

## CFUW and International Relations

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Did you know that CFUW plays a leading role in global affairs? Are you aware of the many partnerships we forge with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to pursue the rights of women and girls? Let us start with the United Nations.

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

The Commission's focus, from 1947 to 1962, was 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. The Commission was also successful 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 drafted the early international conventions on women's rights, such as the: 1. 1953 [Convention on the Political Rights of Women](#), 2. the 1957 [Convention on the Nationality of Married Women](#), and 3. the 1962 [Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages](#). The Commission also contributed to the work of UN offices, such as the International Labour 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.

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.

Accumulation of evidence gathered in the 1960s showed that women were disproportionately affected by poverty. As such, the work of the Commission centered on women's needs in community and rural development, agricultural work, family planning, and scientific and

technological advances. Encouraged by the Commission, the UN system began to expand its technical assistance to further the advancement of women, especially in developing countries.

In 1972, to mark its 25th anniversary, the Commission recommended that 1975 be designated International Women's Year. It was marked by 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, efforts resulted in the [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993. During 1994, an 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](#). After the conference, the Commission was mandated by the General Assembly to play a central role in monitoring implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and advising ECOSOC accordingly. As called for in the Platform for Action, an additional UN office for the promotion of gender equality was established, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).



In 2011, the four parts of the UN system mentioned—DAW, INSTRAW, OSAGI and UNIFEM—merged to become UN Women, which is now the Secretariat of the Commission and, in that role, performs its substantive and administrative work.



UN Women works with member states in the following priority areas, with a focus on the Sustainable Goal #5 – Gender Equality:

- Increasing women's leadership and participation
- Ending violence against women and girls
- Engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment; and
- Making gender equality central to national development planning and building

During the Commission's annual two-week session in New York, representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather at UN headquarters. Their focus is on a new theme and a review theme each year and includes discussions on the key global policy

document on gender equality, implementation of the 1995 [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)), 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.

CSW is the largest gathering of gender equality advocates in the world in which the annual session convenes Ministers, high level government officials and civil Society representatives (e.g. CFUW) to the UN. At CSW, the delegates' role is to 1. Discuss progress; 2. Set policies; 3. Identify challenges and 4. Set global standards on gender equality and the rights of women and girls.



## **NGO CSW/NY – Its Role in the CSW**

The NGO CSW Forum is the civil society side of the UN CSW. NGO CSW/NY was established in 1972 as one of the NGO Committees of the Conference of NGOs (CoNGO) in preparation for International Women's Year (1975), the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985) and the [First World Conference on Women](#) held in Mexico City in 1975. The Forum runs parallel to the official CSW session taking place at the UN Headquarters. This provides civil society the opportunity to engage in the processes and CSW sessions without ECOSOC-accreditation or a UN grounds pass (both of which are needed to attend the CSW).

Over the two weeks of the UN CSW, NGO CSW/NY organizes hundreds of events that inform, engage and inspire grassroots efforts and advocacy needed to empower women and girls. Some of the events hosted are: Consultation Day, Orientation & Advocacy Training, Regional Caucuses and Conversation Circles. They attend, as well, the "Parallel Sessions" organized by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) around the globe and "Side" Sessions offered by Permanent Missions and United Nations entities. Side sessions are offered at the UN Building in New York City while the parallel sessions are in nearby locations

Each year, the Commission focuses on specific themes related to gender equality, known as the 'priority' and 'review' themes. NGO-CSW/NY has an Advocacy Training Research Group (ARG) and offers advocacy training to civil society groups. ARG researches issues raised in the CSW priority theme with input from NGO CSWs in the Regions and civil society. In advance of negotiations, recommended language is provided to receptive government representatives for consideration and inclusion in their discussions, and to UN Women, the CSW Bureau and during opportunities for civil society input.

## **The Influencing Opportunities for CFUW**

So how does CFUW fit in?

CFUW has been accredited through the ECOSOC since 1998. What does this mean to have special *consultative status*? The formal mechanisms granted to an NGO with consultative status are as follows: 1. We have access to the UN; 2. We contribute to the processes and discussions (written statements/oral statements); 3. We are allowed to attend meetings, commissions, and the High-Level Platform (HLP) Forum on Sustainable Development.

Informally, we are able to organize events to showcase our work; network with other NGOs, with UN officials and other member state representatives. We work in and with the international community and interact with other actors and processes.

As such, CFUW contributes written and 'oral statements' every year which are circulated. The oral statement reflects the themes of the CSW session. We suggest language into the draft document to prepare for the Agreed Conclusions – the outcome document of the discussions and policies set for the member states to implement. Please read our written statement for 2023: [CFUW's UNCSW67 written statement](#).

While in New York, CFUW delegates engage also with our government representatives to negotiate for gender equality language in the final Agreed Conclusions document.

We have engaged with other global NGOs who actively work on behalf of women's rights and seek support for our issue positions. The ability to influence is evident by the support we get from other NGOs. We learn what is happening globally and where the gaps on "women's rights" are – including within Canada. (Note the other NGOs who have cosigned our written statement.)

To further pursue the educational aspect to our global family, CFUW offers at CSW a "parallel event" to highlight the work advocated in Canada and with our partners, with respect to the priority and review themes. CFUW also presents a parallel session through the regional organization CAMEUS made up of Canada, (CFUW) Mexico (FEMU) and the USA (WG-USA).

Attending the Commission of the Status of Women is a major venue to connect, learn and share. It is about the work we do for the rights of women and girls. Each year CFUW members apply to our national office for the privilege of being one of CFUW's 20 delegates. These delegates will self-fund a week at the United Nations attending CSW sessions with thousands of other women around the world who have come to New York City for this reason. Other CFUW members are invited to attend virtually and have access to a multitude of parallel events put on by other global NGOs (more information to come.)

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