

As the 2020 begins and we welcome the first UN CSW of the new decade, we invite you to become acquainted with its history.

History of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)



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Main role and function of CSW

- CSW is one of the 9 functional commissions of ECOSOC. (The others deal with social development, human rights, narcotic drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, science and technology for development, sustainable development, population and development, and the statistical commission.)
- It now has reps of 45 Member States elected by ECOSOC (13 from Africa; 11 from Asia; 9 from Latin America and Caribbean; 8 from Western Europe and other States and 4 from Eastern Europe) for 4 year terms.

- Over time the Commission has drafted several Declarations (such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1967; the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 etc.) and Conventions such

as the 1953 Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the 1957 Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW] in 1979, which entered into force in 1981. In 1999, the Optional Protocol to the Convention introduced the right of petition for women victims of discrimination.

The Commission declared as its purpose: “to raise the status of women, irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women in the provisions of statutory law, in legal maxims or rules, or in interpretation of customary law”.

- Not only Governments, but also NGOs are allowed to attend caucuses and panels and to organize their own parallel events;

At the beginning all Gov. reps. were women.

Historical overview and main achievements:

- CSW was established already in 1946 and held its first session with 15 members. One of UNCSW's first tasks was to contribute to the drafting of [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Commission members inserted gender-sensitive language — arguing against references to “men” as a synonym for humanity and phrases like “men are brothers.” They received resistance from members of the Commission on Human Rights, but succeeded in introducing new, inclusive language.

- First achievements:
 - Collection of data showing discrimination against women;
 - Nomination of 1975 as **International Women's Year**;
 - Nomination of the decade 1976 – 85 as the **UN Decade for Women**;
- Preparation of the global conferences on women: Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980),

Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

The Commission is as old as UN, but UN is 75, whereas CSW has its 64 th session this year! Originally, annual sessions from 1946 – 1956; then again annually from 1959 – 1970; then biennial sessions from 1972 – the World Conference in Nairobi in 1985. After that again annual sessions from 1986 – now.

I serviced the Commission from 1983 until 1996. At the time, other functional commissions had also 2-week sessions. Now most others reduced to 1 week, CSW still has 2 week sessions.!

Methods of work:

- Adoption of multi-year programmes of work to appraise progress and make further recommendations to accelerate implementation of the Platform for Action. These are the negotiated agreed conclusions on a priority theme. CSW also contributes to **the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

At each session: -- ministerial segment;

- General discussion;
- Expert panel discussions;
- Consideration of one priority theme based on the Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the special session of the GA in 2000 and linkages to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- Evaluation of progress in implementing previous agreed conclusions;
- Discussion of emerging issues and trends.

After the Beijing World Conference, ECOSOC expanded Commission's mandate and decided 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.

Secretariat of CSW:

The Secretariat for the sessions of CSW: originally

- the Branch for the Advancement of Women in Vienna. After moving to New York in 1994, it became
- the Division for the Advancement of Women (**DAW**).

Other units within the UN system that dealt with women's issues were

- the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (**INSTRAW**) in Santo Domingo,
- the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (**OSAGI**) in New York and
- the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in New York.

In July 2010 the General Assembly created **UN Women**, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. That, however, did not imply the provision of additional resources. But the UN encouraged the setting up of National Committees of Women which are independent non-governmental organizations that support the mission of UN Women through public awareness activities and fundraising efforts to support UN Women programmes.

Currently there are such natl. Cttees in 12 countries (including in Austria).

World Conferences:

Outcome of the Mexico World Conference (1975) was a **Plan of Action**;

Outcome of the Copenhagen Conference (1980) was the **Programme of Action**.

Outcome of the Nairobi World Conference (1985) were the **Forward-looking strategies for the**

advancement of women (FLS).

Outcome of the Beijing World Conference (1995) was **the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.**

Secretary General of the Mexico WC was Helvi Sipilä, a Finnish diplomat.

Secretary General of the Copenhagen WC was Lucille Mair, a Jamaican diplomat.

1985: Third World Conference in Nairobi – my first World Conference!

No computers! Cold War!

157 countries were represented with 1,400 delegates.

Secretary General was Leticia Shahani, a Philippine diplomat.

The NGO Forum at the University of Nairobi was chaired by Nita Barrow from Barbados; more than 15,000 attendees. American women at the NGO Forum opposed the women in official US delegation, believing them to be lengthened arm of conservative Reagan administration.

Outcome: the FLS; for the first time introduction of Lesbian rights;

The issue of violence against women emerged from being a hidden topic.

It took place in the middle of the Cold War. Luckily the Kenyan Gov. was on the same political side as the USA!

Each paragraph was voted upon separately. (**372** paragraphs!!); and in the early hours of Saturday adoption of the document by consensus.

1995: Fourth World Conference in Beijing:

Different political situation, after fall of Berlin wall. In 1995, women from the Eastern Bloc countries had largely cast off the old Soviet anti-capitalist agenda and came to Beijing for the first time free from their Governments' control. The Americans were finally able to lay claim to the leadership of the international women's movement. Eastern European women would be re-educated into accepting Western feminist perspectives. The old Soviet "peace" agenda was reflected in only one area that referred to the effects of armed conflict on women.

A host of relatively new issues such as trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual harassment were heavily integrated into the document.

The Secretary-General was Gertrude Mongella from Tanzania.

Aung San Suu Kyi delivered a keynote address.

Why Beijing? (Austria ----- Beijing!)

CSW acted as the preparatory body for the Beijing World Conference.

During one of the Commission's sessions prior to the Beijing World Conference, an issue arose regarding the term '**gender**'. A contact group was formed to seek agreement on the commonly understood meaning of the term 'gender' in the context of the Platform for Action and to report directly to the Beijing Conference. The contact group reaffirmed that the word "gender" as used in the Platform for Action was intended to be interpreted and understood as it was in ordinary, generally accepted usage; i.e. in the sociological context.

It is sad to see that nowadays new discussions arise regarding the term 'gender'!

Prior to the Conference two days of pre-conference consultations.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action unanimously adopted by 189 countries.

12 critical areas of concern.

More than 17,000 participants (including 6,000 Government delegates, 4,000 accredited NGO reps, 4,000 media representatives).

Hillary Clinton gave her famous speech "**Women's Rights are Human Rights**".

Amb. Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl (Austria) Chair of Committee of the Whole.

As we know the final document reaffirms the fundamental principle set forth at the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, 1993, that the **human rights of women and girls** are part of universal human rights. The Convenor of the **NGO Forum** was Khunying Supatra Masdit from Thailand, it was held in Huairu about 50 km away from Beijing, with 30,000 participants.

After Beijing:

In 2000 the 23rd special session of the GA decided to conduct a five-year review and appraisal;

In 2005: the 49th session of CSW conducted a 10 year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and adoption of a Declaration.

In 2010: a 15 year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action by the 54th session of CSW and adoption of a Declaration.

In 2015 CSW held a “Beijing + 20” Special Session. Encouragement for regional commissions to hold a review and appraisal.

This year: CSW is to adopt a **political declaration**, no agreed conclusions!