

**United Nations Report
World Women's Rural Day
28th October 2023**

Madam Chairman, Madam World President, Lady Anthony, fellow members, this is the report of the United Nation CSW.

In March of this year, I was very privileged to be able to attend the United Nation Commission on the Status of Women conference in New York. This has been an ambition of mine since Covid put an end to the one in 2020.

CSW is a wonderful event with women coming from all over the world to talk about some of the problems they are having and in some cases solutions they have found and want to share.

The theme for 2023 was "INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, AND EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS" but many other issues were discussed including

- Gender Equality
- Gender Based Violence
- Women's Rights
- Widow's Rights
- Social Justice
- Ukrainian National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security
- Food Sovereignty, Innovation, & Technological Change & Education
- Ukraine Young Change Makers
- Rural Women as agents of change – an ACWW event
- Rural Youth for Action – an ACWW event

These are just a few of the events I attended, there were so many and sometimes in diverse locations that we found ourselves literally running from one to the other! Some of them made a significant influence on me but in fact I found it very difficult to choose only three to talk about

1. The issue of widow's rights is not one that has much significance here in Northern Ireland, when your husband or partner dies you retain the same rights as before but in many countries losing a husband means losing everything – your social standing, your home, your economic independence and sometimes even your children. Women are not seen as being of any importance so they cannot open bank accounts, own land or have access to collateral. Being a widow may mean being unable to afford to educate your children and that can force them into early marriage, especially for girls. In some areas harmful traditional practices can see them being exploited by other male members of the husband's family, being forced to leave their property and being discriminated against financially. They are left marginalized and vulnerable.

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2. The second one was the Ukraine Young Change Makers which brought a number of young Ukrainian women as an Independent delegation to the UN. Listening to the stories of their experiences since the Russian invasion was both humbling and shocking. Land mines, bombed cities, displacement, lost homes, jobs, businesses, soldiers, civilians, children and animals. Each story was told from their own perspective with dignity and emotion. They ended by saying in unison, "*Ukraine will never be defeated*". It was a sobering and emotional event and afterwards we had the chance to speak to some of these brave women.

3. Thirdly the Rural Women as Agents of Change using the tagline "Less Talk, More Action" with speakers from New Zealand, Canada, Kenya, Australia and Mongolia. I was particularly struck by the girl from Mongolia, Tugrug, one of our own ACWW delegates who spoke on the problems her own country was facing – poverty, unemployment and alcoholism. The last one contributed to another significant problem – Domestic Violence - which was very prevalent throughout Mongolia with women being very reluctant to inform police as they were often encouraged to reconcile with their abusers or were threatened not to report. It seems many problems are common throughout the whole world.

We were also able to go into the main auditorium of the United Nations and listen to reports from the different delegations. Countries as diverse as Kenya, Burkina Faso, India, Malawi, Tuvalu, Jordan, Micronesia, United Arab Emirates, Tonga and Croatia to name just a few. The island nations were very concerned about climate change and the catastrophic effect that it was having on their homelands with the threat of them being completely flooded.

It was fascinating listening to all the ambassadors and they had a wonderful way of keeping them to their allotted time. Their microphones were simply turned off, whether they had finished or not, which left quite a few still talking but unable to be heard! One lady from an Arab nation was determined to get her full report in and talked so fast even the autocue was unable to keep up with her.

Due to being from the UK I also had the honour of being invited to attend a reception for the British Ambassador to the United Nations, Dame Barbara Woodward. Another chance to chat with people, this time from around the UK and to mention to Dame Barbara some of the problems rural women here in Northern Ireland are experiencing such as the closures of banks and post offices, rural transport and access to health services.

It was a wonderful experience visiting the iconic United Nations, one I will remember for many years to come and one that I felt was very worthwhile. ACWW has a very important place in the UN, they are respected and listened to and that can only be a good thing.

Madam Chair, this concludes my report.