



When the pandemic struck the world in March 2020 and COVID lockdowns were enforced around the world, the **UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 64)** was the first official UN annual meeting to feel its impact. An inclusive 13 day conference was reduced to official, pro-forma opening and closing sessions with the cancellation of the intervening sessions, the commemoration of Beijing + 25 and the entire accompanying programme.



This year **CSW 65** was held in a hybrid format from 15 – 26 March 2021, with limited, socially distanced participation of one delegate per member state at the opening and closing session. Almost all the remaining formal and informal sessions of the Commission meeting were held virtually, as were the negotiations that led to a final Agreed Conclusions, approved by consensus on the evening of 26 March, after several all-night sessions.

NGO CSW organized more than **700 Parallel events** on a virtual platform with more than 25,000 people from more than 150 countries registered, participating in more than 16 time zones. Twenty six years after the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, it was evident that the ongoing struggle for Gender Equality was alive and well around the world!

[→ Watch the short video](#)

CSW 65 – Women in Public Life

The priority theme of the CSW 65 was “**Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.**” In his opening address, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres spoke to the urgency of the issue, citing statistics demonstrating that, despite progress in the last 25 years since Beijing, the gendered impact of COVID has highlighted the underlying systemic issues and the urgent need to accelerate progress on the path to gender equality.

COVID-19 is a crisis with a woman's face.

- Women make up **70% of the world's healthcare workforce**, and occupy most of the jobs in the economic sectors that have been hit hardest by the pandemic.
- Women are **24% more likely to lose their jobs** than men, and can expect their income to fall **50% more steeply.**
- A study of **87 countries** found that **85% of COVID-19 task forces** contained mostly men.



With regard to women's **political leadership**, the scenario has changed little since 1995.

- Worldwide, women currently make up **25% of national legislators**, 33% of members of local government, and only **20% of cabinet ministers.**
- Of **193 UN Member States**, only **22** are headed by a woman and **only one (Estonia)** has both a **female President** and a **female Prime Minister.**
- At current rates of change, parity among Heads of Government will not be achieved for **another 130 years.**
- In **peace negotiations** from 1992 to 2019, only **13% of negotiators**, **6% of mediators** and **6% of signatories** to peace agreements were women.

“**COVID-19 is a crisis with a woman's face.** The fallout has shown how deeply gender inequality remains embedded in the world's political, social and economic systems” UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres.

[→ Watch the short video](#)

Common threads and themes



Common threads running through many of the events that RSHM attended related to the **negative impacts of COVID on women and girls** and the **myriad health consequences**, physical, mental and emotional. Women are often the first to be let go in the job market and the first to be abused in the home, with heavier burdens of unrecognized and unpaid care work falling on them. In poorer contexts, many girls have left school; and most will not return; there has been a disturbing rise in domestic violence, online abuse and increase in child marriages, hunger, homelessness and an increase in femicide. **Clear challenges were identified.** These include addressing underlying patriarchy (often with cultural and religious roots) and toxic masculinity. The need for expanding economic empowerment opportunities for women, the importance of making room at the decision-making table, giving spaces for diverse voices to be heard and providing opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, - all were seen as crucial. There is no equality for women unless there is equality under the law. Integral to the message of CSW 65 were the positive examples of grassroots feminist activism – just a few examples of which are shared on page 2. Hope lies in the many inspiring stories which are changing the narrative, one story at a time.

[→ Watch a 3 minute global history of women's rights](#)

Protectors of Mother Earth



In the highlands of Peru, gender-based violence and degradation of our common home are closely linked. Sharing the experience of indigenous women in the Peruvian highlands **Sr. Pat Ryan MM and Yolanda Flores** spoke of the devastation

of the water supply by mining activities in this arid zone which has led to toxification of the water sources with mercury and other heavy metals. Through the resistance and the action of **DHUMA** a human rights and environmental NGO they founded, they are calling attention to the damaging consequences of extractivism which pollutes and ignores the rights of the indigenous peoples, severely impacting the lives of women. Through the women's resistance and activism, they are promoting indigenous culture, autonomy and self determination. "The government could get rid of all the conflicts in the country if they only respected the rights of the people," said Sr. Pat Ryan. "We are protectors of Mother Earth" Yolanda said. "Violence against mother earth means the degradation of our Common Home" [Read more](#)

Spotlight initiative

The **Spotlight Initiative** is a global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. It is the fruit of a partnership between the **UN and the European Union** which supplied the initial funding of 500 million Euro. The goal is to address the root causes of violence against women and girls by raising awareness and developing tailored programmes in the countries that need them most so that every woman and girl can live a life free from violence be it physical, mental, sexual or economic. **Mozambique and Zimbabwe** are among the 8 countries targeted in the African regional programme.



[Watch the short video](#)

RSHM News Briefs



◆ On **March 1st** the **Grassroots Task Force** of the **NGO Committee for Social Development** launched the report of the survey on inequality carried out in 2019. 10 RSHM working at the grassroots level in *Brazil, Ireland, Portugal and Zimbabwe* were among those who responded. We are happy that an **RSHM case study from Linhares, ES Brazil** is featured in the publication. The Chair of the Commission, spoke at the launch, the key results were presented and panelists from Ireland and Zambia shared on specific experiences. [Read the Brazilian case study](#)

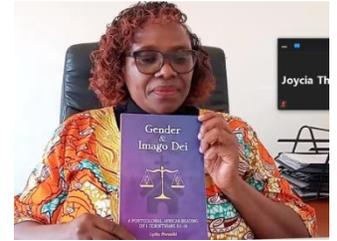
◆ On **March 31st**, the **RSHM JPIC Animators** from **English-speaking Areas** gathered with several other RSHM who had participated in CSW 65 sessions to talk about their experience and share insights and learnings from the sessions attended. *What had struck us most? How did our experience relate to our RSHM call to be women of prophetic hope who proclaim that all have a place in our "common home".?* It was a lively and inspiring gathering. [Read more on the Institute webpage.....](#)



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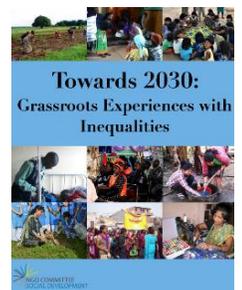
How to challenge and change a Social Norm ?

Organized by **Religions for Peace**, an inter-faith panel of Christian, Muslim and other faith leaders shared how they are working to address and challenge the harmful cultural and social norms that often work to reinforce gender inequality. Some of the steps taken included recovering images of justice-seeking within scriptures and religious traditions, using role plays to unlock taboos, giving space for the voices of survivors to be heard, providing alternative narratives and working closely with male champions of gender justice to challenge toxic masculinity.



Achieving gender equality in food supply chains

How do large food supply corporations fare on efforts to promote gender equality and sustainability? OXFAM shared recent findings from their four year "**Behind the Brands**" campaign which assessed the 10 largest food and beverage corporations on their corporate responsibility, working with them to introduce positive change in three areas: **gender equality, land rights and climate change**. Not only did OXFAM engage the companies in making strong commitments on the SDGs but they also assessed their actual implementation as experienced on the ground in selected countries, showing that progress has stalled in some of the sourcing countries. Women are often invisible in the value chain, although they are often the cocoa producers and small-scale farmers who lack adequate access to and control of, the land they cultivate. Little value placed on women's land and property rights, and their role in decision making and benefit sharing is often subverted. By publicizing companies' performance on gender indicators, campaigns such as "**Behind the Brands**" aim to impact consumer choices and bring about change. [Visit the website](#)



Distribution

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