

## UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 62 SIDE-EVENT

### DO YOU HAVE FAITH IN SDGS?

#### FAITH SENSITIVE GENDER JUSTICE MAINSTREAMING, TOWARDS INCLUSION OF FAITH ACTORS IN CSW and SDGs

MARCH 2018, NEW YORK

*International and national efforts around gender equality and women's empowerment have often involved multiple stakeholders and diverse proposals and initiatives. However, a missing key ingredient – and partnership modality – has been around faith and religious considerations. Integrating religious knowledge – and actors – now needs to be mainstreamed.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Overview

Gender justice mainstreaming has become integral in relief and development work of some faith based organizations (FBOs) that ground their work on an inclusive approach. They have embarked on a journey to tackle gender injustice in communities deploying faith sensitive and faith literate approaches. Throughout their work with communities worldwide, they witnessed the rampant incidences of gender injustice, including violence committed in the name of religion, which undermines faith values. Well positioned amongst their congregations, including faith communities and faith leaders, they have assumed gender justice as a fundamental dimension of their spiritual values and have found ways to mainstream gender through faith lens. Through such ethical posture, FBOs respond to the frequently dangerous nexus between gender, religion and culture which perceives the protection and promotion of women human rights as a threat to family and traditional values, fuelled by the so-called “gender ideology”.

Leading FBOs mainstream gender justice in their operations, both externally in programmes and internally in organisational structures, in order to achieve equality of outcome for women and men of all ages and abilities in their work. Many lessons have been learnt through the engagement of FBOs with key stakeholders in undertaking careful and faith sensitive initiatives to drive gender justice mainstreaming forward. The aim of this side event is to share with the wider public and other FBOs key achievements and challenges of these efforts. Gender mainstreaming in every FBO is unique as it navigates through the context-specific intersection of religion and development, and organisational culture, the complexities ignored by the classic gender mainstreaming strategies.

Religion, as a potential resource for women's rights, had until recently been excluded from gender mainstreaming and development discourses. Criticism of ‘gender mainstreaming’ would suggest that it has failed or at best has had limited success in delivering gender equality within development at either an institutional or operational level; both globally and locally. Yet, FBOs mainstreaming gender justice challenge the status quo, the hundreds of years of male dominated scholarships and a narrative of the subservience of women based on fixed cultural values and beliefs, proving that faith-sensitive gender mainstreaming can be a more effective strategy.

Gender mainstreaming FBOs also make a case in arguing for the recognition and inclusion of FBOs in CSW's deliberations and in SDGs implementation. FBOs coming from different religious traditions share a common vision to protect the dignity and rights of women and girls and end all forms of discrimination, including gender-based violence. They have analysed the mechanisms through which

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<sup>1</sup> New York, March 13, 2015, UNFPA post-CSW-side-event summary article, “Faith Inspired Gender Equality Narratives”, by Dr Azza Karam

religious beliefs and practices can become obstacles to reach gender justice and have consequently developed resources and policies for addressing such challenge.

The role of these actors, as integral partners, needs to be recognised by other (non-faith based) NGOs, UN agencies, Member States, inter-governmental bodies and international institutions. It is imperative that the CSW outcome document is inclusive of faith, FBOs and faith actors in order to improve gender equality strategies and to dismantle religious myths, misinterpretation and misconceptions that oppress women and girls and conversely also men and boys in the way masculinity is constructed. International organisations and CSOs should forge partnerships with the faith sector and increase faith literacy in interventions in order to build constructively on faith values and faith based models to achieve SDGs and improve the status of all women and girls.

### **Objectives of the Session**

- Share lessons learnt from gender mainstreaming in FBOs and the concrete contributions of faith-literate gender mainstreaming in realizing SDGs implementation, in particular SDG 5
- Share case-based evidence of the role FBOs play in tackling gender injustice and empowering women
- Raise the urgency for the outcome document of CSW 62 to include a mention on faith, faith actors or FBOs in order to end the marginalisation of their positive role in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment
- Influence the policy makers and national delegations to include faith, faith actors or FBOs in the outcome document of CSW 62
- Propose policy recommendations to include faith actors as integral partners in CSW and implementing SDGs

### **Methodology of the Event**

The event will be interactive and consultative. After brief presentations by the panellists, the roundtable discussion will follow in order to work out specific recommendations to the key CSW stakeholders with focus on the outcome document. The session of questions and answers will allow any remaining concerns to be addressed by the speakers and guests. The session will be moderated by Dr Azza Karam and Zehra Ali Khan (UN Women) a special rapporteur, selected for this event, will provide feedback to the event outcomes. Optionally, organisational roadmaps will be displayed in the event venue.

### **Proposed Panel**

- Moderator: Dr Azza Karam, Senior Advisor, UNFPA, Coordinator, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development
- Eva-Marita Rinne-Koistinen, Senior Adviser, Rights-Based Approach and Gender, Finn Church Aid,
- Cristina Rendon, Advocacy Coordinator, Lutheran World Federation
- Iman Sandra Pertek, Senior Policy Advisor – Gender, Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW)
- The Revd Canon Terrie Robinson, Side by Side, and Director for Women in Church and Society, Anglican Communion
- Mr. Larry José Madrigal, Deputy Coordinator at Centro Bartolomé de las Casas, San Salvador
- Representative of World Council of Churches (WCC).

**Convening Partners**

- Islamic Relief Worldwide
- Lutheran World Federation
- Finn Church Aid
- WCC

**Co-sponsors/supporters:**

- UNFPA
- Global Affairs Canada (GAC)

**Participants**

The side event will engage around 50 – 80 participants from civil society organisations, member states, UN entities, donors, international and national organisations and gender networks.

**Date and Venue**

Date: 15 March 2018 (exact date TBC on acceptance of the concept note)

Time: 4:30pm

Venue: UN Premises, 405 East 42nd Street, New York, NY, 10017 (tbc.)

*For further information please contact:*

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