

## Background on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

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*United Nations Committee Chairman*

Many of you have heard, through e-newsletters and various other forms of communication, about the annual CSW. For those who do not have a clear understanding, we provide an explanation of what it is and what takes place. More importantly, perhaps, we need to know why it is important to Zonta. We refer to this as CSW while it is actually the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women which meets each year in late February or early March in New York at UN Headquarters. The commission meets for two weeks and is the principal policy-making body dedicated *exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women*. It also seeks to identify challenges and set standards on a global scale. As an international NGO whose mission is to advance the status of women worldwide through service and advocacy, what better place for Zonta to advocate for those women's issues that are close to our hearts: trafficking, violence against women and girls, equality in the workplace, women's health issues, and the problem of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict areas. While this list is not all-inclusive, all Zontians know that these are some of the challenges we are grappling with.



**Mary Ann Tarantula at CSW57**



**Zontians with representatives from the U.S. Fund for UNICEF at CSW57**

Our presence, both during and before the CSW meets, gives us an opportunity to promote our viewpoint on what the commission should be taking into consideration during its deliberations. The members of the ZI UN Committee belong to NGO Committees on the Status of Women in New York, Geneva and Vienna. In the context of those committees, we promote the objects of Zonta and attempt to convince the members of the commission as to the outcomes we hope to see at the end of the two-week meeting. All members of the UN Committee work all year-long through the CSW committees to influence those outcomes.

There are many meetings with member states and UN ambassadors as well as other NGOs to attempt to further our ideas as to what we want to see happen in the realm of women's rights. Our clubs and districts can all take part in this process. What is it we want to see happen? What action do we want to see the UN take? Clubs and districts can communicate with the UN Committee and plan advocacy initiatives that will convince their governments that they want action. This is a way for those who cannot attend CSW to have their voices heard.

### **Record Attendance for Zontians**

This year we had a record number of Zontians attend CSW. They were able to attend sessions, called parallel events, sponsored by various NGOs, where they heard about best practices and what these NGOs are doing to improve the lives of women all around the world. They were able to take these ideas back to their districts and clubs. Women from all over the world attend CSW. This year there were better than 5000 registered from over 350 NGOs. Zonta took part in three panels, one on our program with UNICEF in Rwanda, one on trafficking and we co-sponsored one on maternal health. They were well attended and helped to improve our credibility and visibility around the world.

During the commission's deliberations, only those who are on member state delegations can attend. The ZI UN Committee, along with many NGOs, has worked to try to get our members into these deliberations as observers, but so far we have not been successful. So we work behind the scenes and make our views very clear as to what we want to see in the "agreed conclusions" at the end of the meeting.

### **Agreed Conclusions were hard-won**

It is not an easy task to get all parties to agree on the outcome document (agreed conclusions). This year the CSW discussed the obstacles that hinder progress on realizing the commitments to gender equality and emphasized prevention and services. The time for awareness of the problem of violence against women and girls is past and the CSW concentrated its efforts on actions that would transform social attitudes, laws and institutions that support discrimination and violence.



**Zonta International President Lynn McKenzie meets Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Michelle Bachelet.**

The agreed conclusions have recommendations for action by governments, intergovernmental bodies as well as civil society and other stakeholders. These recommendations are to be put into action at the international, national, regional and local levels. The emphasis must be on implementation. For countries to pass legislation is not enough. The legislation must have teeth. It must be implemented or it is of no consequence and women are no better off.

While the CSW has 45 member states on the Commission, the CSW Bureau is made up of 5 members. The Bureau facilitates the preparation for the outcome document and plays a crucial role in helping to mediate among the members of the Commission. They represent regions (African states, Asia-Pacific states, Eastern European states, Latin America and the Caribbean states, and Western Europe and other States).

### **Looking ahead: CSW58**

The 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW (2014) will concentrate on the MDGs. The official title is "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls." This year, we had a large contingent of Zontians come to New York during

the CSW. We hope that we have as many, if not more, join us in 2014. We will be posting on the Zonta website information as it becomes available, and we urge Zontians to read it and consider attending. When one sees the dedication and commitment of those who attend, it is inspiring and helps to “charge the engines” of change.

An important “emerging issue” is “key gender equality issues to be reflected in the post-2015 development framework.” 2015 is when the MDGs expire and most NGOs are preparing for the next phase. Zonta will be working on its key issues and asks that all of our districts and clubs begin to formulate their views. What world do you want to see for women?

The agreed conclusions-unedited-from the 2013 57<sup>th</sup> Session are available on our website. Read it to see what agreements have been reached.



**Representatives from various NGOs participate in a celebration March during CSW57**