weeks. Our ACC delegation consisted of women from Australia, Japan, Brazil, Peru, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Burundi, Scotland, England, Canada, USA, South Sudan, South Africa, Aotearoa Pacifica, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. With an NGO (non government organisation) Forum of up to sixty daily Parallel Events (at four different Church locations within one kilometre radius) to choose from, pace and taste seemed like wise advice. Week two, the parallel events dwindled to twenty or less per day as the UN member states prepared to reach the Agreed Conclusions.

Ecumenical Women (EW) Orientation Day

We were hosted by Salvation Army and the International Ecumenical Women Leaders. After a very invigorating worship of singing, praising, clapping and jiggling, Lakshmi Puri, Acting Head of UN Women, gave us a historical to present day overview of the UN and the function of CSW. We broke into groups and discussed sections of the EW draft recommendations for CSW57. To conclude the day over one hundred women and girls walked five blocks and two avenues in silence holding A4 pieces of paper with smoky, shadowy images of Christ on the cross symbolising the millions of women and girls who are abused and remain in the shadows. It was very powerful as heads turned, people stopped and sombrely stared. We walked to the Chapel for communion.

UNCSW Background

Since its inception in 1946, the UN Commission on the Status of Women meets annually to "evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies (recommendations) to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide." The primary outcome is a set of "agreed conclusions" (unlike last year's CSW56) which contain an analysis of the annual priority theme as well as concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society to implement at the international, national, regional and local levels. The first draft of the agreed conclusions is ready about one week before the meeting. The language and wording are discussed, debated, and decided upon during the second week of the Commission. In total, Ecumenical Women and other civil society participants have ten days to suggest language for governments to propose for discussion and inclusion in the final document.

Ecumenical Women is a delegation so large that our delegation works to ensure that the message of Ecumenical Women is included in the recommendations of all of the public caucuses. How was this managed? Well, during each CSW, Ecumenical Women targets specific governments to focus our advocacy message by preparing a letter for these governments and include our specific policy recommendations. This "package" is then faxed to the Mission of the Government and addressed to the Ambassador. It is a lot of work, also, Ecumenical Women delegates are strongly encouraged to meet with government representatives throughout CSW in the hallways, during coffee break and even during receptions. We, the ACC delegation took our opportunities with the EW by networking every morning after chapel and individual opportunities.



Our New Zealand UN Permanent Mission Office (which was a conveniently just around the corner from my hotel thanks to Marissa) held a reception for our CSW57 delegates on the first night of the conference. The Minister of Women Affairs and Associate Minister of Health Jo Goodhew and our NZ UN staff welcomed us all to my uncle Canon Wi Te Tau Huata's uplifting waiata "Tutira Mai Nga Iwi" and "Haere Mai". True to the words "kia tapa tahi, kia kotahi ra" we all joined with them to enthusiastically welcome diplomats, ambassadors and their staff from Liberia, Macedonia, Brazil & Venezuela. The next morning we returned for a breakfast meeting/ briefing with Minister Jo Goodhew and NZUN staff. It was another great opportunity for our voices and issues to be aired and discussed. Partnership between government and the non-government sector was a strong theme at this conference.

Our Aotearoa NZ, Pacific NGO delegation (whom I had met at a CSW57 planning hui at Ministry of Women's Affairs office three weeks prior) comprised of TOAH-NESST (Te Ohaakii a Hine) specialist services for sexual violence prevention and intervention, both kaupapa and tikanga Maori and mainstream, around the country. Other NGOs were Presbyterian Church, Girl Guides NZ, Rape Crisis, Soroptimists, Student Christian Movement Aotearoa, WAVES Trust (Waitakare Anti Violence Essential Services), ourselves the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, Pacific Women's Watch Inc, and Maori Women's Refuge led by CEO Heather Henare. She describes "during the com-



International Anglican Women's Network at UNCSW57



ACC Delegates outside the UN: Numia Tomoana, Vijula Aralanantham, Albertine Tawonezwi, Harriet Baka, Erika Montoya & Mandy Marshall

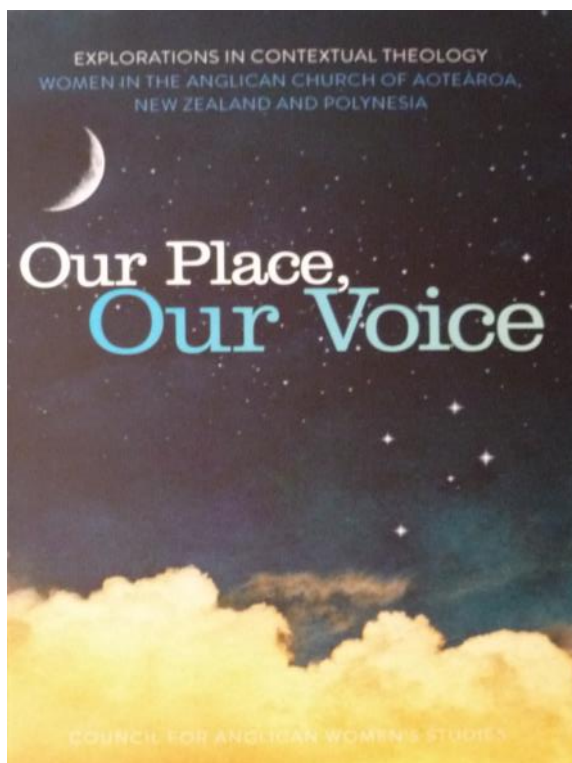
mission Women's Affairs Minister Jo Goodhew announced New Zealand's pledge under an initiative called COMMIT to take steps to ensure women and girls are able to lead violence-free lives".

Being a member of our Anglican Consultative Council within the Ecu-

menical Women's network, felt secure and reassuring as we jostled for seats, floor space, toilets, food, elevators, yellow taxis, and question time amongst the incredible energy and passion of six thousand other women and girls from 'e nga hau e wha', all corners of the earth; UN's biggest conference so far. Chapel in the UN Church Centre was 8am daily, an inspirational way to start the day and remind us who we serve and why we are here – kotahitanga and whakapono in action. As the crisp cold weather determined our attire, fur coats, scarves, gloves, boots, hats, suits or tights, cleric shirts and collar, short and long skirts, saris; what impressed me most were the colourfully, gorgeous outfits of the African women, turbans and headscarves matching their gold or silver threaded bright skirts. New York was certainly graced with beauty and passion – six thousand women and girls on a global mission, to formalise outrage, and consolidate ideas and best practices, with the hope of producing results, emphasis on results, "Agreed Conclusions".

NGO Day 2 was an early start at the Armenian Centre, 700 plus women, girls and some men. The day opened with a presentation by a dynamic rap/drama group GIRL BE HEARD by five girls, a Ukrainian, Russian, Mexican, Afro American and Spanish. Their messages of victim to victory, to halleluiah happy, deeply touched us all with rap songs about sexual slavery, slave labour "stuck in traffic", seductive Saturdays of being a "Disney princess where no Prince saves the day", caught between pimps when "cracked" up to be... "because without me, there is no You", and the 15 year old girls going on 30 when "all I ever wanted was a place to call home". We learnt from opening speaker Soon Young Soon, UN Representative for International Alliance of Women, that girls are vulnerable to the most insidious abuse and that education will empower and be their only wealth or protective shield. 72 million (54%) primary girls are not at school. We were reminded of Malala Yousafzai, 15 year old courageous activist who was shot by a Taliban gunman sending a message to anyone who had the courage to stand up for education, freedom and self-determination. Malala, who started blogging about civil rights when she was 11, was also an example that for millions of women and girls trapped in violence and abuse, there is hope and a future worth living for. Another dynamic woman Bineta Diop from Senegal Africa who has campaigned for 27 years and received the UN prize for Human Rights 2003, spoke of section violence, conflict atrocities, genocide in Bosnia, Syria, Cambodia and other countries and that

military violence must end, we need political will! She told the story of the hummingbird that said in the face of a forest fire, "I am doing the best that I can", encouragement for us all individually (www.wangfoundation.net/humming_bird.pdf.) "Sometimes a person needs only a story more than food to save their life" Michelle Bachelet, UN Undersecretary – General and former Executive Director of UN Women (she announced her resignation at CSW57) told us that civil society sets the scene for change. With the International Day of the Girl Child 11/10/12, and One Billion Rising Campaign, there can be no peace or progress unless there is gender equality. 603 million women and girls suffer from domestic violence, and it is still not a crime in some countries. Some structures that risk the increase of violence are intersecting, human trafficking has a staggering global



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The ACC Delegation meets for its 4pm debrief

cost of \$443 billion. Slave labour, 56% are women, sexual labour, 98% are women. Femicide is a form of indirect suicide as HIV Aids in African countries leads to forced disappearances. The reason? Gender power inequality and patriarchal traditions.

PARALLEL EVENTS

Our Aotearoa/ Pacific NGO's gave their presentation on the first morning; Pacific Woman's Watch Inc, Maori Women's Refuge, Rape Crisis and TOAH- NNESTT. It was titled "Unique Indigenous, Non indigenous and Pasifika Approaches to Violence Against Women and Girls". They wove their stories, intervention, prevention, best practices and wairua, spirituality. It was a popular event and received much positive feedback. They were awesome!

THE GIRL'S TRIBUNAL: Bearing Witness to Girl's Activism

The Salvation Army auditorium was packed with people sitting on the floor. This program was presented by high school girls from around the world, sharing their stories under three themes; the first, *media based violence*. Media can be the other parent in the room which creates a culture that normalises violence surrounding us with negativity and violence against women and girls. It creates the consciousness of our future and objectifies females, that their bodies are only objects meant for the sole pleasure of a man. Most dangerous, it eroticises by sexual images of violence. These advocates and voices for girls, have lobbied for magazines to stop digitally altering their models, and to agree to hire all shapes, sizes, and ethnicities. The next theme was *violence in schools*, where girls from PLAN in Finland and Norway spoke about bullying and sexual violence; that "teachers should teach NOT touch" as 83% of 8 to 11 year olds suffer sexual harassment by a teacher or parent. Sexual violence means girls are inferior; bullying, whether verbal or psychological means suicide or truancy therefore once again, girl's education is being interrupted and denied. The girls talked of "turning oppression into opportunity" and breaking the silence. The last

theme *violence in her community*, a girl from El Salvador who spoke of gang killings and that sexual violence is common, so going to and from school or anywhere outside your neighbourhood is dangerous. Her concern and challenge was how to reach out to boys in order to treat girls differently. These girls were dynamic and they have had enough!! They know that laws and policies have to be enforced but they also know that men and boys need to be part of the solution.

The following gives an overview of some of the other parallel events I attended:

Female Genital Mutilation or FGM. It is deeply embedded in religion and culture and is mutilation of human rights. When one mother is saved from FGM, generations are saved. Governments in Europe, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway have created awareness by media, leaflets, health centres, schools and universities of the trauma, dangers and education of this horrific, barbaric mutilation, which is illegal in Norway. A movie "Africa in the Sky" has been released about FGM.

Domestic violence in Aboriginal areas was an event I went with Archdeacon Karen Kime who is an indigenous Australian woman. Domestic violence is very high where 330 cases are attended by police every day in New South Wales and 100 women a year die of domestic violence. Men can find help to change their abusive ways through sports clubs, and NRL has campaigns to support White Ribbon Day; top rugby league players are advocates



At Olympia Café talking with members of FOR (Fellowship of Reconciliation & Women's Studies programme, NY) and SNAP. They co-presented the session "Gender based Violence & Religion: An Intersectional Perspective"

for women's rights and freedom against violence.

The Salvation Army in the USA fight social injustice as the church's response to an often silent, therefore implicit church, to William Booth's vow "While women weep as they do now – I'll fight!" They have social services in ten states which provide housing, fully furnished apartments to uphold the dignity and integrity of the family in need. Their services evolve to the current needs of the people and use a holistic approach.

The sexual abuse in the Catholic Church was one of the more challenging events for me, that being a priest is the most dangerous profession in the world where the highest proportion of

child molesters work in any career. The problem is manufactured say SNAP a group focussed on eliminating violence in the Catholic Church. Only one in twenty children will report sexual violence where thousands of priests are child molesters.

Violence against LGBT was incredibly hard to listen to. In the Middle East and North Africa where Moslem is predominant LGBT rights are not the same as human rights where in some countries sodomy laws exist. In Iran if two men are caught or known to have sex it is instant death, if two women are caught, they will suffer 100 lashings and the next time will be death. When a gay child 'comes out' and is abused or killed, their family will not report it as they will be killed anyway. Just horrific!

Reproductive Health, Abortion - The message was that as women we are life givers, abortion is not natural; the life cycle is that we are all connected. In China and India they now have a 1 child policy and abortion is forced. China has 34 million more boys than girls under 20 because they kill girl babies and the 3 most dangerous words spoken in the world are "Its a girl."

"End of Violence is not the End – Ensure Women's Equality" was the presentation by Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, and his 20 year mantra and commitment for gender equality. As a UN leader, he is not a trend or power seeker motivated by ego, in fact he is quite the opposite. His humility and compassion comes from his inherent belief – to seek the basic needs for all human beings. He believes we need balance to achieve peace, justice, security, and transformation; that balance includes gender equality not gender representation but 50 per cent of men and women at all levels. As a tireless UN worker of 20 years for peace and justice, women, children, gender equality, and the poorest segment of humanity, he offered much hope and wisdom. He said; "Empowering women in the economic work place is essential as universal norms and standards are being ignored. Militarism is impoverishing the earth and humanity, and women in protest not only join, but they initiate non-violent freedom, justice and equality, and despite their contributions they still face exclusion. *Democracy without equality is another form of*



World Christian Youth Movement meet with New Zealand's Karen Lasei smiling

violence. Women have been peacemakers and holding together families and can inject practical solutions that are more sensitive to the needs of the civilian." As a member of United Nations Security Council Ambassador Chowdhury believes in *Resolution of 3 words – Women, Peace, Security.* He continues, "we cannot achieve democracy and peace in the world unless women are represented at ALL LEVELS of society". He concluded his 45 minute address with these following responses to questions about gender equality saying,

- * Within a family, as children, boys and girls, encourage them to grow up equal despite our ethnic background, colour, or faith traditions. The process of equality starts young.
- * When in groups of people, speak up for women equality.
- * Address structures of male leadership, include more women at the table so that people get used to hearing women's views, women's voice representation.
- * Women's equality will bring transformation. Yes, education is good for the girl child, but it's what we teach them – changing them as human beings and not just a degree for a job/career; education for all human beings.
- * Teachers should be orientated to teach equality.
- * Yes, education and a degree have saleability but it is not the only opportunity for transformation. Many mothers and women have intelligence, wisdom, and experience to contribute and participate on boards. They can emerge as lead-



UN Panel—Gender Norms & Stereotypes, Socialisation & Unequal Power Relations: Sharing & Balancing Life/Work Responsibilities

ers from the community because they have the respect, trust and integrity.

- * *For girls to be empowered to create a better world?* Convince yourself you are equal, not to be a gender role but as a human, inherent as equal. Take the opportunity when it comes, assert your point and voice it in class, family and community to empower self and others, to motivate and assert yourself.

The final question came from our host, Bishop Donovan that was not so much about women's rights but about women's unique gifts—Yes, recognition of women's rights also opens doors to share women's gifts for recognition and participation. Women do better as civilians and not peacekeepers (military). Women are transformers, advisors, children's advocates, teachers, managers, planners and their special qualities and unique gifts contribute to local communities, national and international aspirations.

Chapel every week morning with our Ecumenical brothers and



Morning Worship at the UN

sisters was heartening, reviving the spirit and touching base of any notices, special events and various advocacy meeting times. Every day at 4pm we, ACC met for a debrief at our UN Anglican Centre. This process was really helpful as listening to the horrors and atrocities of some countries and stories were quite overwhelming, a few of us hitting the emotional wall. Sometimes, there would be no words but unshed tears ready to spill. Our God was our haven as we'd retreat back to our Anglican home on 2nd Ave where another sister would offer a hug, a tissue or a cup of tea. The New York Episcopalian women, AWE (Anglican Women's Empowerment) offered us incredible daily manaakitanga with 5pm - 6pm treats of fresh fruit & raw vegetable platters, cheese, crackers, and selected meats. They were the women at the well with Jesus, offering us springs of life giving water, they were faith filled Lydias offering us hospitality in their home, they were Mary and Martha, listening to our stories and cleaning up around and after us, we were so very blessed.

One Christian response and parallel event was *Restored an international Christian alliance* working in partnership to promote healthy relationships between men and women and to end violence against women. Restored aims to raise awareness of male violence and equip the church to stop it happening. They want to see churches and communities built on restored relationships where women are free from violence and the fear of violence by men. Mandy Marshall co Director is Anglican and was an integral part of our ACC, IAWN delegation. <http://www.restoredrelationships.org/> So, during the conference, our delegation presented our Country Reports, which we submitted a month prior to the conference. We learnt just as much from each other and the problems our countries face, as the parallel events. Our task was also to present to the Church, firstly our Archbishop of Canterbury then filtering through the ranks to our Diocese/ Amorangi, achievable and realistic recommendations for the Anglican Communion to use as prevention, intervention and teaching methods for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and gender equality.

Ma te Atua koe e manaaki, e tiaki, e arataki, tatou katoa mo ake tonu atu, Amine. As we are in the Season of Pentecost I conclude and offer **Song to the Holy Spirit** by James K Baxter.

Lord, Holy Spirit,

You blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,
Inside and outside the fences,
You blow where you wish to blow.

Lord, Holy Spirit,

You are the sun who shines on the little plant,
You warm him gently, you give him life,
You raise him up to become a tree with many leaves

Lord, Holy Spirit,

You are the mother eagle with her young,
Holding them in peace under your feathers.
On the highest mountain you have built your nest,
Above the valley, above the storms of the world,
Where no hunter ever comes.

Lord, Holy Spirit,

You are the bright cloud in whom we hide,
In whom we know already that the battle has been won.
You bring us to our Brother Jesus
To rest our heads upon his shoulder.

Lord, Holy Spirit,

You are the kind fire who does not cease to burn,
Consuming us with flames of love and peace,
Driving us out like sparks to set the world on fire.

Lord, Holy Spirit,

In the love of friends you are building a new house,
Heaven is with us when you are with us.
You are singing your songs in the hearts of the poor
Guide us, wound us, heal us.
Bring us to the Father.

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.



The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: *The Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general the WSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.*