Reported by the ICJW UN Team in NY

Madeleine Brecher, Fran Butensky, Rita Fishman, Joan Goldberg, Judy Mintz

In March each year, our ICJW team attends events taking place during the two week Commission on the Status of Women meetings in New York where thousands of global women come to participate. Below you will find the reports of some of the programs we attended. This year, we were so pleased that Vivien Brass, Susie Ivany and Sara Winkowski joined us for many sessions. Vivien and Susie have sent a first-timers review of their experience under separate cover. We hope you enjoy reading about the two events that ICJW cosponsored and our reflections on many of the other sessions.
NGO CSW62 FORUM

March 11-23, 2018

Reported by Madeleine Brecher

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York (NGO CSW/NY) is a coalition of hundreds of organizations and individuals working within the UN community to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across the globe. It works in conjunction with the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and UN Women, member states and other UN agencies to amplify women and girls' voices at the United Nations to ensure that “no one is left behind”.

The NGO CSW62 Forum (March 11-23, 2018) is held each year during the CSW session. It is organized by NGO CSW/NY, takes place in and around UN headquarters and is THE largest Commission gathering at the United Nations. Thousands of grassroots people from around the world come to NY to host parallel events, attend events, network and advocate for the priority themes of the session. This year’s Priority theme is, Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, and Review theme, Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.

The registered attendees are inspired to use the material learned at the Forum when they return home post conference. Over 440 parallel events were organized by nongovernmental organizations which provide best practices and insight into techniques that work and lessons learned. Additionally, attendees gain a perspective on problems facing women around the world and how to advance the women’s agenda to achieve gender equality. The Consultation Day program launches CSW62 with a full day program of speakers and panels to give the sold out crowd of over 800 a taste of what will be happening over the next two weeks. The morning briefings with ECOSOC accredited NGOs (ICJW is one!), UN Women and the CSW Bureau bring attendees up-to-date on important daily happenings especially the status of the Outcome Document being negotiated by members of the CSW (Bureau). In addition, The Forum includes Regional Caucuses, Advocacy Training, a new and exciting Media Zone where rural women record their personal stories to share around the world, and a Rural Women’s Network. Social events include a Rally, an Artisan Fair and a sold out Networking Reception. Four hundred civil society women were in attendance at the Reception which was held at the lovely
Rosenthal Pavilion at NYU overlooking Washington Square Park. I was proud to co-chair the reception which received “best one ever” reviews. (See the pictures below.)

The scope of the Forum requires months of advance planning by a large and very strong all-volunteer Planning Committee made up of members of NGO CSW/NY. We started planning in September and the intensity increases as the month of March gets closer. We love every minute of the experience and are particularly thrilled when it’s successful AND it’s over. We are elated but truly exhausted!

At the Reception- March 13, 2018

Susie Ivany, Madeleine Brecher, Vivien Brass

Madeleine Brecher welcoming the attendees
WOMEN POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LEADERS:
Achieving Economic Solvency with Rural Women

March 12, 2018

CSW 62 Side Event

Planned and reported by: Joan Lurie Goldberg and Judy Mintz

Also attended by: Madeleine Brecher and Fran Butensky

Sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Fiji, Estonia, Chile and Albania

Organizations: FAWCO, PPSEAWA, LWV, ICJW and BPW

This forum showcased best political practices that have led to the eradication of extreme poverty for rural women and girls. Leaders from Canada, Chile, Estonia and Fiji spoke about strategies to strengthen economic solvency. These political leaders are combating issues faced by many rural women. The plight of indigenous women was highlighted.

Opening Remarks by Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Fiji, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Today’s meeting brings together many women who have done much to alleviate poverty. It is more important than ever to empower women in this era of climate change. 40% of agriculture is in the hands of women and this is an area where effects of climate change are most important. The Minister emphasized that women can influence policy on many levels – women leaders can influence national policy. All women can influence household and community decision making. In the fight against poverty in the era of climate change, women are most vulnerable.

Rosalee Keech, the moderator, introduced the speakers. She began by emphasizing that, when women are in leadership roles, more attention is paid to social issues and to making constructive change. By 2015, the number of people living in extreme poverty ($1.50 per day or less) had decreased to 14% of people on earth. This is still 800,000,000 people. All of these people suffer from hunger, malnutrition and lack of education – the components of poverty.

Canada:

Senator Marilou McPhedran (Canadian Parliament) uses her lens as a human rights lawyer to work for economic solvency and independence. She’s working to overcome barriers by creating a legal framework based on rights. In Canada improvement has been achieved by passing a budget based on gender and diversity. There have been increased allocations for women entrepreneurs. The gaps between women and men and rural and urban have been lowered due to new laws and a revision of the constitution which gave full rights (e.g. land ownership) to women. However, more attention must be paid-especially to indigenous women-many who live in rural areas.
Gender-based budgeting is very important. In Canada, the situation is now very good. In the current budget, every article mentions gender and $1.65 Billion is allocated to women entrepreneurs.

Chile:

Ms. Maria Soledad Berrios, Director of Programs and Regional Management with responsibility for the Promotion and Development of Women began by stating that the poverty rate in Chile is just 3% but most of the poor are indigenous peoples who are hard to reach.

Of 1.85 million rural women, 133,000 are farm workers; some are paid and some are not. Many live in poverty and just 1 in 10 finish high school. Three public policies exist to alleviate the situation:

- Training program for rural women in which they learn technology. Since 1992, 30,000 women have been trained for 3 years each; participants include some indigenous women.
- Loans for women – 16,000 women have low interest loans to start businesses.
- Since 1995 there has been a National Board for Rural Women’s organizations. Today there are 17 participating organizations. In the last four years, they have been able to facilitate loans to women without involving their husbands or partners.

Estonia:


From 2016 to 2023 there is a welfare development plan in place in Estonia which, for the first time, includes women’s economic independence.

According to the speaker, economic independence is very important for women in Estonia because it helps them get away from violence. A big issue is that the gender gap in salary in Estonia is 25.3%, the biggest in the European Union. But, there has been equal pay legislation in place since 2004. The Labor Department will soon start to investigate why the law in not enforced. They will use information technology tools to examine the salary structure.

Family leave policy is good – Parental leave is provided to women for 1.5 years at near full salary. They are looking toward more equal leave; want to increase paternal leave from 10 to 40 days. In addition, the government identifies family friendly companies and has, to date, named 40 such companies.

Estonia recognizes that we must change gender attitudes to create more female leaders and must encourage girls to pursue careers in non-traditional fields. Note that the President of Estonia is a woman.

Fiji:

Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Fiji, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has worked to shine a light on domestic violence. In Fiji there are 189,000 rural women who live on 100 islands. She
shared that a huge improvement for this population came about with an increased investment in infrastructure. With improved village roads came access to legal services, water and electricity. There was a 6.3% decrease in poverty because of this crucial investment. Other improvements helping rural women include provisions for loans, micro financing and credit. The women serving in Parliament are working to ensure women’s social and economic rights. There are many good laws and policies in place, but there must be more implementation. A case in point is the continued prevalence of domestic violence but unfortunately it is still entrenched in cultural traditions.

Final Comments:

Canada: There is unequal representation between rural and urban women in the government. There is a need for leadership, education and the use of social media to reduce these gaps. Implementation of laws and increased women’s participation are keys to improvement. Women must support each other.

Chile: There are more and more women serving in Parliament and in business. In order to eradicate extreme poverty, the needs of indigenous women must be targeted. Training is key.

What can NGOs do to solve this problem:

- NGOs must form partnerships with governments and institutes.
- NGOs must use strong voices when addressing ministers.
- NGOs must strengthen their roles and generate more space.
- Best practices must be shared.
- NGOs must increase intergenerational participation.
- NGOs play a critical role and need to work in synergy with governments.
A TOWNHALL MEETING DURING CSW62

With Civil Society and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

March 13, 2018

Reported by Madeleine Brecher

Secretary-General Guterres at the Townhall Meeting

As part of an ongoing dialogue, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres met with civil society activists to discuss topics pertaining to gender equality in the work of the UN. The SG explained the initiative to address the male-dominated power structure within its own ranks and he was proud to proclaim that it now has more women than men in the senior management team. “The struggle for gender equality is a tough struggle, and obviously it is tougher when we look at it from the perspective of Governments and institutions,” Mr. Guterres said at this town-hall meeting at the start of the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women gathering. He went on, “So it is civil society that is indeed being in the forefront of this struggle... Without civil society leadership and pressure, I doubt we would be where we are today.” Some of his other main points during this exciting and exceedingly transparent session were:

- The Executive Office now has a staff ration of 56% women against 44% men. The female to male ratio was 40/60 when he was sworn in as top executive.
- At the most-senior level, gender parity was reached last month with 23 women to 21 men.
- He also issued a roadmap to achieve full gender parity in 2028, having already asked all UN departments and agencies to present their plans.
- Mr. Guterres is addressing the problem of UN staff sexually exploiting and abusing the people they serve as well as sexual harassments happening within the UN.
- UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who was in attendance, called the townhall-style meeting a great opportunity to build the relationship between the UN’s leadership and civil society.

During the Q and A portion of the event, the highlights were:

- Q: What specific actions will insure that marginalized groups will not be left behind?
A: The world has a long way to go before gender equality will be ensured. Many countries have abhorrent penal mechanisms adding the UN denounces those situations. Our role is advocacy.

- Q: How can the UN justify holding CSW in the US with its travel bans and visa denials.
  A: That is a serious question. The organization “engages actively with government to solve it: and will do everything it can to avoid it. (As an aside, I attended the US CSW briefing at the US Mission. When the same question was addressed, the Chief of the US Delegation seemed actually shocked to hear it. She said she was mortified and would look into the matter immediately. Those of us in attendance were shocked by her response as we knew that several others up there on the dais knew ALL about the visa and travel ban issue and NGO CSW had addressed the matter with them!!!)

- Q: An indigenous Guatemalan woman asked what the UN chief would do to guarantee technical support and economic resources for women’s and indigenous women’s organizations globally to improve conditions for women and girls.
  A: In the context of human rights instruments and economic and social resources, there are “action plans that are geared to the rights of indigenous people that are most vulnerable, which includes women.” He did concede that the programs are smaller than they should be given the great need.

Secretary-General Guterres closed the session by thanking us and wishing us all the best. “Make our lives difficult”, he called out as he walked out of the room. You couldn’t help but trust him.
Stop Trafficking Panel

Reported by Rita Fishman, ICJW representative on CSTIP

Also attended by: Madeleine Brecher, Fran Butensky, Judy Mintz, Vivien Brand and Susie Ivany

Moderator—Lauren Hersh—World Without Exploitation

Laura Edndin—Brooklyn District Attorney Human Trafficking Unit

Sara Gardner—THORN—Digital Defenders of Children

Akiba Saeedi—IBM Director of i2 Intelligence Analysis

Staca Shehan—National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The panel, representing organizations, technology companies, and a prosecutor from the District Attorney’s office, shared the challenges facing them in their work to disrupt human trafficking and the tremendous effort it takes to stay ahead of the traffickers who, too, use technology to their benefit. So far the traffickers are winning. Working with technology created by THORN and IBM i2 Intelligence Analysis and Facebook panelists shared their stories. Some highlights of the important conversation engaged in by this panel helps us to understand some of the issues we face in disrupting human trafficking:

- The use of Backpage and Facebook by traffickers is very difficult to track.
- Traffickers are using VPN (virtual private network) to share information.
- Kids are recruited on line and controlled on line.
- The Dark Web gives anonymity on the web – now the bad actors use Bitcoin to cover their tracks hiding where the money is going.
• Kids are forced to write their own ad—in that way the trafficker is kept out of legal jeopardy.
• Thorn is focused on building the tools to find trapped children. They identified 18,000 victims in 12 months. Using Spotlight they are able to assist investigators so that they no longer feel they are looking for a “needle in a haystack”.
• IBM i2 Intelligence Analysis turns disparate data into actionable intelligence in support of disrupting criminal activity, together, the Center for Intelligence Led Prevention run by Stop the Traffik has had success identifying hot spots around the globe sharing what they learn with financial institutions, law enforcement, NGO’s and communities to disrupt trafficking.
• Facebook has partnered with STT, in reaching out to vulnerable communities, and has identified, through the IBM i2 program, those vulnerable communities. At risk communities download the Stop App and are engaged in conversation educating themselves to the dangers around them.
• Facebook ran a campaign on “sextortion” joined with Thorn to reach out to teenagers. 1600 responses in two days from panicked children concerned that naked photos of them taken by a disgruntled boyfriend would appear on line. Some cases have resulted in suicide.

In conclusion—as we see, technology can be used to disrupt this human rights violation. Perseverance, partnerships, sharing information are essential if we are to get ahead of the traffickers. As communities join together to that goal, there is hope that we will see a switch in the struggle to become the winners and successfully disrupt human trafficking.

Lunch together after the trafficking panel
(L.to R.)Vivian Brass, Judy Mintz, Fran Butensky
Madeleine Brecher, Rita Fishman, Susie Ivany
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: A Panel Discussion with Leading Female Advocates

Sponsored by UN Watch and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights

March 20, 2018

CSW 62 Side Event

Susie Ivany, Madeleine Brecher, Vivien Brass, Sara Winkowski, Judy Mintz, Joan Lurie Goldberg

Reported by: Joan Lurie Goldberg and Judy Mintz

Also attended by: Vivienne Brass, Madeleine Brecher, Susie Ivany and Sara Winkowski

Opening remarks by Dan Smith, the New York Associate for UN Watch: UN Watch has lots to monitor in Geneva. Their mission is to monitor the Human Rights Council and raise the alarm when human rights abusers are appointed to the Council. The current session of the HRC will end this Friday. In the next session Saudi Arabia and Iran will take seats.

Irwin Cotler, Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and an international human rights lawyer who counsels prisoners of conscience was the moderator. As a parliamentarian in Canada, Prof. Cotler was the first male member of the Women’s Caucus. He has championed gender equality initiatives in Canada and many other places. Prof. Cotler set the tone for this event by his description of Raoul Wallenberg as a person who demonstrated that someone with the courage to care can confront evil and be effective in bringing about change. “Empowering women is empowering humanity”.

Ketty Nivyabandi a poet and Burundian democracy activist was the first speaker. She was forced to leave Burundi and has come to Canada where she works with the Nobel Women’s Initiative for women’s rights. In Burundi, there were decades of internal conflict and civil war in the 1990s. After the war, a new constitution provided limited democracy with the President to serve for 10 years; there were some abuses but there was a free press. That changed in 2015 when the president decided to change the constitution and run for a third 10 year term. There were protests which led to police brutality to suppress dissent.
Ketty used social media to get women to join the protests which had been largely male. Women broke out of their traditional roles, held all-female protests, and spoke in public. Then a failed coup d’etat was used as an excuse to silence all protest. Many women were arrested and tortured.

90% of those in private media are now outside the country along with intellectuals and all opposition. There is no dissent tolerated inside the country. She considers fighting the dictatorship to be her basic duty; we must normalize resistance and all work against totalitarianism.

Cotler comments – Global totalitarianism is resurgent and a global response is needed.

Wai Wai Nu, Rohingya activist and Founder of Women’s Peace Network and Justice for Women

When Wai’s background was shared, we learned of her credentials as a key proponent for human rights. She is recognized as one of the 50 leading advocates in the world. For 7 years she was a political prisoner and now continues to speak out about social injustice and human rights found in the repressive society in Burma today. She shared how it’s not easy for her as a woman and as a member of a minority community to be a defender of rights but feels that it’s her obligation. She continues to be inspired by women around the world. She applauds the #me too and #times up movements in the US but urges that these discussions must go to all the corners of the globe. Gender equality and human rights must reach the grassroots—especially in areas of conflict. She also stressed the need to protect human rights defenders. Many are targeted with death threats when they use social media. A strong strategy is needed.

Cotler comments – Where are the men? He noted that the audience was virtually all female. A critical mass of both genders is needed to have an effective grass roots movement and be able to protect activists.

Maria Corina Machado is a leading Venezuelan democracy activist. Her talk was delivered by video. For the past 4 years she has not been permitted to leave the country where she is one of the heads of the human rights struggle. She spoke of the human rights violations and the deterioration of economic and social conditions occurring for the past two decades under the current regime. As a result:

- 87% of the population of Venezuela is poor and 61% of these people live in extreme poverty.
- There is acute malnutrition and loss of weight. 33% of children are impacted.
- There is a shortage of medicines including contraceptives and HIV and cancer treatments.
- Venezuela is the most violent society in the world.
- There are severe limitations and violations of free speech and property rights.
- Prisoners’ rights including torture are violated.

In conclusion she stressed that “never again” should a tyranny and resulting tragedies exist in her country. She feels that the international community must move from indifference to action. On a positive note she does see some progress.
Cotler comments – Venezuela is in the midst of a humanitarian catastrophe with widespread malnutrition and infant and other death rates way up because of lack of medical care. The government refuses to assist but international pressure is building.

Mahnaz Afkhami - first Minister for Women’s Affairs (1976 to 1978) in Iran. She was the first person to hold such a position in the Muslim world. She is a scholar and an activist and has been published all over the world. She noted that today is the Iranian New Year which celebrates the coming of spring.

Under the current regime in Iran, she and other woman activists have been charged “with corruption on earth and warring with God”. The only other woman in the Iranian cabinet at the time of the revolution was the Minister of Education and she was hung in the red-light district. Ms. Afkahami was in the US at the time and has never been able to go back to Iran. Exile is not just hard economically; there is also a huge issue of loss of identity.

Rather than discuss the awful situation in Iran, she talked about potential solutions.

The 20 grass roots organizations on four continents with which she has been working for the last 25 years, may have some of the answers:

- The women’s movement must be global; we are 50% of the earth’s population.
- Women are subject to the family structure with men in charge. There is no longer a need for this structure but it persists and is replicated in education and in industry.
- We need to get together with men with a new vision to change this structure and to focus on the similarities of our needs. Universal rights for everyone should be socially adapted for each setting.

Cotler – the speaker has an inclusive, participatory vision of human rights.

Denise Robinson – an opposition parliamentarian in South Africa. In South Africa, the situation is not as bad as in some other countries. Women have played a major but subservient role in politics. She reviewed some of the efforts by women to end apartheid and paid special homage to Helen Sussman, a great liberal, who was the only woman in the parliament under apartheid.

Now there are many women in parliament (though not yet 50/50) who address issues dealing with women’s subjection to the patriarchy; rape, abuse and domestic violence are widespread. There is a conspiracy of silence about violence against women (founded on the idea, shared by police and justice department) that women are second class citizens and deserve to be beaten. There is also extensive bias against lesbians.

She has founded DAWN, Domestic Alliance Women’s Network.
#ME TOO RURAL WOMEN, MIGRANT WOMEN – SEXUAL ASSAULT

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Sponsored by Women In Migration Network

Reported by Fran Butensky

In 2016, the United Nations agreed to a Global Compact For Migrants, separate from the Global Compact For Refugees to ensure that gender is mainstream in the crisis worldwide. The Global Compact For Migration must fulfill the human rights commitments of the New York Declaration and Agenda 2030, by:

- Recognizing that various forms of family exist.
- Upholding the principle of non-discrimination and fundamental freedom of migrants.
- Ending deportation to dangerous situations in home countries or third countries.
- Creating more channels for regular migration at all skill levels.
- Offering options for regulation of status for migrants in destination countries.
- Preventing and prosecuting gender-based violence in transit and destination countries.

Sexual assault and violence in the workplace is a reality and leads to fear of deportation and retaliation. The Solitary Center is the largest organization in the United States that deals with safety in the workplace. They are also based in 20 other countries and do work in 60 more countries. They are involved with the Global Compact for a safer and orderly progression for workers through collective bargaining. The entire identity of the migrant workers is tied to their employer and their legal status. Violence in the workplace is a reality and their goal is to get rid of it.

Two of the speakers were involved in a Freedom Fast and hadn’t eaten for days. The audience was asked to participate in a march that was taking place later that day. “Times Up Wendy’s March”. Marching to Wendy’s corporate offices to protest and boycott Wendys restaurants. Their slogan was “Breaking Our Silence To Stop Sexual Violence in the Fields”.

**“Women don’t need protection, women’s rights need to be protected”**
Advancing Gender Equality Through Community Based Organizing and Global Advocacy

Reported by Fran Butensky

The panel for this event sought to understand the current best practices that community-based and grassroots organizations are implementing in dealing with women’s rights as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in achieving gender equality in their respective communities. They explored how community-level organizations are at the forefront in providing services and working directly with those for whom policies are written for they are the ones who best know what are the needs and problems within the community. The panel stressed the importance of the community level voice in the implementation of international policies and global advocacy campaigns. CEDAW and Special Raconteurs were mentioned as examples of the effectiveness and importance of interaction between the UN and the community.

Speakers:

Maria Lizardo, Executive Director at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation told us that she went to the settlement house for help and the experience changed her life. She decided to become a social worker and later started working at the settlement house. Through her, her whole family ended up working there, being helped and helping others. She explained that economic independence is crucial and economics are a key reason why victims stay with their batterers. The settlement house gets them jobs, provides activities and deals with their housing, legal and immigration problems.

Manju Kak, Treasurer of All India Women’s Conference. She is a national advocate for women’s issues and issues of good governance. She explained that the Conference was started in 1927 and is 90 years old. They have 500 branches and reach out to offer assistance to over 200,000 women. In order to become a chairperson or hold a seat of importance in the organization, one needs to have 20 years of volunteer experience within the organization.

Antonio Cisneros de Alencar, Officer-in-Charge Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights New York Office Equality and Non-Discrimination Section. He began by telling us that human rights begin at the local level, not at the UN. The community makes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights possible, not the other way around. At the start of the UN, the focus was on peace and security. The term Human Rights was not mentioned. The Feminist Movement was really responsible for the creation of the Declaration. The women on the committee made certain that equality and non-discrimination were part of it. Women like Rosa Parks have led actions on the community level that led to the international level. There is a ripple effect – one single action at the community level can impact others globally. The 17 SDGs not the MDGs have impact and are about human rights because the community was consulted, not the determination of the “experts” as was the case with the MDGs.

“Leave no one behind” is a new way of focusing on inclusion of all groups. The SDGs recognize that challenges are global and need a universal strategy but it had to trickle down to the community level and include human rights.