

# Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

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Photo courtesy: <http://peace.sandiego.edu>



## UN Commission on the Status of Women provides another avenue for advocacy

By Louise Davidson

### Background

The United Nations, chartered in 1945, affirms in its preamble “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.” During the first meeting of the United Nations, a subcommission on the status of women was created under the Commission on Human Rights, now the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and soon after became a full-fledged commission. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has met annually since its founding to ensure women’s equality and promote women’s rights. Since the beginning, the CSW has had a close relationship with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Presbyterian Women. It has allowed many NGOs’ contributions to be incorporated into its agreed conclusions and resolutions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women,” at [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf), which references the United Nations Blue Books Series, The United Nations and the Advancement of Women, 1945–1966 and the United Nations CD-ROM Women Go Global, 2000.

In 2006, the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT/PW) sent representatives to the 50th session of the CSW. Upon their recommendation, the CCT/PW began an effort to continue and increase a PW presence at meetings of the CSW with the goal of adding our strong voice to those of other NGOs advocating for justice for girls and women. The 2006 Churchwide Business Meeting voting representatives approved

funding to support attendance at CSW sessions in the 2006–2009 triennium.

In 2007, eight Presbyterian Women attended the CSW meeting with the support of the Presbyterian United Nations Office. The theme of the meeting was “ending all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.”

The nations of the world have responded to the human rights concerns of women and girls with protective and enabling legislation. However, reports to the Commission on the Status of Women and reports in forums presented by NGOs make it clear there is a very long way to go toward overcoming unpunished violations, shocking abuses and cultural attitudes that continue to violate the persons and rights of girls and women.

The Justice and Peace Committee of the CCT calls on Presbyterian Women to consider participating in the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women. PW has advocated for the justice work of the United Nations since its beginning when it claimed equality for women with men. By joining the PW/NGO effort, members of PW can strengthen efforts to make equality a reality for women everywhere.

## Biblical/Theological Dimensions

“Christ constantly calls the Church out into the world that the Church may be faithful and obedient to [God]. . . . The church is most faithful and obedient when it moves from worship in God’s house to witness in God’s world. Its witness is through both corporate action and personal participation within the arena of conflict and controversy. In serving the world in [God’s] name, the church not only reveals [God’s] grace, but out there may find it for itself.”<sup>2</sup>

## Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Position

Treaties or conventions drafted by the member nations of the United Nations are to be ratified by the governments of those nations. The CSW particularly advocates that countries ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) clearly supports ratification of CEDAW and most international treaties of the United Nations. The 199th General Assembly (1987) requested the stated clerk to urge all senators to vote in favor of the ratification of CEDAW, in overtures 35.124–35.129.<sup>3</sup> The General Assemblies of 1988, 1992 and 1996 also urged ratification by the United States.

## Resources

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### Web

- Threads of Justice, the Women’s Advocacy’s newsletter of the PC(USA), online at [www.pcusa.org/womensadvocacy/thread-justice/index.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/womensadvocacy/thread-justice/index.htm).
- The Presbyterian United Nations Office Web site, which includes information on CEDAW, CSW and many other topics; go [www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un).
- Ecumenical Women 2000+, a coalition of denominations and ecumenical organizations at the United Nations that focuses on the global intersection of religion and human rights from a gender perspective; go to [www.ecumenicalwomenun.org/about/about.htm](http://www.ecumenicalwomenun.org/about/about.htm).

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Also known as the Women’s Convention, CEDAW has been ratified by 169 countries around the world as a concrete symbol that their governments are committed to the equal treatment of women and men. Ratification empowers women to encourage and challenge their government officials face-to-face on gender discrimination issues. The United States, however, is the only industrialized country that has not ratified the Women’s Convention.

## What Can Presbyterian Women Do?

- Pray for girls and women who suffer domestic violence, sexual abuse, ritual abuse, torture, rape, prostitution, slavery and who are trafficked.
- Observe the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which is observed each year on November 25. Begin planning activities to call attention to this day.
- Read the agreed conclusions from the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women ([www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm)). Click on “Outcomes” then “Agreed Conclusions.” Choose an issue for which to advocate.
- Consider sending a PW in your synod to the 52nd CSW, February 23–March 8, 2008, and start saving money now. Contact Ann Ferguson, PW Program Coordinator, for additional information ([aferguso@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:aferguso@ctr.pcusa.org)).
- Contact congressional representatives and urge them to advocate the ratification of CEDAW.

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<sup>2</sup> “Minutes of the General Assembly, Part I, Journal (Office of the General Assembly, United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1961), p. 431

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the General Assembly, Part I, Journal (Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987), p. 584