



**UNCSW 54: March 1 to 12, 2010  
15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing  
Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the  
outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the  
General Assembly (2000)**

**Report from Trade Union Participants**

---

**What's the UN  
Commission on the  
Status of Women...and  
why does it matter?**



The [United Nations Commission on the Status of Women](#) (UNCSW) is the principal global policy-making body on women's equality at the United Nations.

Every year, Member States (essentially governments) gather for two weeks at the UN Headquarters in New York to examine how women's equality is progressing

around the world on pre-determined themes.



**Commission on the  
Status of Women**

The main theme of the 54<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UNCSW, which took place from March 1 to 12, 2010, was the fifteen-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). How far have we come? What have we accomplished? And what still needs to be done to meet the commitments to women's equality made by world leaders at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and in the Millenium Development Goals set in the year 2000?

**Civil Society Participation**

The UNCSW is open to civil society participation – in the form of observers from organizations with official accreditation with the UN Economic and Social Council.

Concretely, thousands of representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and civil society organizations come to the UNCSW to monitor, evaluate and influence the outcome of the UNCSW meetings and the positions that member states take on the issues being raised.

In fact, the annual UNCSW meetings are arguably the largest international gathering of women in the world (with the exception of the World Conference on Women organized by the United Nations).

Over 8000 accredited NGO representatives were registered to attend this year's UNCSW. No other UN Commission can boast such a high level of civil society participation.

## The Trade Union Delegation

Representatives from four international global union organizations - the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Public Services International (PSI), Education International (EI) and UNI Global Union – work together as a trade union delegation during the UNCSW meetings.

Our objectives are to bring the trade union perspectives and workers' rights to the international discussions on women's equality. We work with each other and with other non-governmental organizations to expose inequalities and discrimination in all their forms. We

lobby for decent work, quality public services, quality public education and women's rights as preconditions for gender equality around the world.



Many members of the trade union delegation

This year's trade union delegation to the UNCSW was the largest ever. Over 120 trade union representatives from 41 countries around the world were represented.

Most delegates were present during the first week, with some new faces attending the quieter but equally important second week.

## This Year's Obstacles: Trade Union Delegation Speaks Up!

Participation in this year's UNCSW was a significant challenge for all civil society representatives.

The most significant obstacle was substantive: the "outcome document" of the UNCSW -- a set of recommendations for governments and intergovernmental bodies normally negotiated throughout the two weeks of the meetings -- was finalized and [agreed upon by member states in advance of the UNCSW54 session](#). There were no

consultations with civil society on this final document.

Taken together with the logistical difficulties, including renovations at the UN buildings, the limited or lack of access to official meetings, the lack of interpretation in many rooms (there are six official UN languages) the tight security, the line-ups and the time it took (up to 8 hours) to get the required UN credentials, to name only these, there was a generalized impression that the UN was not living up to its commitment to be inclusive of civil society.



One of the many line-ups to obtain UN credentials.

In response to this chaos, the trade union delegation drafted an [open letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon](#) on the opening day of the UNCSW meetings.

The letter pointed out that women from around the world who spent considerable time and resources to come to the UNCSW in hopes of being heard were met with discouragement and a profound sense of disrespect.

We submitted that effective engagements in this UNCSW was all the more important as we look

towards future international events, including the September Summit on the Millennium Development goals, and urged Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to intervene to ensure that what transpired should never happen again.

This letter received widespread support. Hundreds of NGO representatives signed on to the letter that was posted on the Trade Union CSW Blog (<http://unioncsw.world-psi.org>).



Trade Union letter makes the front page of the CSW NGO newsletter.

## Trade Unions Meet UN Assistant Secretary-General

As a result of this letter, representatives from the trade union delegation were convened to meet with Ms. Rachel Mayanja, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

We expressed our concerns with the substantive and logistic issues that impeded our full participation in the UNCSW meetings, and pushed for more open access to the official meetings and negotiations on specific resolutions.

Ms. Mayanja listened to our concerns, acknowledged the numerous obstacles, and indicated a willingness to work with us and others to avoid a similar situation in coming years.

We took the opportunity to underline the importance of the UNCSW's main theme in 2011 – related to education, training and decent work – and the expertise that trade unions bring to these issues. We urged the Assistant Secretary-General to include trade union representatives among the experts involved in preparatory work and analysis in view of UNCSW55.



Chidi King (PSI), Marieke Koning (ITUC), Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Gemma Adaba (ITUC), Sarah Bélanger (PSI-PSAC), Marilies Rettig (EI-ETFO), Rebeca Sevilla (EI)

## Trade Union Delegation Accomplishments

### Women in the Global Economic in a Time of Crisis: Joint Statement to the UNCSW by ITUC, EI and PSI

In advance of the UNCSW54 meetings, the ITUC, PSI and EI jointly prepared and signed a statement that was received by the UN Secretary General and published as the official statement in all six UN languages on the UN website (see [http://equality1.typepad.com/files/en\\_psi\\_ei\\_ituc\\_joint-statement\\_2010-1.pdf](http://equality1.typepad.com/files/en_psi_ei_ituc_joint-statement_2010-1.pdf)).



A participant reading the joint ITUC-EI-PSI statement.

This statement laid out the gender dimensions of the global financial crisis, and the food and climate change crises.

Recommendations include integrating women's equality and decent work into global economic and social policies and frameworks aimed at restoring growth; promoting ILO recommendations relating to protection for workers, investing in public education and public services



as a necessary for any economic recovery, and including trade unions in policy development and implementation at all levels.

### A Successful Trade Union Orientation session – Sunday February 28<sup>th</sup>

Building on the experience of the previous two UNCSW meetings, the ITUC-PSI-EI delegation organizing committee, headed by Gemma Adaba of the ITUC, organised another successful trade union orientation session.

The orientation, held the day prior to the official opening of the UNCSW meetings, enabled trade union delegates from around the world to meet each other, better understand the UNCSW process, the role of the trade union delegation, and how we could be most strategic during the UNCSW meetings. Obviously, decent work, public services and education were at the heart of our discussions.



A full house at the Trade Union orientation session

Trade union delegates took stock of the joint ITUC-EI-PSI Statement

prepared for UNCSW54, entitled Women in the Global Economic in a Time of Crisis. This joint statement served as the focal point for the activities, priorities and positions we took throughout the UNCSW54 meetings.

During the session, we welcomed Jane Hodges, Director of ILO's Bureau for Gender Equality, who provided an overview of the ILO's focus at the UNCSW meetings. Gender equality is front and centre – indeed, at the heart -- of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

As the UN's tripartite agency that brings together governments, trade unions and employers, the ILO can directly advocate for decent-work approaches to social and economic policies, and for women's equality as a centrepiece of the fight against global poverty.

### Communicating with each other: Daily Trade Union Delegation Briefings

During the first week of the UNCSW, trade union participants met on a daily basis first thing in the morning to connect, share information on activities and priorities and plan our strategies for the day ahead.

The size of the delegation, the comings and goings and diversity of languages posed small but not insurmountable challenges. During the first days, delegates met by language group (English, French and Spanish) in delegates' hotel rooms. By day three, we had secured a

common space in the Salvation Army basement, and were conducting the briefings together and translating for each other.



Francophone trade union caucus on the first day of the UNCSW meetings.



The 8am daily briefings.

Whether on the corner of a hotel bed or in a basement meeting room, women trade unionists buckled down and got the job done with very little ceremony, hierarchy or fuss.

### Negotiations on Key Resolutions: Trade Union Participation

Because the final Declaration on the occasion of Beijing+15 (in replacement of the usual Agreed Conclusions) was finalized and agreed upon at the outset of the

UNCSW meetings, negotiations between UN member states focused on substantive resolutions.

Given our priorities, the trade union delegation chose to follow most closely the negotiations on the women's economic empowerment resolution. Some trade union delegates also closely followed the resolution on maternal mortality, which was "on the agenda" for the G8 meeting in June 2010.

Trade union delegates formed a drafting committee and from input provided, we drafted proposed changes to the economic empowerment resolution with rationale. These changes, which were discussed and endorsed by the trade union delegates, were primarily focused on:

- maintaining and reinforcing references to decent work, including ILO Conference June 2009 resolution
- a strong reference to public services, including education, as necessary to economic empowerment and to full employment and decent work;
- references to child care as essential for women's economic empowerment;
- direct language on women's equality and women as agents of change.

Through our contacts with our respective government delegations and in liaising with the ILO UN Office we were able to obtain the resolution text early on in the process, to observe certain negotiation sessions

and to monitor and pressure our governments to adhere to our suggestions.

This resolution on women's economic empowerment was [adopted by the UNCSW](#) after many hours of marathon negotiations ending during the night on the last day of the meetings. Much of the trade union recommended text was endorsed by key member states throughout the process. In the end, some of the more direct labour references were removed, although the important issues remain part of the final adopted resolution.

## Lobbying Governments

One of the strengths of the trade union delegation at the UNCSW is its diversity. We come from many countries around the world, which means that as a group, we have potential ties to many government delegations. It is our "job" to make these contacts and use them for lobbying and information gathering during the UNCSW meetings.

For example, Canadian trade union representatives have an ongoing relationship with their government delegation during the UNCSW. Each year, the Canadian government provides daily briefings to Canadian NGOs on negotiations and ongoing events. Canadian trade unions attend these daily briefings along with other women's organizations; it is an opportunity to put forward the trade union perspective, and lobby the Canadian delegation to incorporate trade union

priorities in the negotiations and beyond.



Canadian NGOs are briefed by their government delegation

At this year's UNCSW, Canadian trade union women requested (and were granted) a meeting with the Canadian head of delegation, the Coordinator of Status of Women Canada (the federal government department responsible for women's equality). We took the opportunity to discuss the proposed trade union changes to the economic empowerment resolution and to concerns with the the policy agenda in Canada, including the removal of the questions on unpaid work from the national census and the removal of information on same-sex marriage rights in the documentation on immigrating to Canada.

## Networking with NGOs

Being one of the largest gatherings of women's organizations in the world, the UNCSW is a prime opportunity to network with like-minded (and to run into less like-minded) NGOs.



The NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGOCSW) takes the lead in organizing a pre-meeting NGO Consultation and a daily briefing for interested NGOs. It was at the daily briefings that the trade union representatives spoke about and distributed the open letter to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and sought signatures.



Gemma Adaba (ITUC) speaks to NGOs at the daily briefing

The trade union delegation attended various NGO caucuses, including regional caucuses (broadly organized by continent), thematic caucuses (such as the migration caucus and the girls' caucus dealing with young women's access to education and other issues).

### ITUC-EI-PSI Side Events

ITUC, EI and PSI jointly organized two very successful side events during the first week of UNCSW meetings.



Karin Amossa (EI-UEN) facilitates joint ITUC-EI-PSI Workshop on the global economy

The first, held on Thursday March 3rd, focused on **Women in the Global Economy in a Time of Crisis**. Facilitated by Karin Amossa from Lararforbundet Union in Sweden, this workshop examined the impacts of the multiple food, financial, jobs and climate crises on women's prospects for achieving decent livelihoods.

The second workshop, held on Friday March 5<sup>th</sup>, was an **opportunity for trade unionists to weigh in on Beijing+15 country reports**. In preparation for UNCSW54, all member states were asked to provide a written report on their progress in achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.



Participants at the country report session



In this workshop, panelists from Canada, Turkey, Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago provided a reality check on their country's report. Workshop participants then discussed the situation in other countries, and the challenges, strategies and instruments we use in holding governments accountable for their commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and other international commitments.

### Thousands more side events

As in other years, thousands of side events were organized throughout the two weeks of the UNCSW meetings. The trade union delegation attempted to "spread out" to various workshops of interest on such issues as climate justice, integrating LGBT issues in education, women in decision-making, peace and security, the media, indigenous women, migration, domestic workers, and many others.

Some trade union women were panelists at side events. For example, Gemma Adaba from the ITUC opened the discussion at the event on migration and climate change with some remarks on the commoditization of labour and its impact on human rights.

### Panel Intervention by EI Deputy General Secretary Jan Eastman

Early on in the first week of meetings, the trade union delegation

submitted a request to intervene during an official UNCSW plenary.

EI Deputy General Secretary Jan Eastman spoke in plenary on behalf of the joint trade union delegation. She reiterated that women's voices at the UNCSW had effectively been silenced and that much more needed to be done to achieve women's equality – at the UNCSW but in also in all spheres of economic, political and social life.

Specifically, her statement called on the UN to invest in social infrastructure as a solution to the financial crisis, to invest in public education for girls, to implement decent work, to make social dialogue a reality, and to make civil society and trade unions a legitimate part of the UN decision-making process. She also reminded the UNCSW that next year's theme – related to education, training and decent work – is one where trade unions have direct expertise and the resources to actively participate in the preparations.

### Communications: [Blog, Blog, Blog \(The Trade Union Blog\)](#)

For the first time this year, the ITUC, PSI, EI and UNI set up a UNCSW trade union blog in advance of the UNCSW meetings.

<http://unioncsw.world-psi.org/>

The blog was used as a central site for posting UNCSW documents, events, the open letter, side events of interest, a photo gallery, and so much more.

The blog also featured video streaming done onsite, with interviews with trade union representatives on their experiences at the UNCSW.

Trade unionists were invited to write short statements on the blog. While this aspect of the blog requires further promotion, there is no doubt that this internet website was an invaluable source of information for trade unionists and NGOs.

## UNCSW55

The 2011 priority theme of the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women is “**Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work**”. The UNCSW session will be held from February 22 to March 4, 2011 in New York.



This is clearly a trade union theme, and an opportunity not to miss for the ITUC, EI and PSI!

### So, what can we do to get ready?

- **Learn more about women and education, training, science and technology and decent work.** Here is a very short list of resources to get started:
  - **International Labour Organization (ILO) web page on decent work:**
    - [http://www.ilo.org/global/About\\_the\\_ILO/Mainpillars/WhatisDecentWork/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Mainpillars/WhatisDecentWork/lang--en/index.htm) (English);
    - [http://www.ilo.org/global/About\\_the\\_ILO/Mainpillars/WhatisDecentWork/lang--fr/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Mainpillars/WhatisDecentWork/lang--fr/index.htm) (Français);
  - **ITUC :**
    - **Statements/ documents of previous UN CSW sessions:**  
English: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/trade-union-statement-54th-session.html>  
French: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/declaration-des-syndicats-a-la-54e.html?lang=fr>
    - **Decent Work Decent Life for Women Campaign:**  
English: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/+decent-work-decent-life-for-women+.html>  
Français: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/+decent-work-decent-life-for-women+.html?lang=fr>

- **PSI: Gender equality page:** [http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateEn.cfm?Section=Gender\\_Equality2&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=14&ContentID=6707](http://www.world-psi.org/TemplateEn.cfm?Section=Gender_Equality2&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=14&ContentID=6707)
- **EI Gender quality page:** <http://www.ei-ie.org/gender/en/>
- **Women, Science and Technology**  
[http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/links\\_sci.html](http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/links_sci.html)
- **Learn more about the United Nations**, women and how the UNCSW fits in. Here are a few suggested links:
  - **Women page on UN site:** <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women/>
  - **CSW site:** <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html>
- **Visit the UNCSW trade union blog** and read up on what we accomplished at the UNCSW54 session. <http://unioncsw.world-psi.org/>.
- **Keep track of the UNCSW55 preparatory activities:** Visit the website at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html>.
- **Talk to your Union** about the upcoming UNCSW55 and why the labour movement needs to be involved. Talk to your women's committees, human rights committees, the leadership and all relevant part of your Union structures.
- **Get in touch with government representatives for the status of women in your country or region** and ask them what their plans are for UNCSW55. Ask them what concrete measures they are putting in place for women's economic equality. Ask them what their position is on decent work and what they have done to achieve it. Ask them about their record in achieving the Millenium Development Goals. Find out what their plans are for UNCSW55 – who the delegation will be and how to liaise with them before and during the UNCSW55 sessions. Find out what activities – events, side events – they are planning. Let them know you are active and engaged and will hold them accountable!
- **Find out what NGOs in your country or region are doing** on decent work and access to education, training, science and technology. Find out what research or lobbying they are engaged in on these issues. Keep in touch with like-minded organizations so that we can work together before and during the UNCSW55 sessions.



- **Stay tuned** for the plans and activities of the trade union delegation leading up to and during the UNCSW 55 session!