

In March 2017 the **Commission on the Status of Women [CSW]** at the United Nations  
focused on the economic empowerment of women

Optimism, enthusiasm and expectation filled the air as Anglican, Episcopal and Mothers' Union delegates travelling to New York from more than twenty countries around the world – when they gathered for the opening day of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York on Monday, 13 March 2017.

This year's theme, 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work', will look at issues such as how to promote equality and how to give women better access to education. Thousands of people are attending the two-week event – many representing faith groups, Non-Government Organisations and various United Nations groups.

The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, informed the opening plenary – stating that campaigners were an inspiration as they championed equality. Empowerment for women had to be a key priority – and he promised that he and the United Nations would support them every step of the way.

There was loud applause from the Anglican delegation as the Secretary General declared that women's rights were human rights and that attacks on women were attacks on everyone. Mr Guterres urged campaigners to hold the United Nations to its promises on equality.

Scottish Episcopal delegate, Rachael Fraser, said she was impressed by his willingness to be accountable:

'I am encouraged by him. He has been committed to gender equality from the outset –  
and this is a really important topic to acknowledge.

It is an area very closely tied to other aspects of gender equality because I feel it opens doors.

If women are able to achieve equal opportunities in terms of economic status  
then I think that is a sort of snowball effect in allowing so many other aspects of equality to be achieved'.

Noreen Njovu from Zambia felt the discussion was long overdue:

'Women have been oppressed for a long time.

This is a wake-up call.

People now need to realise that a woman is the same as a man.

When she does the same amount of work, she deserves to be paid the same'.



**Mathilde  
from  
Burundi**

Mathilde Nkwirikiye, a lawyer from Burundi and Mothers' Union member, said she hoped the Commission would support families: 'Empowering women starts in the family. If a father and mother look at their sons and daughters equally – that is the beginning'. She said the theme was especially important in a poor country such as Burundi, which was so dependent on agriculture and where much of the farming was done by women. But she was hopeful of returning home with a positive message.

'I hope the Commission will inspire us, we will inspire each other  
and we will come together and highlight strategies  
to make a change for women across the world'.

Fellow Mothers' Union member, the Revd Immaculee Nyiransen from Rwanda, also agreed that it was essential the Commission addressed issues at the grass roots, if real change was to happen in the lives of many women.

For Dr Khushbakht Peters, an eye surgeon from Peshawar in Pakistan, the key will be agreeing how best to engage with local leaders:

'I hope there is a strategy formed in which we can discuss with cultural leaders how they can help  
and allow women to be economically empowered, especially in a country like Pakistan which is quite different  
from other countries of the world because our culture is very strong.

It will be better if we discuss with cultural leaders more and help them to understand  
the strategy of the United Nations and the Commission for the Status of Women'.

The Commission for the Status of Women is a complex event. A draft document was produced by the end of February and has since been added to. More additions will be made by the Commission over the course of the event as delegates lobby for changes. The negotiators have been urging delegates to come up with practical suggestions of ideas that will work on the ground. The final agreement – the Agreed Conclusions – is then to be put to the United Nations. If approved, member nations are expected to implement it.

The Revd Laura Marie Piotrowicz, from Canada, said the agreed statements would be helpful:

'I am going to take back increased knowledge and a broader network of resources.  
And I think all that information will feed into a greater sense of hope'.

This comment was endorsed by Rachael Fraser from Scotland:

'My main hope is that this acts as a springboard for action'.