

ACTION for GIRLS Vol. II, Number 2, May 2006
An Electronic Newsletter of the **NGO Committee on UNICEF**
Working Group on Girls (WGG) and its International Network for Girls
(INfG)

Girls' Rights are Human Rights

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**Girls Issues at the 50TH Commission on the Status of Women--
February 28-March 10, 2006**

by Doris Schapira and Margery Cohen, League of Women Voters

The original Draft Outcome Document presented at the beginning of the CSW meeting, "*Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels*" contained no references to girls at all. The final outcome document contained eleven references to girls, but always paired with women, never addressing the unique situation of girls.

In the document, "*Enhanced participation of women in development: An enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work*" some changes were added. Originally this document mentioned girls four times. The final draft mentioned them thirteen times, but always in the phrase "women and girls", never addressing the unique needs or problems of girls. Still it was progress to have delegates recognize that girls should be included in planning.

WGG Input

A simple count of the mention of girls does not tell the whole story. In fact, the places and ways in which girls were mentioned in the final documents were important and we are proud that the Working Group on Girls (WGG) contributed to the improved outcome documents. This achievement was primarily the result of the four caucuses we sponsored. Attendees overflowed the room and included NGOs representing countries worldwide, representatives from UNICEF, as well as a schoolteacher who brought girls.

Participants analyzed the draft documents and worked together to come up with suggested wording to insure that the needs of girls would be included in the final documents. We found that the draft documents (to be used as a starting point for the CSW meeting) issued by the CSW Bureau shortly before the meeting, lacked any significant mention of girls. This seemed to be a step backward. In recent years we had been pleased with the attention being paid to girls in other UN documents.

Attendees volunteered to talk with delegates about girls' issues, show them the suggested wording, and report back at the next WGG caucus about their interaction with the delegates. Some of the delegations they approached included the UK, US, Australia, South Africa, Spain, Indonesia, France, Switzerland, Mexico, Germany and Brazil.

Attendees also commented that both girls' issues and the attendance of girls at the CSW were crucial to what would happen at the CSW in March 2007. It was agreed to make every effort to ensure more girls would attend next year when the priority theme will be "***The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.***"

Accessibility to water and the lack of water was stressed as one of the biggest obstacles to girl's education. Adolescent health, negative cultural influences,

mentoring girls, having workshops for young people at the next CSW on confidence building were all part of the focused discussions in the WGG caucuses. Some information on the official documents that were the main focus of work of the Commission are cited below .*

* Please see documents at the UN website <http://documents.un.org/default.asp>, click language, click simple search, insert document number in *symbol* space and click search.

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Working Group on Girls’ Platform: Do the “Right” Thing—Act Now for Girls’ Rights

by Ann Scholz, School Sisters of Notre Dame

The Working Group on Girls (WGG) is putting the final touches on its Platform for Girls. “It has been a number of years since we up-dated our Fact Sheets on girls. It is time to re-examine those issues that are of most concern to girls and their advocates in the Working Group on Girls,” according to Ms. Hourig Babikian, Co-Chair of the WGG, representing Christian Children’s Fund.

The new platform includes planks on education, health, labor, participation, poverty, trafficking and violence. Each section of the platform recalls the related international commitments to girls made in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, A World Fit for Children and the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, each plank outlines the situation facing the girl child and makes recommendations for action that will help ensure that girls’ everywhere enjoy the full measure of their human rights.

The Working Group on Girls hopes to disseminate the platform widely and to use it in a variety of settings to bring the rights and needs of girls to the attention of policy makers at the national and international levels. “It’s the kind of document that can form the basis for interventions at international meetings and can be used as talking points with government leaders and United Nations staff,” said Ms. Carolyn Donovan, Vice-Chair of the WGG, representing the American Association of University Women.

Watch for the WGG Platform: Do the “Right” Thing—Act Now for Girls’ Rights at website www.girlsrights.org.

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UNICEF Gender Equality and Human Rights Unit Partnership With the Working Group on Girls

As reported by Carolyn Donovan, AAUW

The following excerpts from the UNICEF’s report on CSW 50 (2006) submitted by the Gender Equality and Human Rights Unit...reflect the shared goals and coordinated actions of the WGG and UNICEF during the session. The Working Group is very appreciative of Ms. Akila Belembaogo’s efforts and is looking forward to working with her unit to develop appropriate advocacy actions for ensuring a strong outcome document in 2007.

“UNICEF’s main objective during the CSW was to ensure that the attention on the situation and rights of girls (SECTION L of the Beijing Platform for Action) was maintained, since UNICEF believes we must ensure that girls have the right start in life: today’s girl child is tomorrow’s woman. To this end, UNICEF advocated the integration of girls’ concerns in the outcome documents of the 50th session. . . .”

“UNICEF’s advocacy ensured attention to the rights and needs of the Girl Child in the general debate and especially in the outcome documents of the session. UNICEF supported the proposal of the ...Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF (WGG), requesting more attention to girls’ concerns in the official documents. To strengthen UNICEF’s advocacy, the Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Rima Salah, organized a meeting with heads of government and NGO delegations on March 7 to reinforce UNICEF’s concerns regarding the integration of girls’ issues in the final documents.”

“As a result of the joint advocacy work developed by UNICEF, governmental delegations and NGOs, the girl child concerns were ... integrated in the final documents of the session. Certainly, the main outcome for UNICEF is the adoption of the priority theme for the (51ST) session of the CSW in 2007: “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”. The session will bring renewed attention to the rights and needs of the girl child; it will be an opportunity for strategic advocacy and partnership that UNICEF should lead.”

Please address questions about sources used in preparation of articles to the author % wqgs@girlsrights.org.

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We welcome articles by NGOs who wish to share their experiences.

Roberta Ross, International Council of Jewish Women, Editor