

Civil Society Development Forum 2010 Report - Women's Human Rights & Development

On 4 May 2010, the morning commenced with an opening plenary session, moderated by Liberato Bautista, President, CoNGO and Cyril Ritchie, First Vice-President, CoNGO. Highlights of the program included the keynote addresses and discussants. The essential role of the NGO network was emphasized as critical to the UN system, whereby governments are facilitated to engage with civil society. Rachel Mayanja, UN Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, stressed in her keynote address that sometimes solutions lie not with the UN, but rather with NGOs, and the interplay and interaction between the two is of utmost importance.

The UN's inability to often implement its noble policies was a concern raised by some of the distinguished speakers. The need for civil society engagement in ensuring implementation is effective was also highlighted. In his keynote discussion, Junaid S. Ahmad, Faculty Member, Faculty of Law and Policy, Lahore University of Management Sciences, and speaking on behalf of Muslim Men Against Domestic Abuse, raised concerns about the UN programs in developing countries, especially in light of the aims set out in the Millennium Development Goals. He also emphasized the need for education and empowerment of women to counter abuse against women.

The afternoon panel discussion session was moderated by Denise Scotto, UN Representative, and International Federation of Women Lawyers. The first panel discussion topic was "Legal and Institutional Mechanisms: Implementation and Enforcement." Panelist Eleanor Solo, Coordination and Outreach Unit, UN Division for the Advancement of Women, spoke of the newly established mechanism for dealing with violence against women, whereby formal complaints can be brought forward to the UN. She noted, however, that very few complaints have actually been filed, and the need to bring such complaints forward. The lack of complaints by no means indicates a decrease in violence against women, only that they are not bringing their cases forward. Emphasis on the need for NGOs to do so was also highlighted. Similarly, Karen Stefiszyn, Human Rights Specialist, UN Development Fund for Women, gave an in depth analysis of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). All these matters were brought in the purview of meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

The second panel discussion topic was "Women and Sustainable Development." Panelist Lois Beilin, UN Representative, Soroptimist International, spoke of the 90,000 women in 124 countries that have joined with Soroptimist to aid in sustainable regional development. The discussion focused on the need to empower women and allow them to play a transformative role in sustainable development around the world. Particular emphasis was also placed on climate change and how women's daily activities can assist in limiting the effects of climate change.

The third and final panel of the day focused on "Gender Discrimination: Multiple Layers and Multiple Forms." This session discussed not only the historical inequities leading to gender discrimination, but also the forms it takes in our contemporary society. Ranging from limited employment opportunities to lack of education for women, and everything in between, the panelists discussed the efforts their organizations undertake in alleviating gender discrimination. All panelists concurred on the need for UN and NGO cooperation in meeting the desired aims of the Millennium Development Goals – both on the ground and through governmental legislation.

On May 5 2010, The morning session commenced with a continuation of the panel discussions, moderated by Richard Mandelbaum, Policy Analyst, Farmworker Support Committee. Elena Gastaldo, a panelist and Programme Officer and CEB Toolkit Liaison, Office for the UN, New York, International Labour Organization (ILO), began with a general picture of migration and the governmental shift in approach to the issue of migration. International instruments for migration, including the ILO Convention and Convention 143 on migrant workers, were noted as strong foundations for international adoption on the issue of migrants. The panelists discussed what migration means for women, chiefly in the

area of work. Women migrant workers tend to enter the retail trade or domestic work. Serious concerns were raised in relation to migrant women and domestic work, particularly because households are not considered a workplace and the individual hiring not generally perceived as an employer. This dynamic makes it difficult for there to be any enforceable regulations, outside already established labor legislation. It was further noted that since work permits are not granted for domestic work, migrant women have the additional difficulty of not being able to bring their families with them from their home countries.

Often, migration of women can be detrimental to their home countries. A case study was presented on Costa Rica, where there appears to be a health crisis resulting from a shortage of nurses, many of whom have migrated to Europe. However, in their migration and subsequent integration, these workers face great obstacles that are sometimes insurmountable. Women migrant workers face particular discrimination because of their gender, nationality, race, migrant status, type of occupation, and in wages. The UN and civil society must engage with one another to bring positive change in these areas.