

STATEMENT

By

Soon-Young Yoon, UN representative for the International Alliance of Women and Global
NGO Council, New York

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates

Last Sunday, over 1100 women and men, boys and girls representing NGOs, governments and UN delegates gathered at the 14th Street Salvation Army for the 11th anniversary of the 1st Women's Forum Consultation Day. Our Chair, Yoon, gave a message from the UN to our Young Professional leaders. She appreciated the idea that the CSW was an open and safe space that we have to safeguard. She thought that the speeches by Michelle Bachet and Leymah Gbowee were amazing. She had tears in her eyes. A woman from the State of Mississippi, a defender and when Nyaradzwa Gumbonzvanda, born into an impoverished rural family, talked about the sacrifices her sister made so that she could attend school. Natalia said, "I was personally touched, empowered, and energized".

What are some of the messages we can share with you from our forum? One of them is that the new generation of leaders is watching, learning, and ready to step in—and they find the CSW inspiring. This is reassuring in a time when—according to some skeptics—the international women's movement is "quiet" and looking backwards to the Beijing Women's Conference of 1995 instead of forwards.

Another important point is that rural women's and girls' economic empowerment requires more than technocratic solutions. A lot of us are talking about the need for policies that take into account the social and cultural context of rural women's economic needs. This is particularly important when agricultural policies do not consider the wide diversity of rural women's needs according to ethnicity, age, orientation, marital status, or levels of disability.

Mirna Cunningham Kain, Chair of the Indigenous People's Forum and this year's NGO Council NY Woman of Distinction Awardee noted in her keynote address on Consultation Day that land is more than a commodity to indigenous women—it is also often a sacred cultural reference for the community. Collective as well as individual human rights must be respected and honored, as well as indigenous women's contributions to so-called sustainable development policies are implemented.

Other speakers recognized that international instruments like CEDAW have helped to transform the

landscape. For many societies, gender inequality and discrimination are entrenched, systematically, into

institutions. Violence against women and girls in conflict zones or in their own

homes is an economic issue because rural women and girls who experience violence may be immobilized by

fear. A girl's first political decision could be choice of marriage. A woman's most critical economic decision

may be the number of children she bears.

In many parts of the world, rural women are rising to the challenge in conflict and post-conflict

situations. Leymah Gbowee, this year's Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, said in her address on Consultation Day

that women are organizing themselves. "You may have to plant the seed of the peace and stability." She told

us that rural women in her region are the experts on disarmament because they know where guns are hidden.

Diabyera Dion, founder and chair of the 50/50 Women's Initiative in Senegal, said that in her region, women are

organizing themselves to prevent the outbreak of new electoral conflicts.

That in her index address on Consultation Day, elections have increasingly become triggers for larger scale

conflict. She noted that rural women were at high risk, which is why they were making

extraordinary efforts to prevent the outbreak of new electoral conflicts.

Gender-friendly banking is one of the emerging indicators. Gender-friendly banking

doesn't work unless we get at the heart of the issues. We have to understand more profoundly the inter-

connections between economic development, gender equality and peace and we have to make these a personal as well as public

policy agenda.

In the next day or so, we will continue to debate and explore these issues. You are welcome to join

the RWSE CSW Forum in more than 300 participating countries, including the young girls and women,

to the family, ageing, migration, inter-generational dialogue, health, and rural and urban development. We also invite

young women with us on March 8, International Women's Day--down 2nd Avenue-- to celebrate "Global

Women for Equal, Safe, Peaceful Lives and a Caring World." Sometimes we just have to let the world know that the

international women's movement is alive and well. Thank you.