

Building a Coordinated Caribbean Position for CSW65
Expert Presentation - Commission on the Status of Women CSW: Its
Functions and Negotiations
Delivered by Rosina Wiltshire – 8th February 2021.

The Commission on the Status of Women established in 1946 is responsible for the promotion and monitoring of Gender equality and the empowerment of women. Reporting to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), CSW was established a year after the United Nations was founded in the shockwaves of the Second World War. The UN Charter reaffirmed faith in the fundamental human Rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and nations large and small. The CSW was tasked with a focus on setting the policy agenda, advocating, and monitoring progress on the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Catastrophic crises such as wars often shine a light on fundamentals, and the importance of women in building peace and security. World War 2 had such an impact. COVID19 has also shone a light on the critical role that women play in every aspect of health and well-being, and the strengths that they bring to decision making. COVID has also made it clear that women in leadership make a difference to the lives of men, women and children. Transformational, Compassionate leadership saves lives.

The CSW played a central role in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Women from North and South ensured the inclusion of the principle of gender equality and women's equal rights in the Human Rights Charter. From its inception the CSW collaborated with NGOs in promoting the agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality and monitoring progress. Monitoring reports revealed the

continuing gaps in women's rights and status, challenges of poverty and inequality and violence against women. These informed CSWs recommendations and their drafts of the early international conventions on women's rights, including the legally binding Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Commission recommended that in celebration of 25 years of existence, 1975 be designated International Women's Year. The first World Conference on Women held in Mexico marked this International Women's Year. Peggy Antrobus was then the first head of the Women's Desk in Jamaica and organized government representatives and NGOs to support the data and drafting of Jamaica's report presented to the 1975 Mexico conference. I had the privilege of being part of that consultative team.

UN World Conferences on Women followed in Copenhagen in 1980 where Lucille Mair of Jamaica was Secretary General, and Nairobi in 1985 where Dame Nita Barrow of Barbados was Chair of the parallel NGO Conference. In the preparation for the 1995 World Conference in Beijing, Angela King of Jamaica was head of the Division for the advancement of Women (DAW) and was later appointed the first adviser on Gender to Secretary General Kofi Annan, I had the privilege of leading UNDP's substantive position in Beijing 1995 and being part of the Sec General's planning team along with Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania who was Secretary General of the 1995 Conference.

As is clear, Caribbean women have historically been central to the global struggle for women's empowerment and gender equality, both at the grassroots and leadership levels. Women have also been in the forefront of the call for Peace.

Claudia Jones born in Trinidad in 1915, migrated to the US with her mother and is buried next to Karl Marx in London. Claudia Jones was a

celebrated champion of women's rights, workers rights, racial equality and peace. Her advocacy for workers rights, racial equality and peace led to her arrest and incarceration in the US in 1948 during the McCarthy era. Citizens all over the world including Japan marched in her support. She was deported to the U.K.

Clotilde Walcott of Trinidad was a champion of women's rights and the official recognition of domestic workers as workers in the ILO Convention. Peggy Antrobus was a cofounder of the South South Network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), which championed women's rights and care of the earth. Women from the global South made the connections between equality, justice, peace and environmental sustainability. I had the privilege of representing DAWN on the team of religious leaders who drafted the Earth Charter. I also represented DAWN on the planning team for the Worlds Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991, which concluded with the Women's Agenda 21. Both the Earth Charter and the Women's Agenda 21 were presented at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. The notion that the North is pushing human rights and the gender equality agenda on the South, does violence to the power, vision and voice of women from the Caribbean and the global South who have fought tirelessly for equality, justice, peace and environmental sustainability.

Caribbean NGOs continued to play a critical role in the lead up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Caribbean governments and NGOs once again worked in partnership to make a difference to the global agenda. The Beijing Platform for Action outlined a clear transformative agenda and Caribbean governments committed to the goals set out in the Platform for Action.

CARICOM has traditionally played an important coordinating role in supporting the region in preparation for the CSW meetings, which report

on progress. This CARICOM role began with Magda Pollard who served as the first head of the CARICOM Women's Desk. Convening the governmental and NGO leaders to review the regional status and common agenda has helped to build capacity, ensure coherence and forge winning strategies.

The central role of NGOs was recognized by both Lucille Mair and Dame Nita Barrow who also served as Ambassadors to the UN for their countries. These two giants of the movement worked closely with the Heads of their Gender Bureaux and the NGOs who were the first line of partners. Dame Nita and Lucille Mair understood well the importance and power of NGOs as allies. Over 10,000 NGOs had attended the 1980 Copenhagen conference where Lucille Mair was the Secretary General and approximately 15,000 the 1985 Nairobi conference led by Dame Nita.

Defending Caribbean interests and commitments requires that we are aware of our government's commitments. It also requires understanding the global political arena, the relationship of representatives to their HQ, and equally important a grasp of effective negotiation. It requires understanding the importance of government/NGO partnership. Representatives in New York serve the national agenda and are informed by the commitments and priorities set by their governments. Caribbean representatives must speak to the reality of the lives of Caribbean women and societies. I had the privilege of training many Ministers and diplomats in the region from the early 1970s, first at Mona UWI and then at the Institute of International Relations in St Augustine when diplomats were required to pursue a one-year program, which deepened their understanding of International Relations and successful negotiation.

The global struggle for dominance and control reappears in multiple ways. We need to be clear and vigilant in defending the hard won gains that women who went before us worked to attain. Men have also been

key allies. Women's full and effective participation in public life is central to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the elimination of violence against women and sustainable development. Women have a right to be in leadership. However, the struggle has never just been about numbers. It has always embodied transforming people's lives and the well being of all. Transformational leadership which embodies the principles of equality, justice, peace and care of the Earth is critical to the achievement of these goals.

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