

59th Commission on the Status of Women – Short Summary

The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place over the last two weeks, from March 9th – 20th and included representatives from Member States, UN entities and NGOs from across the world. The two weeks kicked off with the International Women’s Day ‘March in March’ held on Sunday March 8th when thousands marched the streets of Manhattan carrying and waving the slogan “Planet 50-50: by 2030: Step It Up For Gender Equality and Women’s Rights”.

The main theme of the session was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the Commission undertaking a review of the past twenty years (Beijing+20) and the implementation of the Platform for Action over that time. There was also a focus on the current challenges that affect the implementation and the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. The Commission adopted the Political Declaration during the first session of the Commission, which unfortunately meant that there was not much space for civil society to be involved in the formation of the Declaration.

Over the course of the two weeks, aside from the sittings of the Commission, there were 190 official side events held in the UN head quarters and 400 side events organised by NGOs that were held in other locations. The side events covered a myriad of topics relating to women ranging from women in peace and security, to disability, to the role that sport can play for women and girls.

Three main points stood out for me that each panel and each discussion kept coming back to, they were: the participation of men and boys in achieving gender equality; intersectionality of issues; and accountability. There were multiple side events held on the topic of men and boys and it was also a theme that came up alongside many other topics. The inclusion of men and boys in the process towards gender equality is going to be essential as in most cases men are still the decision makers who are able to implement the policies that will increase equality. It is also so important to educate boys from a young age so that they understand what equality means and why it is a benefit to everyone, not just women.

Intersectionality also came up in many discussions as many of the current paradigms for gender place issues as mutually exclusive rather than seeing them as multidimensional and overlapping.

There were many discussions on accountability: how is it achievable; whose role is it? A large focus was on the role of civil society in holding governments accountable for commitments they make and looking at how we measure the successes of government and a framework for accountability. Going forward it will largely be civil society that will need to hold governments accountable along with UN agencies that are mandated to do so.

The Commission produced one resolution on the “Situation of and assistance too Palestinian women” E/CN.6/2015/L.2, which expresses concern about the situation of women in Palestine and calls upon relevant parties.

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