

News Update

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BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OFFICE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

News from the Bahá'í Delegation to the 51st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 26 February-9 March 2007

The main theme of the 51st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held at UN Headquarters, New York between 26 February and 09 March 2007, was "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child".

In addition to the representatives of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, the Bahá'í delegation consisted of 43 delegates (see picture) from 25 national Bahá'í communities (Alaska, Australia, Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, France, Gambia, Germany,

Greenland, Haiti, Hawaii, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Puerto Rico, Samoa, Sweden, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the United States of America). Among the Bahá'í delegates were twelve girls, between the ages of 13 and 18.

Bahá'í delegates participated actively and dynamically by leading the workshops and caucuses in which they participated in the official sessions as observers, on panels as speakers, and as facilitators and reporters for caucuses. Valuable interventions were made at workshops by presenting Bahá'í perspectives and experiences from the grass-roots level. Some of the thematic sessions covered by delegates included: violence against women; the issue of the girl child; financing gender equality; indicators of gender equality; transitional justice; trafficking; the role of men and boys in the elimination of vio-

lence and discrimination against women and girls; empowerment and education; health issues; poverty reduction; and missing girls. The Bahá'í International Community submitted a statement for the CSW titled: "Transforming Values to Empower the Girl Child".

The following is a brief overview of parallel events the BIC-OAW was involved with: co-sponsored with the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom an interactive panel of three generations of Bahá'í women from one family; organized and hosted a dialogue between girls and their country's Mission to the UN which was co-sponsored by the NGO Committee on UNICEF's Working Group on Girls (WGG) and moderated by UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Ms. Yakin Erturk; a performance by the Bahá'í inspired Children's Theater Company of New York; and a Bahá'í delegate pre-screened her film at the BIC-OAW office about the best practices toolkit for professionals who are in contact with women who have survived sexual abuse as children. The BIC-OAW organized an orientation program on Bahá'í diplomacy, and the over-arching strategy for the BIC-UNO's participation and priority themes of the CSW. In addition regional workshops were held in which delegates discussed the objectives of their participation at the CSW and strategized on their activities for the advancement of women in their countries. Both the orientation and consultations enabled delegates to network and exchange experiences and best practices, drawing on the rich diversity from 25 country representatives working for the advancement of women.



A Note From the OAW

Dear Friends,

Warmest greetings from the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women (OAW). This News Update aims to create a global forum for sharing news about Bahá'í communities and their Offices for the Advancement of Women and to provide highlights of the women's global agenda. It is important that this News Update be shared internally among the members of your community, and externally with your interested friends or colleagues, especially where web-access is not available. We will try to keep this News Update between 4 – 6 pages so that you can translate it into your local languages and photo copy it for wide distribution. The Update will also be on our web-site: www.bic.org

We hope to have the following sections in each issue — current updates of international events and global issues related to the status of women, plus related links; Bahá'í International Community OAW News; news of national Bahá'í community OAW activities and introduction of new offices and their representatives. In this issue we are highlighting the CSW 51st session and sharing news of best practices in promoting gender equality. We are also inviting Bahá'í communities and Offices for the Advancement of Women to observe "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls" on 25 November [see p.4] and have already sent guidance to NSAs with recommendations for the observance of this international day.

Please feel free to send us any suggestions you may have for the update.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Fulya Vekiloglu
Representative to the
United Nations

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Anheleima Kojiam, a 16 year old student from Imphal, India at the CSW

The Bahá'í International Community hosted a majority of the committee meetings at the Bahá'í offices in New York for the WGG and the NGO/CSW and its many sub-committees.



News from Bahá'í Communities Around the World

We are happy to share with you news of activities held last year for the International Day of Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

Bangladesh: The OAW has launched a web site - www.ofaow.multiply.com containing articles on women's issues, the Bahá'í teachings on women, suggestions for the upliftment of the status of women, and a booklet on principles of Bahá'í family life. It also includes more than 20 statements on women and their rights from the BIC OAW statement library. The Office has published a quarterly newsletter and sent it to 300 women NGOs throughout Bangladesh; several organizations have responded and asked for more information. recently one of the Office representatives met with the Program Manager of UNIFEM and had an exchange of views and information with her. Emphasis was put on the



training course aimed at the promotion of women's advancement that the Office has developed.

Bolivia: The National Spiritual Assembly through its Office of External Affairs received an invitation from the Mayor of La Paz to participate in a Human Rights Fair on September 23. The External Affairs Office set up a stand on the Eradication of Violence Against Women. The stand highlighted the efforts of the Bahá'í community on this subject.



India: The following activities were reported by Ms. Nalina Jiwnani, Director of the Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in India. As part of the 16 days of activism that took place between 25 Nov. and 10 Dec. 2006 all the State Bahá'í Councils and Local Spiritual Assemblies, Bahá'í inspired NGOs and schools, as well as many NGOs and like minded organizations were sent the BIC statement "Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls" with the request that they conduct suitable programmes in their communities to raise awareness of violence against women.

New Era High School (NEHS)

Panchgani: NEHS organized an assembly for 'Violence Against Women' Week on 8th December, 2006. The students of Std X presented an array of skits to exhibit various types of abuse of women – dowry, drinking etc. A dance was performed by the volunteers at the school from South Africa and the UK.

Bangalore: At a workshop 16 par-

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participants began the study of the new



BIC statement on violence against women.

Manipur: As a follow up to the CSW, two schools were contacted and 2 Bahá'ís from the area organized an awareness program regarding gender equality. A meeting with the Principal of Sunrise Public School in Imphal was held and the importance of gender equality and the upliftment of women and girls was discussed. In Langathel village in Khangabok Cluster, a number of homes in the village were visited and discussions about education and other social problems took place. Education in this area is considered a privilege and is not available to all. Even some of the girls were not eager to continue their studies after 10th standard because they receive very little encouragement from their parents and elders.

At the Awareness Program the students were asked about their experiences. The girls did more domestic work than the boys. As one of the girl students, Neevia, age 14, pointed out, finding time to study is very difficult because of her household duties and there is no time for play. On the contrary, the boys stated that their only responsibility was to go to school and study; the rest of the time they were free to play. In a discussion of how to overcome these problems the importance of both men and women respecting one another and the need for spiritual education were seen as key. Afterwards the teacher and the students gave additional suggestions. A follow up with the students is planned.

New Delhi: Human Rights Day was

commemorated at the auditorium of the Information Centre of the Bahá'í House of Worship on 9 December 2006. The theme for this year was violence against women and girls. Recently, the OAW had done an awareness training based on the recent statement by the BIC on violence against women at the Bahá'í House of Worship for a group of volunteers. The attendees then presented an equality dance based on this topic.

Sweden: Ms. Mehri Afsahi reports that because of active participation in



As Chairperson UNIFEM-Sweden, Ms. Mehri Afsahi was invited to speak at the UNIFEM-US 30th jubileum event which was held at the Swedish Embassy in Washington, DC. She met with the Swedish Ambassador H.E. Gunnard Lund and his wife Kari Lotsberg and US UNIFEM President Ms. Sheryl J. Swed.

the Commission on the Status of Women, the Swedish Bahá'í community was mentioned in the government's report about the Commission.

Tanzania and Uganda:

Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting: Ms. Mitra Deliri, a Bahá'í from Tanzania, at the request of an acquaintance at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with whom she established a relationship during the 51st CSW session in NY, attended the Commonwealth Ministers Meeting held



Mitra Deliri (r.) with Syda N. Mbbumba, Minister of Gender, Labor and Social Development

from 11 to 14 June 2007. Ms. Deliri was part of the Ministerial delegation, and at the same time represented the Bahá'í Community of Tanzania. The meeting brought together Ministers from all the Commonwealth countries and offered a great opportunity to meet many Ministers in one location and strengthen relationships with government ministries.

Uganda: Also at the Commonwealth meeting the NSA of Uganda's Office of External Affairs shared the BIC statement on violence against women with all the Ugandan Ministers, the Law Reform Commission and all the members of Parliament. Many high ranking government officials, including the president of Uganda, H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, received literature from a table the Bahá'ís had set up for the occasion. Two representatives from the OAW, Dr. Daisy Namono and Ms. Nambuya C. Linda of Uganda attended and participated in a workshop on *Financing Gender Equality for Development and Democracy* during the Commonwealth Women's Conference held from 8 – 11 of June 2007.



On April 3rd, 2007 *The Guardian* newspaper in Tanzania printed an article about Bahá'í participation in the 51st session of the

CSW in NY. It reported on the participation of 46 Bahá'ís from 26 countries including Tanzania. Kabula Jahanpour (see picture at left), one of the young girls who attended the CSW (see front page story) from Tanzania, was highlighted in the article. It quotes her as saying that the CSW gave her and the other con-

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ference attendees a lot of hope for the future of the advancement of women. Although the Commission passed a number of important resolutions dealing with violence against women and girls a tremendous amount of work remains to be done.

United Kingdom: Zarin Hainsworth, a member of the Bahá'í community of the UK has been elected President of the Board of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) UK, a national committee of UNIFEM. UNIFEM enables projects around the world that improve the lives of women. In addition to being a Board member of Widows Rights International, Zarin has a lot of experience with training and consultancy for communications, gender and diversity projects and has run seminars, conferences in these areas in the UK, Europe, US and the Middle East.

United States: The representative for the Advancement of Women for the NSA of the US, Ms. Sharona Shuster, is collaborating with the NGO End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT-USA) and other national child rights organizations in the development of an alternative report to be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The report is a follow up to the US government's initial report on its compliance with the UN Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Ms. Shuster has been responsible for the data collection component of the report and was one of the lead editors. The report highlights the government's successes in combating these issues and provides analysis and recommendations for further progress.

Bahá'í International Community Office for the Advancement of Women News

Expert Group Meeting:

Financing for gender equality and

the empowerment of Women, Oslo, Norway, 4-7 September 2007

The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women convened an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the above topic in order to contribute to a further understanding of the issue and to assist the Commission on the Status of Women in its forthcoming deliberations. The EGM was hosted in Oslo by the Government of Norway from 4 to 7 September 2007. The NGO representatives participated fully in discussions and working groups and aided in the preparation of a report. BIC also represented two NGO Networks: the NGO Committee on CSW and the NGO Com-



BIC Representative Ms. Fulya Vekiloglu (on the left) participated in the Expert Group Meeting in Oslo, Norway with several other NGO observers

mittee on UNICEF's Working Group on Girls. The EGM addressed the issue of international and national policies that do not meet the required action on the ground. Proper resource allocation and capacity building for implementation, the necessary commitments that promote gender equality and the advancement of women, still remain under funded. As Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, points out "The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women involves significant costs, particularly because of the nature and scope of existing inequalities in all parts of the world. The cost of required national level interventions should be based on locally identified needs, within the framework of broader global and national goals and targets". Please visit the web site for more informa-

tion and official papers: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/52sess



Upcoming Events

25 November 2007 is International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This United Nations day marks the beginning of **16 days of activism** for the elimination of violence against women that ends on International Human Rights Day (**10 December**).

There are two thematic areas you may take into consideration in this area of your external affairs work: the Girl Child and the role of Men and Boys in Eradicating Violence Against Women. Visit this website for more information and ideas for action, and please contact your NSA for additional guidance on this issue. www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/kit07/kit.html

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

**52nd session, New York
25 February – 7 March 2008**

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider the theme: "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women" at its 52nd session at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 25 February to 7 March 2008.

The work in the Commission will be guided by two reports of the Secretary-General on the theme. One will identify and discuss key issues in financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and suggest policy recommendations, and a second will provide an overview of mainstreaming efforts related to financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women at the national level. Your National Spiritual Assembly has received a letter with more information about the 52nd session.