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ONTARIO COUNCIL

Special Report on the 67th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) Ontario Council (OC) Club Attendees

MARCH 2023

Recommendations FOR THE Zero draft - CSW67

1 LISTEN To girls & women

2 DIGITAL EDUCATION and STEM

3 IMPACT of TECH. on HUMAN RIGHTS

4 FINANCIAL RESOURCES for WOMEN for TECHNOLOGY

5 INTEGRATING HUMANITIES and STEM TO DRIVE CHANGE

6 WE HAVE MISOGYNY on steroids ONLINE

7 "WOMEN ARE missing out WITHOUT TECH"

8 THERE'S NO FINISH LINE

9 SPEAKER feedback

10 co-created BY 700+ CONSULTATIONS and SURVEY RESULTS

11 FEMINIZE DIGITAL ECONOMY!

12 YOUTH and ADOLESCENTS

13 ACCESS to TECH

14 RURAL COMMUNITIES

15 OLDER WOMEN

16 WOMEN with DISABILITIES

17 SAFE SPACES!

18 NEED a GLOBAL APPROACH to FOLLOW UP and ACCOUNTABILITY

19 NEED FEMINIST INTERNET!

20 "I WANT TO BE IN MY OWN STORY"

21 PEOPLE PRODUCT PLATFORMS PROFIT PHILANTHROPY ... BUT

22 ENGAGING private sector

23 GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

24 THERE CAN BE NOTHING for youth WITHOUT youth participation

25 NOT AS A TOKEN!

26 CSW

27 NGO CSW FORUM 67

28 DAY 2023

29 CONSULTATION

30 CONSULTATIONS and SURVEY RESULTS

31 AMANDEEP SINGH GILL, EMMA GIBSON, SIA NOWROJEE, FERNANDA VAZQUEZ, PASHTANA DURRANI

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Special Report on the 67th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)- Ontario Council (OC) Club Attendees

UNCSW 67 Priority Theme: **Innovation and Technological Change, and Education In The Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and The Empowerment of All Women and Girls.**

Background

The UNCSW is the principal global policy-making body dedicated to gender equality and the advancement of women. It was established in 1946 as a mechanism to promote, report on and monitor issues relating to the political, economic, civil, social and educational rights of women. The UNCSW convenes yearly in New York at the UN property for two weeks in March.

Over 8,700 organisations registered for UNCSW 67 and approximately 15,000 people took part, many through digital access (46% - a positive outcome of COVID) or a combination of virtual and in person (25%). Sixty-three percent of participants were under 50 years of age and most were women. Two thirds were attending for the first time.

Each commission has a priority theme (see above for the priority theme for UNCSW 67) and a review theme (for UNCSW 67 this was: challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session). The vast majority of presentations/sessions address these two areas.

Civil society, through non-government organisations (NGOs), plays an important role alongside the UN Committees and Member States in bringing information about the state of affairs and needs of women worldwide to attendees at the UNCSW. The UNCSW now uses adjacent sites for sessions presented by NGOs (called Parallel Events) and Member States (called Side Events) due to the sheer number of events. There are well over 800 presentations/sessions to choose from!

CFUW enjoys special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. Consultative status provides NGOs with access to not only ECOSOC, but also to its many subsidiary bodies, and importantly for CFUW, to the UNCSW which is a functional commission of ECOSOC.

Every year, 20 members of CFUW Clubs from across the country attend UNCSW as CFUW delegates (selected through an application process – any Club member may apply to be a delegate). Each delegate is asked to submit a report to CFUW National upon their return. These reports are then curated for distribution.

This year, Ontario Council Advocacy has asked each of the Ontario attendees to condense their reports and/or review their notes from sessions they attended and provide information that they believe is important for Ontario Clubs. This information will allow Ontario Council members to gain knowledge from the experiences of our delegates, may provide the impetus

for Clubs and members to explore our delegates' insights further and will perhaps encourage Clubs to incorporate some of the issues identified by our delegates into their advocacy projects.

I thank each of the attendees for taking the time to review their reports and modify them for this special document from Ontario Council Advocacy. It contains an abundance of information and ideas generated by our delegates.

Please note that some of the reports have been modified for brevity and comprehension, with the permission of the author.

Reports from Our Members

From Sandra Thomson, CFUW Kincardine, CFUW Oakville

Session: Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence – Moving Beyond Technology and Gender Based Violence (GBV) – Risks, Opportunities and Challenges

This was a very compelling and informative session which set the groundwork for learning about Gender Based Violence (GBV) and digital technology. The most revealing aspects of understanding this topic: the difficulty in obtaining statistics and the **need for more regulatory legislation.**

What is the definition of Digital GBV? The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has used this term - technology-facilitated gender-based violence - as: "acts of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender."

Who is at Risk?

Globally, 58% of girls and women aged 15-25 have experienced online harassment. The highest rate of online violence is found in Europe (63%), followed by Latin American (60%), Asia-Pacific (58%), Africa (54%), and North America (52%). According to the study, most girls have their first experience of social media harassment between the **ages of 14-16**, suggesting that this violence starts at a shockingly young age. In addition, digital GBV affects: women of colour, LGBTQI+ persons; disabled women and girls; and women in public life (women human rights defenders, politicians, journalists, and feminist activists). Women in public life are often at increased risk of experiencing technology-facilitated gender-based violence not only due to their gender, but because of their public work, activism or campaigning.

What is being done?

Even before this priority theme was highlighted this past CSW 67 in March, 2023, CFUW was already taking action. Following our Ontario Council Speakers Series in October 2021 featuring Senator Marilou McPhedran on violence against women politicians, CFUW clubs picked up the gauntlet. CFUW Oakville wrote a resolution and a template package was created.

The Ontario government, in March 2022, invested more than \$550,000 in initiatives that will help keep kids safe in class and **online**. The funding will support programs that combat sex-trafficking, violence against women, bullying and cyberbullying. This was in response, in part, to the following statistics in Ontario:

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 23 per cent of Ontario students reported being bullied at school and 22 per cent of Ontario students reported being bullied over the internet. And Statistics Canada found the following:

- 95 per cent of victims of police-reported human trafficking were women and girls.
- 22 per cent of police-reported victims of human trafficking are children under the age of 18.
- Most of all police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada occur in Ontario.

The Ontario government is acting to protect students through partnerships with community organizations, such as OneChild, White Ribbon, Respect Group Inc. and the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA), PREVnet, Egale, and Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity.

Other Recommendations – for clubs to advocate with the provincial and federal governments:

- Develop and continuously update legislation to protect women and girls from technology-facilitated GBV;
- Develop criminal and civil laws specific to technology facilitated harms and ensure that perpetrators can be held to account and sanctions are proportionate to injury;
- Develop international agreements to fight multi-jurisdictional technology facilitated GBV;
- Develop collaborative structures with women’s rights organizations, the technology sector and civil society, in the first instance to conduct a review of all measures and policies in relation to GBV, and update these in order to ensure they effectively address technology-facilitated GBV;
- Establish a statutory agency with authority and resources to address technology-facilitated GBV (or include new powers in an existing agency) including regulatory powers over private technology companies to proactively develop safeguarding processes and immediately remove harmful content;
- Provide funding to research institutions and NGOs to carry out studies on technology facilitated GBV, with a focus on the most marginalized women and girls;
- Utilize technology to tackle GBV including national digital awareness and education programmes, particularly prevention programmes that include engagement with men and boys to address harmful online behaviours.

I found this session to be so relevant, especially in light of the fact that CFUW and the Ontario government have already been active in combatting this ever-present threat to women and girls.

From Marina Huissoon, CFUW Milton and District

The theme of the conference in New York was digital transformation. Before I went, I wasn't sure how that could be related to women's rights ... but it certainly resonated with me how the younger generation in particular will be hugely impacted (for good and bad) by our digital capabilities.

"Technology is a gamechanger - but what (it) enables is up to us. For example, digital tools will connect women with their own bank accounts. But digital tools are also the new face of gender inequality. An online connected world can compound inequality - there are new forms of misinformation and online violence and harassment. Avoiding the harm and grasping the opportunity is what we must do."

For CFUW club members, International Women's Day (IWD) has continued to be a great annual opportunity to publicly declare our position; and in my view, that activism is important for Clubs as it demonstrates our commitment to the idea of women's rights. (Editor's note: the UNCSW is usually scheduled so that IWD falls at the beginning of the conference.)

While the narrative of women's rights is changing as our society evolves, the basic truth of gender inequality is still staring us in the face.

Salient points from the speech by H.E. Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th UN General Assembly key points:

Knowledge is power. [We must] equip women with access and resources.

By 2050, 70% of jobs will be technology-based.

Only 57% of women use the internet.

We have to intensify our efforts to improve women's agency.

Women and girls are 27 times more likely to be harassed online, and they limit their presence online as a result.

Even women in Afghanistan have the possibility to surreptitiously participate in education online - although there is risk to them.

Courtenay Rattray brought a message from the Office of the Secretary General:

Technology is dramatically shaping our lives. Women have less access than men. In LDCs (least developed countries) this is even more evident – they stay offline. Women occupy fewer positions in the tech industry and are being paid 27% less than men for the same job.

Equal representation has to be fought for. We need to change the patriarchal structures that allow the gender divide.

Gender equality is an issue of POWER.

*There are stereotypes that discourage STEM learning for girls.
Everyone everywhere needs connectivity - using quotas if necessary.
Silicon Valley merely digitizes sexism with algorithms that have inherent bias. Need to change this.
Discrediting women in the public eye is violence. Technology companies and corporations must stop the hate!*

Key points from the speech by the Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – Doreen Bogdan-Martin first woman (elected) chair of ITU (American):

3 examples of how technology has changed and is changing women's role in society:

- *Visually impaired students can use technology to communicate*
- *Using drones to observe shifting vegetation in an indigenous woman's geographic area*
- *3D & Virtual fashion shows*

All countries agree on the need to have connectivity everywhere.

From Hally Siddons, CFUW Ottawa

Session: Online Safety and Digital Empowerment of Women Journalists: Combatting Online Threats and Harassment (Side Event sponsored by Slovakia, Czechia and Austria)

In view of challenges women journalists are facing, the Permanent Missions of Austria, Czechia and Slovakia organized this Side Event to strengthen the safety and protection of women journalists by combating online threats and harassment. This was indeed a powerful session with much food for thought.

I share below key points:

The Under-Secretary General for Global Communications reminded us that death and rape threats are on social media every day and threaten to shut down critical reporting. Seventy-three percent (73%) of female journalists experience online threats and 25% violence, and 23% off line just for doing their jobs. On an average day there are 90 'threats' an hour. Nothing seems to be off limit. There is a systemic campaign to silence women. In concluding the UN speaker wanted to raise the alarm of what was happening to female journalists. **Take away: All of us own them a better response.**

The second speaker by video reminded us women were retreating from the field. Countries need to ensure law enforcement is better trained to deal in this field. Individual politicians have a role to raise awareness, especially among the public. There needs to be more state support for the rights and protection of these women. They must be able to do their important work without fear or harm.

The third speaker was Begona Lasagabaster from UNESCO. She quoted one journalist who said she was not in a war game but behind a computer. UNESCO's research has brought the crisis to the surface. We need to raise awareness of such at events like CSW. We need to organize capacity-building and online courses on how to deal with the issues and to offer them in several languages. UNESCO is also helping with journalists' mental health, an important part of their work. We need to protect freedom of expression and access to information and to ensure journalists are free from online violence.

Jodie Ginsberg reported that 390 journalists were in prison at the end of last year. Many women journalists received threats to their families and both online and offline violence, especially those investigating corruption at the highest level. Many threats were organized by those in a position of power.

A Russian journalist who had been attacked and had to leave Russia a year ago also spoke. She is just 25 years old. She chose a profession she would like to continue but is away from her country. Journalists do not want to leave their countries.

The next speaker questioned what these threats to female journalists mean. These threats are not just emerging but have been here for years. They need to be addressed with permanent action. Why are women targeted? They work in defense of freedom of information, and they are still not safe in exile. These threats are found in every country of the world with chilling effect in practical terms:

- They discourage women from entering the field
- They can result in watering down of the stories

Although there has been a failure to investigate sufficiently there is a sense of concrete action and a path forward.

Fatima Faizi was a journalist in Afghanistan. More than 80% of female journalists have left the country. Those remaining are not allowed to cover social or political issues. They must wear a burka and mask. It is hard to keep Afghanistan in the news. There is a lack of information and this is critical. The Taliban are not willing to provide journalists with the information they need. Despite being outside the country there is online harassment by the Taliban and their supporters. Right now no one listens to the women and no one hears them. Afghanistan is the worst place in the world to be a woman.

Ideas for Action to Support Women Journalists Everywhere: Immediate action is needed. States need to train their law enforcement as to how to deal with such online and personal violence. Silence is not an option. News organizations need to be created to support these women through providing visas (if they want or need to leave their country) and material assistance. Be sensitive and kind and teach the public to fight against propaganda. We cannot keep having these conversations in silos and expect our institutions to take action. Words are not enough. Action must be taken. Ensure gender equality is at the forefront of all action.

Session: The Signal for Help: Innovation to Shift Stigma to Support (Side Event sponsored by Canada Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations)

Canada Women's Foundation presented their work on the **Signal for Help** that can be used online if danger arises. Importantly it does not leave a digital trace. Signal responders know to dial 540540 to learn to help. Forty per cent of women in Canada are familiar with this now. You can sign up for a course online.

Safe You is a multi-stakeholder mobile application and platform that is designed to empower and protect women and girls from violence, as well as raise awareness on key gender-based issues. It is possible to hide the App on your phone. It has now spread to 48 countries and the support material is in 20 languages.

Comments by Hon. Marci Ien: Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth

Eleven million girls and women, 15 years and older have experienced some sort of partner violence. Gender based violence is a serious national health issue. It is costly – human, health, economic and has the potential to grow and soar. Canada is a proud advocate of Signal for Help. Canada recognizes and reflects on the critical intersection of technology and digital media.

Comments by Mariam Torosyam: CEO and Founder of The Safe You App

This could be an invaluable aid to end gender violence.

PANEL: Use of technology in gender-based violence, hate speech, sexual violence, coercion and control is extensive. All are very invasive. Training of shelter workers is being done with these tools, province by province. They are also working with youth at McGill University. They want to ensure they are met with support and not shame or blame. Self-help is important and believing survivors is key. We think especially of women who do not have access to shelters or help, and especially of rural women and those who live in remote areas.

From: [Elana Freeman, CFUW Windsor](#)

I was a first-time attendee at the UNCSW 67 event in New York in March 2023. Overall, I had a very positive experience and would attend again and would recommend it to other CFUW sisters.

I was very interested in this year's event due to the priority theme "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". I've worked in the field of technology for over 25 years and have been working specifically on digital transformation over the last 10-15 years in a corporate context. In addition, over the past 5 years or so I've been volunteering my time and talents on advancement for women and girls in the realm of technology careers.

Two items I took away from the conference that I think I can work on locally both in Windsor-Essex and in Ontario are as follows:

- Educating the community on the importance of participation of women and girls in the STEM fields.

- Educate the community on AI, especially on the topics of gender bias in AI, gender bias in AI algorithms.

I found the following drawing to be a great summary of my attendance at CSW67

