

The Status of Women: UN Conference Anglican Delegation



From the 21st February to the 2nd March 2008 I attended the United Nations 52nd Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW 52) as a delegate sponsored by Anglican Women's Empowerment (AWE) representing the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). The topic of this year's Commission was 'Financing for Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment'. The week commenced with the launch of a campaign to end Violence Against Women, which Ban Ki-moon the Secretary General of the UN announced to rousing applause. Ban Ki-moon stated that violence against women is not the result of random individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality

between women and men. He said the roots of violence lay in the historically unequal power relations between men and women and that there was still pervasive discrimination against women in both the public and private spheres.

The Commission was attended by numerous NGOs including the Mothers' Union, YWCA, Unifem, Womankind Worldwide, Oxfam, Girlguides, Episcopal Church Women as well as the permanent country delegations at the UN. Women from all over the world gathered, with AWE sponsoring women from countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, Japan, Australia and England.

Of particular interest to the religious organisations gathered were the workshops on the gender architecture of institutions and gender budgeting. The ACC adopted resolution 13/31 on Gender Equality (2005) acknowledging the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) for equal representation of women in decision making at all levels and called for each Province to consider the establishment of a women's desk. This year the recommendation is that the ACC passes a resolution on gender sensitive budgeting. This would mean that analysis of budgets would be undertaken with regard to gender so that rather than women's and children's projects receiving small special grants, that an equitable distribution and *input* of resources is promoted between the genders (gender mainstreaming). This policy push comes from analysis of poverty worldwide which reveals that women and the girl-child are by far the poorest and most disadvantaged members of the global community. In ensuring that women and children are given equal access (not privileged access) to the world's resources poverty can be cut out at its root. For me the shocking statistic of the week was that women produce $\frac{1}{2}$ of the world's food but own only 1% of its farmland.

Several Bishops' wives were part of the delegation and the few female Bishops that gathered reminded us that at the forthcoming Lambeth Conference women would be outnumbered 19/800 – the number is likely to be reversed at the Spouses Conference. If the Church is to be a partner in the global campaign to reduce poverty and empower grassroots women, it must look to the prejudice within its own walls. The lack of gender equity within the Church of England is in stark contrast to Great Britain's high standing in the global gender gap index (9/115, 2006). As an ordinand the reality of the need for financing for equality is brought into sharp relief when it is considered that one national fund (UK) only gives grants for books to male ordinands. This kind of practice needs to be recognised as blatant discrimination.

It was a truly enlightening experience to be with women from around the Anglican Communion fighting for equality in our extremely diverse regions. Faithful and passionate lay and ordained women revealed their commitment to the liberation and freedom that is in Jesus Christ, dramatically enacted by Bishop Catherine Roskam at our opening Eucharist as she gave a homily on the woman bent over for 18 years who was set free by the healing ministry of Jesus Christ (Luke 13:10-17).

Links

<http://www.aco.org/un/> The Anglican Communion Observer at the United Nations

<http://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm> International Anglican Women's Network



Peace window at the United Nations, New York

Conference Room 2, Launch of end violence against women campaign, UN

