

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES
Commission on the Status of Women – United Nations
February 27 – March 4, 2009

FACT SHEET

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) offers *Young Women's Leadership Experiences* to provide opportunities for women between the ages of 18 and 30, who are active in a NCC member communion, to engage in global women's issues through the ecumenical movement. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) event will be a five day experience providing orientation to the NCC, Ecumenical Women at the UN, the UN-CSW, and this year's theme – *The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*. As visitors to the CSW, participants will get a small taste of this annual UN event and will be involved in exciting side events at the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN).

National Council of Churches (NCC)

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has been the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The NCC's member faith groups — from a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American, and Living Peace churches — include 45 million persons in more than 100,000 congregations in communities across the nation. For a full list of member communions and to learn more about the NCC go to www.ncccusa.org. This Young Women's Leadership Experience at the CSW will be sponsored by the *Justice for Women Working Group* of the NCC and coordinated by the Rev. Ann Tiemeyer, Director of the NCC Program for Women's Ministries.



Ecumenical Women at the UN (EW)

Ecumenical Women is a coalition of denominations and ecumenical organizations at the United Nations who focus on the global intersection of religion and human rights with a gender perspective. Each year, as a coalition, the members of EW annually form an international delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). They work together to prepare worship and advocacy positions for the CSW. Every year, they usually host between 40 and 100 women from around the world during the two weeks of the CSW. Members of the *Ecumenical Women* include: Lutheran World Federation, United Methodist Women's Division, Presbyterian Church, USA, YWCA, World Council of Churches, and World Student Christian Federation. www.ecumenicalwomen.org

Church Centre for the United Nations

For over 40 years, the Church Centre for the United Nations (CCUN) has stood as a witness to Christian support for efforts to advance the causes of peace, human rights, development, and ecology, in international diplomacy. The CCUN provides twelve floors of office and meeting space for religious and other non-governmental organizations concerned with UN issues. It will be the location for Saturday's Ecumenical Women's orientation session, daily worship/Bible study, and other interesting side events during the CSW. For more history about the CCUN read the article at <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/feat-03-13.html>.

Commission on the Status of Women – United Nations

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The CSW is a principal policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Representatives of Member States gather annually at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the CSW to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards, and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and advancement of women world-wide. Each year the theme of the CSW focuses on one priority from the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd Special session of the General Assembly of the UN. This year the theme of the CSW will be: *The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*. To read more about the CSW go to: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html>.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China 1995

While the efforts of the previous two decades, starting with the Mexico City Conference in 1975, had helped to improve women's conditions and access to resources, they had not been able to change the basic structure of inequality in the relationship between men and women. Decisions that affected all people's lives were still being made mostly by men. Ways had to be sought to empower women so that they could bring their own priorities and values as equal partners with men in decision-making processes at all levels.

Recognition of the need to involve women in decision-making had begun to emerge during the course of the series of global conferences held by the United Nations in the early 1990s on various aspects of development — the environment, human rights, population and social development. All the conferences had stressed the importance of women's full participation in decision-making, and women's perspectives were incorporated into the deliberations and the documents that were adopted.

However, it was with the next in the series of conferences, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, that a new chapter in the struggle for gender equality can truly be said to have begun.

The fundamental transformation that took place in Beijing was the recognition of the need to shift the focus from women to the concept of gender, recognizing that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, had to be re-evaluated. Only by such a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions could women be fully empowered to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life. This change represented a strong reaffirmation that women's rights were human rights and that gender equality was an issue of universal concern, benefiting all.

The legacy of the Beijing Conference was to be that it sparked a renewed global commitment to the empowerment of women everywhere and drew unprecedented international attention. The Conference unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that was in essence an agenda for women's empowerment and stands as a milestone for the advancement of women in the twenty-first century. The Platform for Action specified twelve critical areas of concern considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement and which required concrete action by Governments and civil society:

- Women and poverty;
- Education and training of women;
- Women and health;
- Violence against women;
- Women and armed conflict;
- Women and the economy;
- Women in power and decision-making;
- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- Human rights of women;
- Women and the media;
- Women and the environment;
- The girl child.

By adopting the Beijing Platform for Action, governments committed themselves to the effective inclusion of a gender dimension throughout all their institutions, policies, planning and decision-making. What this in effect meant was that before decisions were to be made or plans to be implemented, an analysis should always be made of the effects on, and needs of, both women and men. For example, instead of striving to make an existing educational system gradually more accessible to women, gender mainstreaming would call for a reconstruction of the system so that it would suit the needs of women and men equally.

The introduction of gender mainstreaming called for the re-examination of society in its entirety and its basic structure of inequality. The focus was, therefore, no longer limited to women and their status in society but was committed to restructuring institutions and political and economic decision-making in society as a whole.

In endorsing the Platform for Action, the United Nations General Assembly called upon all States, the UN system and other international organizations, as well as NGOs and the private sector to take action to implement its recommendations. Within Member States, national machineries that had been established to promote the status of women were assigned a new function as the central policy-coordinating unit to mainstream a gender perspective throughout all institutions and programmes. Within the United Nations system, the Secretary-General designated a senior official to serve as his Special Adviser on Gender Issues, whose role was to ensure system-wide implementation of the gender perspective in all aspects of the work of the United Nations. The Organization was also assigned a key role in the monitoring of the Platform.

The Beijing Conference was considered a great success, both in terms of its size and its outcome. It was the largest gathering of government and NGO representatives ever held, with 17,000 in attendance, including representatives of 189 governments. The NGO Forum held parallel to the Conference also broke all records, bringing the combined number of participants to over 47,000.

The presence and influence of NGOs, one of the most active forces in the drive for gender equality, had increased dramatically since the Mexico City Conference in 1975. In Beijing, NGOs had directly influenced the content of the Platform for Action and they would play an important role in holding their national leaders accountable for the commitments they had made to implement the Platform.

Tentative Schedule for the NCC *Young Women's Leadership Experience* – CSW

Friday, 1 pm Arrive at NYC housing Location
Orientation – general and subway
Registration at the UN for Badges
Dinner
Orientation to NCC

Saturday – Ecumenical Training and Formation (Hosted by Ecumenical Women at the UN)
Worship at CCUN
UN Orientation and CSW Overview
Registration and Lunch at UN
Strategy Groups
Dinner – Debrief Day – Evening Prayer

Sunday – CSW Events and NCC Office
Attend Worship and Visit the Interchurch Center
NGO/CSW Event
Dinner – Debrief Day – Evening Prayer

Monday – Opening Events of CSW at the UN
Worship at CCUN
All Day Events at UN—Including Religions for Peace North American
Women of Faith Network Launch
Dinner – Debriefing Day – Evening Prayer

Tuesday – CSW at the UN and Side Events at the CCUN
Worship at CCUN
All Day Events at UN
Dinner – Debriefing Day – Evening Prayer

Wednesday – CSW at the UN, Side Events, Evaluation and Closing
Worship at CCUN
Group Lunch
Return to Housing – Evaluation and Departing Prayer
Departure