

## **CSW PROCESSES**

### **THE HISTORY OF CSW**

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) first met at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947, soon after the founding of the United Nations. It is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

All 15 government representatives were women. From its inception, the Commission was supported by a unit of the United Nations that later became the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in the UN Secretariat. The CSW forged a close relationship with non-governmental organizations, with those in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) invited to participate as observers.

From 1947 to 1962, the Commission focused on setting standards and formulating international conventions to change discriminatory legislation and foster global awareness of women's issues. In contributing to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the CSW successfully argued against references to "men" as a synonym for humanity, and succeeded in introducing new, more inclusive language.

Since the codification of the legal rights of women needed to be supported by data and analysis, the Commission embarked on a global assessment of the status of women. Extensive research produced a detailed, country-by-country picture of their political and legal standing, which over time became a basis for drafting human rights instruments.

The Commission contributed to the work of UN offices, such as the International Labor Organization's 1951 Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, which enshrined the principle of equal pay for equal work. The Commission drafted the early international conventions on women's rights, such as the 1953 Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which was the first international law instrument to recognize and protect the political rights of women; and the first international agreements on women's rights in marriage, namely the 1957 Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, and the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages.

As evidence began to accumulate in the 1960s that women were disproportionately affected by poverty, the work of the Commission centered on women's needs in community and rural development, agricultural work, family planning, and scientific and technological advances. The Commission encouraged the UN system to expand its technical assistance to further the advancement of women, especially in developing countries.

In 1963, efforts to consolidate standards on women's rights led the UN General Assembly to request the Commission to draft a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which the Assembly ultimately adopted in 1967. The legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), also drafted by the

Commission, followed in 1979. In 1999, the Optional Protocol to the Convention introduced the right of petition for women victims of discrimination.

In 1972, to mark its 25th anniversary, the Commission recommended that 1975 be designated International Women's Year—an idea endorsed by the General Assembly to draw attention to women's equality with men and to their contributions to development and peace. The year was marked by holding the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, followed by the 1976–1985 UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. Additional world conferences took place in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. New UN offices dedicated to women were established, in particular the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

In 1987, as part of follow-up to the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, the Commission took the lead in coordinating and promoting the UN system's work on economic and social issues for women's empowerment. Its efforts shifted to promoting women's issues as cross-cutting and part of the mainstream, rather than as separate concerns. In the same period, the Commission helped bring violence against women to the forefront of international debates for the first time. These efforts resulted in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993. In 1994, a UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences was appointed by the Commission on Human Rights, with a mandate to investigate and report on all aspects of violence against women.

The Commission served as the preparatory body for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women which adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 expanded the Commission's mandate and decided that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities. In 2011, the four parts of the UN system mentioned on this page—DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI and UNIFEM—merged to become UN Women. Its main roles are to support the inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms. It also helps Member States to implement these standards and hold the UN system accountable for commitments on gender equality. During the CSW, UN Women organizes special preparatory events and briefing sessions for Member States and is responsible for organizing substantive papers, such as the Report of the Review and Appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action, based on government reports.

As the Secretariat for the CSW, UN Women also manages the written and oral statement applications by NGOs. UN rules stipulate that only NGOs with official relations with the UN through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have full privileges, such as speaking at official inter-governmental meetings. It should be noted that some NGOs are accredited to the UN through the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) or through UN conferences; these NGOs cannot submit written or oral statements to UN Women for the CSW.

## **THE METHOD OF WORKING**

During the Commission's annual two-week session, representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather at UN headquarters in New York. They discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality, and the 23rd special session of the General Assembly held in 2000 (Beijing+5), as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women. Member States agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women's enjoyment of their rights in political, economic and social fields. The outcomes and recommendations of each session are forwarded to ECOSOC for follow-up.

The Commission adopts multi-year work programme for the first time in 1987, containing priority themes for discussion and action at its annual sessions, per ECOSOC resolution 1987/24. Subsequently, multi-year programmes of work were adopted in 1996 in ECOSOC resolution 1996/6, in 2001 in ECOSOC resolution 2001/4. Since 2006, the Commission has to appraise progress and make further recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action. These recommendations take the form of negotiated agreed conclusions on a priority theme. Under its current methods of work, established by ECOSOC resolutions 2006/9, 2009/15 and 2013/18, at each session the Commission:

- Engages in general discussion on the status of gender equality, identifying goals attained, achievements, gaps and challenges in relation to implementation of key commitments;
- Focuses on one priority theme, based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly;
- Holds a high-level roundtable to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices on the priority theme;
- Evaluates progress in implementing agreed conclusions from previous sessions as a review theme;
- Convenes interactive panel discussions on steps and initiatives to accelerate implementation, and measures to build capacities for mainstreaming gender equality across policies and programmes;
- Addresses emerging issues that affect gender equality;
- Considers in closed meeting the report of its Working Group on Communications;
- Agrees on further actions for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women by adopting agreed conclusions and resolutions;
- Contributes gender perspectives to the work of other intergovernmental bodies and processes; and
- Celebrates International Women's Day on 8 March, when it falls within its session.

## **CSW and NGO's**

The active participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a critical element in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women's empowerment and gender equality: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They continue to play an important role in holding international and national leaders accountable for the commitments they made in the Platform for Action. NGOs that are accredited to and in good standing with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may designate representatives to attend the annual sessions of the CSW. The number of representatives who can attend open official meetings can be contingent on the availability of space. Today, nearly 4,000 NGO representatives participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women each year. It is the largest annual gathering of the international women's movement at the UN—a time for renewal of collective purpose and action.

### **What is ECOSOC accreditation?**

Non-governmental, non-profit, public or voluntary organizations may formally contribute to the work of the United Nations after being granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council under Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations and on Economic and Social Council Resolution 1996/31.

There are three categories of status: General consultative status, Special consultative status and Roster status.

**General consultative status** is reserved for large international NGOs whose area of work cover most of the issues on the agenda of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. These tend to be fairly large, established international NGOs with a broad geographical reach. Written Statements by organizations in general consultative status with ECOSOC may not exceed 2,000 words

**Special consultative status** is granted to NGOs which have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the fields of activity covered by the ECOSOC. These NGOs tend to be smaller and more recently established. Written statements by organizations in special consultative status with ECOSOC may not exceed 1,500 words.

Organizations that apply for consultative status but do not fit in any of the other categories are usually included in the Roster. These NGOs tend to have a rather narrow and/or technical focus. NGOs that have formal status with other UN bodies or specialized agencies (FAO, ILO, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, WHO and others), can be included on the ECOSOC Roster.

## **Privileges of accredited NGO's**

- ***Attending the annual sessions of the CSW and Many others open official UN Meetings***

NGOs that are accredited to and in good standing with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may designate representatives to attend the annual sessions of the CSW. Invitation letters are sent, usually in November, to the e-mail addresses registered in the integrated Civil Society Organizations (iCSO) System of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) by NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. NGOs are encouraged to make sure that their profile and contact information on the CSO system includes the latest correct information about their organizations. Because of increasing demands on limited space, it has become necessary to reduce the numbers of attendees to CSW sessions from civil society. This number should be kept to a minimum and should not exceed 20 representatives per organization. Organizations should be aware that, in this context, entry into official meetings can still not be guaranteed to all who wish to attend.

- ***Submitting oral and written statements prior to sessions***

NGO's which are accredited to ECOSOC, have an opportunity to prepare oral and written statements during the interactive panels. Oral statements may be delivered during the general discussion by a limited number of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, subject to time availability. Preference will be given to NGOs speaking about the theme of the session, on behalf of groups of organizations, caucuses, or coalitions. Instructions about the process will be communicated via e-mail to each NGO representative requesting to make a statement. Oral statements should not exceed three minutes (approx. two pages double-spaced using font size 12).

NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may also submit written statements on the thematic issues considered by CSW, in accordance with Council resolution 1996/31. Statements are submitted months prior to the session in order to allow time for processing and issuance of the statements as official United Nations documents for the Commission.

- ***Lobbying at national levels***

The most important starting point to influence the UN process is at the national level. Accredited NGOs should submit shadow reports to their governments, seek opportunities to discuss the government positions, and establish good relations with delegations, as well as try to join the official delegations as members of Civil Society.

- ***Organizing parallel and side events***

Accredited NGO's have an opportunity to arrange Side Events and Parallel Programs in CSW Processes. The Side Events include panels and discussions, including some organized by conveners of the Conference and others by Member States or other stakeholders.

The Parallel Program, organized by the conveners of the conference, often concerns negotiations on the possible outcomes of the meeting. These negotiations, called “informal meetings,” can be open or closed; the confidentiality changes from one meeting to another.

### **Obligations of accredited NGO’s**

NGOs in general and special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council must submit to the Committee on NGOs, a brief report of their activities every 4 years, known as the quadrennial report, which includes information about contributions of the NGO to the work of the United Nations. To emphasize the need to abide strictly by this requirement, resolution 2008/4 stipulates measures that the Council has taken to suspend, and subsequently withdraw consultative status of organizations that fail to submit their reports on time.

### **THE COMMITTEE on NGO’s (NGO CSW)**

The NGO CSW/NY is a volunteer-based, non-profit NGO funded largely by individual contributions and is one of the women’s committees of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO). Under CoNGO’s umbrella, the NGO CSW Committees helped plan the NGO Forums at the UN World Conferences on women in Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, and Beijing.

The NGO CSW/NY is an advocate for the human rights of women and girls and supports the UN consensus documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and other UN agreements such as the Declaration on Population and Development and the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights.

The current terms of reference of the Committee are set out in Resolution 1996/31. The main tasks of the Committee are:

- The consideration of applications for consultative status and requests for reclassification submitted by NGOs;
- The consideration of quadrennial reports submitted by NGOs in General and Special categories;
- The implementation of the provisions of Council resolution 1996/31 and the monitoring of the consultative relationship;
- Any other issues which the ECOSOC may request the Committee to consider.

The Committee has 19 members who are elected on the basis of equitable geographical representation in every four years:

- 5 members from African States;
- 4 members from Asian States;
- 2 members from Eastern European States;
- 4 members from Latin American and Caribbean States; and
- 4 members from Western European and other States.

## **GENERAL TIPS for NGOs**

**Tip I.** Long term preparation is key. Member States begin their preparation at least one year in advance – a practice that NGOs need to adopt in order to successfully influence the outcome of the CSW.

**Tip II.** Gather information about the issues and allies. NGOs should gather good information through readings of UN documents and research. It is important to know the position and background of one's allies — NGOs and governments – but also the position of those defending another position.

**Tip III.** Reach out to other NGOs as well as governments. To be influential at the United Nations, NGOs need States that are ready to champion their proposals. These “friendly States” can be identified during the year prior to the CSW. Generally, progressive States concentrate their effort on one or two topics and become the “specialists” on them.

NGOs must reach out to interested States, go to side events organized by these countries, and talk to the diplomats working at UN Missions. The NGOs should also contact the main government body responsible for the negotiations at the UN in their own countries such as the Ministries of Women's Affairs. They must present themselves as well-prepared partners who can bring added value during the negotiations.

**Tip IV.** Intervene at key moments during the lifecycle of a decision. The negotiations on a UN outcome document move as fast as a train, and NGOs must be prepared to get on at the right “stations.” In other words, NGOs' actions must be in sync with the lifecycle of a decision. For example, it will be very difficult to introduce a new theme in the final round of the negotiations. The right moment is at the very beginning. Similarly, streamlining wording just after the arrival of the Zero Draft in the “capital cities” is too early to have an impact.

**Tip V.** The CSW usually takes place in the first half of March (9 to 20 March in 2015). Around September of the year before (i.e. 2014), there is a call for written statements by ECOSOC-accredited NGOs. For example, the deadline for written statements for CSW 59 was 24 October 2014. Because, these statements need to be checked for NGO accreditation, translated and edited. There is a word limit, and an NGO can only deliver one written statement although they may sign on other group statements. They are published on the website of the CSW and distributed to the Missions to the United Nations.

**Tip VI.** Amendments to the zero draft should begin at the national level. As soon as the Zero Draft is available on the UN website, NGOs should contact their own government delegates to the CSW and UN missions with concrete proposals for wording. New topics are not likely to be included at this point. As explained above, Member States have only two weeks to change language, to have it approved by their administration, and to deliver it to the Secretariat (UN Women in the case of the CSW). Time is very limited and decision-making goes very fast. This is the key moment to introduce a new and non-agreed language in the Zero Draft.

**Tip VII.** Be vigilant during the negotiations. First readings can start prior to the beginning of the official program. This is the case for the 59th session of the CSW, when informal negotiations began several weeks before the official beginning of the session. It is difficult for NGOs to follow up with what is happening during the debates, as they are not admitted in the

room. NGOs have requested to self-select observers in limited numbers. It is understood that NGO observers would not speak during the negotiations unless invited to do so.

**Tip VIII.** A last and important step in negotiations is to identify the last “square brackets” and the last “deals.” the “square brackets” indicating added text disappear, you will be able to understand the political weight of the different language. After each new version, the Member States will reflect on possible language that would offer an acceptable formulation for the other side. This is when NGOs can be supportive by proposing language to streamline the text, as well as supporting arguments for governments to defend preferred language. It is important to keep in mind that new issues cannot be introduced at this stage.

**Tip IX.** Work with coalitions, caucuses and forums. Overwhelming negotiators with numerous messages, phone calls and meetings is not an effective NGO strategy. Rather, NGOs should work collectively in caucuses, coalitions or forums. Often, the most powerful messages are those supported by a large number of NGOs. For example, caucuses can be created on many levels: national, regional and global. National caucuses are equally important because they are direct links to the grassroots organizations.

**Tip X.** Use mobile technologies and electronic media. One important technical support that the NGO can bring is in “the wording” to express a particular position. This wording should be based as much as possible on the “agreed language” that from previous UN documents. This can entail hours of research to find this agreed language. Every agreed language should be quoted with the reference of the text. There are different tools to find the adequate language. Two applications for mobile phones and tablets have been created to support the work of the NGOs and diplomats in their research for agreed language on women’s human rights.

### **CSW and BPW International**

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that has had general consultative status with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947. At present there are a total of twenty-one members serving as representatives of IFBPW at the UN Headquarters in New York, Geneva, Vienna, the five regional commissions and at UN Agencies.

Representatives are dedicated to promoting the agenda of BPW International, specifically the economic advancement of women at all levels. This cross-cutting issue takes in concerns for women’s overall well-being in matters of health, education, access to all resources (including food, shelter and water), properly remunerated work, safety, human rights, and personal dignity. Within the UN Human Rights framework it means advocating for the implementation of the major conventions and agreements on women, like CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, relevant ILO Conventions and General Assembly Resolutions, and the Women’s Empowerment Principles. It means advocating for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the staffing, creation and implementation of all UN decisions.

Our activism is accomplished through information gathering (going to meetings and briefings by various UN Agencies and CoNGO Committees, together with wide reading of background materials); lobbying (visiting the missions of member states and talking to UN delegates and agency personnel to get our points across); creating oral and written input into UN negotiations, outcome documents, conventions, and agreements; and communicating with one another, the NGO community and BPW International through reports, talks and presentations and the

creation of informational panels and workshops (please visit <http://www.bpw-international.org/history-of-cooperation-bpw-un>)