



## Equal Opportunities in decision making: Attainable at last?

53<sup>rd</sup> session, Commission on the Status of Women, March 2009

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The IFUW parallel event panel discussion “**Equal Opportunity in decision making: Attainable at last?**” was presented at the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the UN Center in New York on March 4, 2009.

**Jane Hodges**, Director of the International Bureau for Gender Equality of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Geneva, spoke first from her perspective as an international lawyer specializing in labour laws in Asia and Africa.

- She maintained that when women and men discuss issues together the level of the dialogue is elevated.
- The Gender Equality Bureau addresses questions of gender equality in the world of work.
- In June 2008, the ILO launched a one-year global campaign to highlight the central role of gender equality in its Decent Work Agenda and in the work of its constituents governments, employers and workers organizations.
- The impact of the economic and financial crisis on working women and men is important. The ILO is a strong promoter of pay parity.
- ILO Conventions allow affirmative action and this is not considered to be discriminatory towards men.
- Labour has always been in the forefront of equality and worldwide 20-25% of the positions of Ministry of Labour are held by women. ( Latin American countries appear to lead the way here)
- Within the ILO itself the second in Command is a man.
- Regarding trafficking of persons, Ms Hodges stated, that “the scene” is getting uglier This year there will be a ruling concerning domestic trafficking as well as overseas trafficking.
- It is important to ensure coherent policies and measures to promote greater understanding, recognition and sharing of family responsibilities between the State, the private sector and households and between women and men.

The Second speaker was **Dan Seymour**, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit for UNICEF (New York).

- He spoke positively of the fact that it was women parliamentarians who ensured parliamentary votes took place on items such a Child Care, Education, Health and Women's Rights. Thus, it is essential that there are women lawmakers.
- Globally there is only 17-18% political participation of women.
- With women at the Peace table there is greater sustainability and usability of peace treaties. The essentials for making progress include: more support for women's organizations and NGOs, support for women's participation in politics, need to dismantle barriers to high office and dismantle workplace barriers in general. Education is critical.

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The third speaker was young high school student, **Nia Asmani**, an Indonesian citizen, currently a senior at a New York High School. She related her experience when volunteering to assist with clean up in neighbourhoods in New Orleans.

- She spoke of the invisible line between girls and boys' work stating that when the clean up process began the boys immediately took over the "hard tools (lawn mower) while the girls were relegated to soft tools such as rakes and other garden tools.
- Nia believes that there has to be a transformation of attitude so all will value the contributions of women and girls. and that this must start in the schools and homes.

The final speaker was **Mary Purcell**, a Past President of the International Federation of University Women and co-founder of the Working group on Girls (Philadelphia).

- She emphasized throughout her talk that mentorship was the road to success. All along in her remarkable career she had mentors who told her that she could do the job well and with this backing she moved forward.
- Women definitely need mentors, a support system (back up people) and funding. Referring to the American Association of University Women she maintained that, in that milieu, members learned techniques that prepared them to run for office.
- A negative note was evident when she referred to the fact that there were times when women who were at various Peace Tables were treated poorly and not accepted as equals.
- The aim of the Working Group on Girls was to institutionalize girls at the UN so that they could speak for them selves.

Conclusion: Although great strides have been made there still remains a long road to true gender equality.