

Commission on the Status of Women: The 2013 Experience

*Vincenzina Santoro**

For two weeks (March 4-15, 2013) at UN headquarters in New York City, statements were read, panelists spoke, NGOs pedaled their ideas and services, but little truly related to solving the issue related to the theme of ending violence against women. The only word that was hardly ever uttered was “behavior” as in doing something to alter the behavior of the aggressors of women. To end violence against women the behavior of the perpetrators has to change. Attackers of women – and girls too – are men. But where were the solutions to stop this violence? One parallel event I attended focused on violence against women in Mozambique. A mild mannered woman professor presented a case where a 35-year old male attacked and raped a six-year old girl. Despite the anguish and terrible suffering caused, the perpetrator went unpunished.

While the conference was going on another vicious attack occurred on a woman in India that grabbed world headlines while the jailed perpetrator of a previous death-dealing attack a few weeks ago ended his life in jail.

A few days before the CSW meetings began, the New York City Police department announced that rapes in the city had declined significantly. Yet no one spoke about that at the UN and perhaps no one was aware of this news or how the results were achieved. Curbing violence against women seems to have occurred but only in the area surrounding the UN. Women were portrayed as victims to be assisted or empowered through “sexual and reproductive rights.” Once again institutions that uphold the dignity of women were reviled, as the citations below indicate, as the purveyors of sexual and reproductive rights sought to advance their cause.

In addition to the “contributions” from extreme feminist organizations, there was a statement distributed by an Austrian women’s organization, WIDE (Network for Women’s Rights and Feminist Perspectives in Development), which was also endorsed by the “Austrian Development Cooperation” and enumerated a series of “preconditions” for convoking another – and this would be the fifth – “World Conference on Women in 2015.”

“**Misogynous concepts and strategies** must be **confronted** explicitly. In this context the negative role of the Vatican as observer is to be critically examined, and respective statements should be rejected.”

A statement by the Minister for Gender Equality Affairs of Finland included this paragraph:

As one of the most crucial aspects of violence against women and girls, Finland promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls both in bilateral and multilateral for. This issue is a clear priority for Finland during this year’s CSW, and we urge all member states to work with us to reach the best attainable outcome to promote both reproductive AND sexual rights of women and girls.”

(The underscoring, highlighting and capitalization are from the original.)

Another frontal attack on the Holy See came via questions posed after an event sponsored by the Holy See. This event entitled: “A Religious Response to the Causes and Consequences of Violence against Women and Girls” attracted an overflow crowd. Numerous examples were cited of how religious persons operated medical and other facilities across the globe to assist women victims of violence, disease or numerous conditions stemming from poverty. In the Q&A that followed, members of “Catholics for Choice” from Latin America posed a particularly spicy question/comment: since the Catholic Church does not allow women priests, this is a form of “psychological violence” against women!

Helen Alvare’ (from George Mason University), one of the speakers, put the “choice-istas” in their place by answering that there was nothing “catholic” about the group or their members and reminded them that they had even received funding from the “Playboy Foundation” to start their organization. The audience was replete with a female

attired in male clerical garb, Roman collar included, who afterwards seemingly assailed some of the panelists with effusive verbosity, evidently smug in her “choice” of dress.

On a more meaningful note, The World Youth Alliance sponsored the showing of the documentary film “It’s a Girl!” which was presented by the producer, Reggie Littlejohn, a San Francisco lawyer who, upon learning about the horrors of China’s one child policy, Asian male preference and the missing millions of baby girls decided to produce this striking documentary about both China and India. I urge all who care about humanity and human dignity to see it. The trailer can be found here: <http://www.itsagirlmovie.com/synopsis>

March 8th, International Women’s Day, was duly celebrated with a panel discussion during which a music video introduced a “theme song” named “One Woman.” The expertise of this panel included elderly abuse, indigenous issues, HIV, and women’s rights. It was presided by Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women.

No two-week conference at the UN takes place without an outcome document, negotiated paragraph by paragraph and phrase by phrase over agonizing days and sometimes well into the night. Due to controversial language relating to two hotbed issues – sovereignty and reproductive rights – the fierce battle lasted well into the final evening of March 15th – the ides of March! The results were disappointing.....

The evening saw the presence of Michelle Bachelet who spoke at the conclusion and announced, somewhat tersely, that she was resigning for “personal reasons.” (Rumor has it she will run once again for President of her native Chile.) It is worth recalling that Ms Bachelet was chided early on for not doing enough to advance sexual and reproductive matters but she had been using the terminology more in her more recent speeches. This may not have been enough to satisfy the extreme feminists. Ms Bachelet spent a great deal of time promoting the participation of women in government, and sought to increase the number of women presidents, prime ministers, parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, ambassadors and similar high-level posts. I fear we may go from the frying pan to the fire and that a more extreme replacement will emerge.

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