

The Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It represents the main international body focusing on the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Throughout its history, the Commission on the Status of Women (or CSW, as it is more often referred to), has conducted a wide variety of actions regarding the monitoring of women's lives, changes and development with regard to empowerment in order to shape global policies and to promote women's rights within society.

History

Women's rights have been an issue for centuries and still are today. Abuse and inequality have been challenging societies for a long period of time. This is one of the reasons why right from the very beginning of the UN, representatives of the nations felt the need to create a special body dealing with this part of human rights. It was at a time when both, the advancement of women and the abuses and inequalities were calling attention. Moreover, at the San Francisco conference in 1945 when the UN Charter was signed, this preoccupation started to take shape. At that moment, out of 160 representatives of the member nations, only four were women. Nonetheless, they managed to include women's rights in the document.¹ With this stated, a sub-commission was established under the Commission on Human Rights. However, the NGO representatives and women delegated to the sub-commission did not think this was enough. They urged for the creation of a special and separate body. Subsequently, the Commission was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.²

Structure

The membership is decided by the ECOSOC based on the geographical distribution. Likewise, there are forty-five members representing forty-five countries according to the arrangements of the Council: thirteen members from Africa; eleven from Asia; nine from Latin America and Caribbean; eight from Western Europe and other States and four from Eastern Europe. They are in office for four years. Meanwhile, they meet every year in New York at the United Nations Headquarters and for ten weeks (February to March) they present their activity.³

Activity and mandate

At the first Commission meeting in February 1947, all of the 15 delegates were women, which had been unheard of before. Even more avant-garde: the Commission saw to it that gender-sensitive language be used in the then draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴

The main purposes of the Commission were to evaluate the situation of women's rights, to identify challenges, formulating international conventions aiming at changing discriminatory legislation and fostering global awareness of women's issues, to make recommendations and formulate concrete

¹ CSW: "Short History", p. 1.

² Ibid., p. 2.

³ United Nations: "The CSW", n.p.

⁴ CSW: "Short History", pp. 2 ff.

policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The Commission thus embarked on a vast research to assess the status of women worldwide. Studies were launched in order to collect information on the legal status of women, their access to education, their work opportunities and their civil rights.⁵

The Commission's mandate was expanded in 1987 by ECOSOC resolution 1987/22 to include the functions of promoting the objectives of equality, development and peace, monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women, and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. The CSW is heavily involved with the World Conferences on Women (e.g. 1995 in Beijing) and monitors the implementation of their decisions.⁶

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) again modified the Commission's terms of reference in 1996, in its resolution 1996/6, deciding that the Commission should:

- (a) Assist the Council in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels, and should advise the Council thereon;
- (b) Continue to ensure support for mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities and develop further its catalytic role in that regard in other areas;
- (c) Identify issues where United Nations system-wide coordination needed to be improved in order to assist the Council in its coordination function;
- (d) Identify emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that required consideration and make substantive recommendations thereon;
- (e) Maintain and enhance public awareness and support for the implementation of the Platform for Action.⁷

Differing slightly from other committees simulated at MUIMUN 2012, the CSW does not adopt resolutions. Instead, it publishes so-called Agreed Conclusions which are less restricted in terms of style and wording: While resolutions typically consist of one single sentence which is divided up into preambulatory and operative clauses, the CSW's Agreed Conclusions may contain sub-headings and multiple sentences.⁸ These Agreed Conclusions are then presented to the ECOSOC which should consider the points that were made and try to help with their implementation.

Conclusion

The Commission proved during the second half of the last century to be committed to the promotion of gender equality. It plays a major part in the international arena, raising awareness, shaping policies and ensuring that UN activities share a gender perspective. It relies on the cooperation with governments, UN entities, regional and international organizations and NGOs to keep promoting women's rights and to advance gender equality.

⁵ United Nations: "The CSW", n.p.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ECOSOC Resolution 1996/6, "Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women", <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1996/eres1996-6.htm>

⁸ You can find the 2011 Agreed Conclusion, which may serve as an example, at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw55/agreed_conclusions/AC_CS55_E.pdf

Sources/Further Reading

CSW: "Short History", <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>

S. Coliver: "United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: Suggestions for Enhancing its Effectiveness";

http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/whitlr9&div=37&g_sent=1&collection=journals

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