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News from the UN - # 91

RSHM at the UN

March 2018

Commission on the Status of Women CSW 62

During the Commission on the Status of Women an estimated 4,400 representatives from 170 Member States and more than 600 civil society organizations gathered at the UN HQ in New York. We were happy to be able to **register 6 RSHM participants** coming from 3 Provinces, as well as **four other participants** who were **Marymount alumnae or collaborators**.



The priority theme for this year's session was **“Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”** and the review theme highlighted the role of women in the media. After two weeks of intense negotiations the formal outcome document known as the **“Agreed Conclusions”** was adopted unanimously by Member States in the closing session. Concrete measures were identified to ensure the rights, well-being and resilience of rural women and girls and the importance of ensuring their equal access to land and productive assets as well as decent work. Women's crucial role in addressing hunger and food insecurity was recognized, and the need for them to have access to resources and technology. Great importance was placed on guaranteeing education and health for women and girls, and an urgent call made to end all forms of violence and harmful practices.



In addition to formal sessions of the commission, some 300 side events were organized on the UN premises and 450 parallel events were held at various venues nearby. We participated actively in these, meeting women from around the world and learning from them about inspiring initiatives and best practices.



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[Learn the facts](#)

*In this special edition of News from the UN we are featuring feedback from 3 RSHM from other Provinces who attended the Commission on the Status of Women during month of March. Our thanks go to **Srs. Catherine Mary Minhoto (WAP), Pamela Penkert and Joyce Rushinga (Zambezi Region)** for sharing reflections on their experience of CSW 62.*



Cathy Minhoto RSHM

The focus of the United Nation's 2018 Commission on the Status of Women was the empowerment of rural women and girls and the challenges to achieving gender equality. Although my family roots began in rural Salinas, California, I was not sure how much this theme might connect with my ministerial interests in urban Los Angeles. However, I accepted this invitation from Veronica Brand, knowing that my first experience at the 2014 CSW had been one of learning, inspiration and energy for our RSHM priority issue of women and children.



The sessions I attended addressed multiple issues confronting women in our global community:

child marriage, the rights of widows, human trafficking, fracking, women journalists in the line of fire in places like Egypt, Iran and Malta, and the global plight of migrants and refugees. Several side events examined the issue of women in the media and access to communication technologies as an instrument of gender equality.

The first event in which I participated was entitled “The Role of Media in Promoting Women's Rights to Freedom of Expression and Religion.” All the speakers were excellent, but I was particularly intrigued by the comments of Mary Darling, executive producer of the Canadian television situation comedy, “Little Mosque on the Prairie.” *(There were no apologies to Laura Ingalls Wilder for the play on the words of her famous series!)* Although the sitcom's creator, Narqa Nawaz, stated that the show's primary agenda was humor and not a political statement, she was equally convinced that comedy could be a value tool in breaking down cultural barriers

and encouraging dialogue and understanding of peoples of differing belief systems. In a post 9/11 world, where Muslims are not only suspect, but vilified, this program portrayed Muslims in the fictional town of Mercy, Saskatchewan, with humor and sensitivity. I was impacted by the courage of the producers and writers in addressing stereotypic images that aimed to bridge cultural differences and foster values of openness, tolerance, and solidarity.



A most significant moment for me was attending the session in the United Nation itself as civil society responded to the draft **Global Compact for Migration**. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,

joined her voice to many who applauded those who have developed the draft document, while suggesting alternative language to strengthen this international protocol for responding to the global phenomenon of forced migration. *(The United States has withdrawn from this process. Could this be an opportunity for us to speak as North American women religious in urging our administration to reconsider this position?)*

On a lighter side, this native Californian now knows why New Yorkers walk so fast – they are eager to arrive at their destination, get out of the cold and find a space to thaw out! At the same time, I appreciated the warm hospitality of the 93rd Street Community and the companionship of Veronica, Pam Penkert and Joyce Rushinga, whose presence was a reminder that we are called to be women who transcend boundaries and see differences not as lines of separation, but as meeting places for grace to unfold. ➔ *Can you locate Cathy RSHM in this official [UN Women video](#)?*

Joyce Rushinga RSHM



Rural women and girls brought the world together at the United Nations from the 12th - 23rd March. The 62nd Commission on the Status of Women focused on how rural women and girls can be empowered and included in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at local, national and global level. It was touching that each country had something to say about its rural women and girls. Concerns of

rural women were quite similar, showing that a woman is a woman and the needs and rights are the same regardless of colour, race and status.

There was a common refrain coming from all countries and organisations: “**Rural women and girls**”. These words, repeated thousands of times, sparked my interest. As one woman shared, some of us are the product of rural women. We are talking about ourselves. We are proud of that!

There were many events inside and outside the UN buildings. What a lot of exercise we had each day moving from one session to another! People of different races and colours mixed and mingled with a common goal: uplifting and empowering rural women and girls. I realized how rural women and girls are looked down upon by some men. There

is still a lot to be done if women’s importance to national development is to be recognized, and their rights realized,

The panelists were very organized and knowledgeable. People had the chance to ask questions, comment and affirm what had been shared as well as offer suggestions in a free and supportive environment

The theme of “**Early, child and forced marriages**” came through very strongly to me. Not only are girls forced to marry, even some widows are in the same dilemma. There is need to create conditions to empower women and girls so that they will be able to realize their dreams and believe in themselves and their potential. Women and girls should be the game changers; players and not spectators. The **Sustainable Development Goals** cannot be achieved without the involvement of rural women in decision making and developmental roles. There is



need to let rural women and girls be participants and not only beneficiaries of development. Women have to decide their own future and be included in formulation of national and global policies.

Human Trafficking

was also a major issue in many different countries. I was struck by Pope Francis’s message “*if we mean to fight Human Trafficking, there is need to cut off demand and dry up the market or source*”. It was interesting to hear that 100% of traffickers are using technology to lure and exploit their victims online. So technology has to be used in a responsible and careful manner.

It was an eye opener for me to hear that the many hours of work women do in rural areas is not accounted for and recognized as part of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. Rural women should be paid and should be seen as contributing to national development.

With joint effort with different partners, rural women will be empowered, taken on board and be part of national development. They say that “*The strength of a nation depends heavily on the strength of women.*”

In short, I had a very good experience at the United Nations. I managed to endure the cold. The presence and company of Sr Veronica and Sr Pam was a blessing to me. May God bless all women under the sun!

Pamela Penkert RSHM

It was a great experience being at the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women at the UN. We met women from all over the world; some indigenous, urban, rural and some very colourful in their traditional dress. The Side Events were many and varied. Here is a taste of what stayed with me.



CHILD MARRIAGE IN ZAMBIA and MALAWI:

This event put the spotlight on the issue of Child Marriage and how it is being successfully tackled in both countries. Zambia has taken the Traditional Leaders on board and there is a Plan

Sampling of CSW 62 Briefs

of Action in place which was outlined by the Minister of Gender. **Senior Chief Kachindamoto** from Malawi said 'As



Senior Chief, I am the custodian of culture. I have the power to 'annul' child marriage. But Traditional Beliefs have to be challenged....' Over the last 2 years, she has annulled 2,000 child marriages. Most of the girls have returned to school and 3 are in College now. For

this she got a standing ovation. **'Education first, marriage later'** was her appeal. ➡ Watch a [short video](#)

EMPOWERMENT of WOMEN and GIRLS through Addressing GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Maybe each one of us can ask ourselves, What does Gender Based Violence mean to me? *Do we see the results of it every day as we go about our work?* Violence means abnormal becoming normal; it is keeping women from power; they have NO voice and it is a major abuse of human rights. Women have the power to change society. Again, Education is the key. It can enable women to say 'NO'

An interesting question raised was *'In any family, how are the children brought up? Are girls and boys treated equally?'* What can we do to raise awareness: in our work in the classroom, hospital, womens' groups etc?.

HARNESSING the SDGs to secure WOMEN'S RIGHT to LAND. Inonge Wina, Vice President of Zambia gave very powerful input at this Event. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of the women of Zambia. Her main appeal was to recognise that Rural women are the key agents of change' Ownership of land, she noted, gives women dignity. This event was organized by Zambia and Switzerland.

Some Interesting hints.....



Women should be the distributors of FOOD in any conflict or famine in order to avoid sexual exploitation.

Lack of Political Will on the part of Leaders accounts for most of the conflict in the world.

Poverty is the main driver of conflict, child marriage, gender based violence, HIV and AIDS.....

The Globalisation of Indifference...each of us has a calling to work for the eradication of the evil of trafficking.....



➡ Look at our annotated [CSW photo album](#)

Forthcoming attractions.....

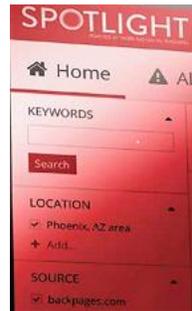
Our April issue of News from the UN will feature reflections by RSHM who attended the World Social Forum and the World Water Forum in Brazil during March 2018 – and some brief information on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held on related issues at the UN HQ in April.

Irish Anti-Fracking campaign:

The account of how rural Irish women were empowered to take the lead in resisting **Hydraulic fracturing** in their country was fascinating! Starting from kitchen table gatherings, to community meetings, from local lobbying to networking with others, they successfully built a coalition and a nation-wide campaign. Women from rural Ireland tell the story of the 6 year campaign that led to the successful ban on fracking in Ireland in July 2017. ➡ [Learn more](#)



Turning technology into hope for vulnerable children.



Technology is being successfully used to rescue victims of child sexual exploitation and human trafficking. **Spotlight** is a web-based tool that has been used by law enforcement officers and child rescue agencies in Canada and United States to rescue more than 18,000 victims of human trafficking and identify more than 6,000 traffickers over the last two years.

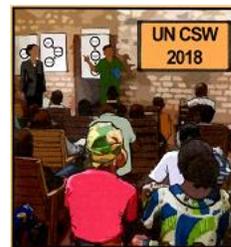
➡ Read about [Spotlight](#)

Fragments of Hope

"Fragments of Hope" is a community-based, not for profit organization in Belize. During CSW they shared their **environmental stewardship programme**, and how women are working to restore endangered coral reefs in the **Caribbean** as well as raise awareness about the threat of rising sea levels and climate change. They have developed an **eco-tourguide** programme which has helped to empower local women economically and socially, while addressing **SDG 13, 14 and 5**. Now they are sharing their programme with Jamaica and Colombia. ➡ Watch the [short video](#)



Lawyers Without Borders – Workshop



How does a small group of women lawyers successfully engage 70+ women in four different sequential workshops in one room, rotating them through 4 informative experiential exercises? The answer: Successfully! During CSW an international panel from **"Lawyers without Borders"** ran an informative workshop session which gave participants experience in using practical tools to address Trafficking in Persons. The areas addressed included a) distinguishing between **Smuggling and trafficking** in persons; b) **spotting the indicators** of human trafficking, c) **interviewing victims and witnesses** and d) **collecting evidence** from trafficking crime scenes.

Distribution:

General Council Team; Provincials/ Regionals; JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools; UN Interest Group
Portuguese translation by *Maria Luisa Pinho, RSCM.*