

NGOCSD-NY General Membership Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 23rd 2015, 1-4:30PM at the United Nations, 2nd Floor Church Center for the UN, 777 UN Plaza

Submitted by Modou Cham, Secretary

1-4:30PM:

Co-Chairs Margo LaZaro and Yvonne O'Neal welcomed everyone to the meeting and elucidated that this month's Theme for our meeting is: "Child Brides: Raising Awareness of a Cultural Travesty." The Co-Chairs said that the Executive Board had approved the General Membership Committee Minutes for October Meeting Minutes & the Agenda for our meeting together with the Secretary and Treasurer Reports during the Executive Board meeting.

The Co-Chairs wholeheartedly thanked our NGOCSD-NY Honorary Advisers: H.E. Mr. Henry Mac-Donald, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations; Ms. Gloria Starr-Kins, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Society & Diplomatic Review; Ms. Zainab Zeb Kahn, Founder of MALA - the Muslim American Leadership Alliance along with Ms. Wendy Wright, Vice President of C-FamCenter for Family & Human Rights for their outstanding support. Our appreciation goes to the Co-Sponsors of our meeting: The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations; Society & Diplomatic Review; MALA - the Muslim American Leadership Alliance; C-FamCenter for Family & Human Rights; International Council of Women; Global Family; World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations; Africa Development Interchange Network; Global Family for Love & Peace; UNDP Policy & Strategy Group/The World We Want Platform. In addition, we thank UNICEF, UN/DESA & the team at the UN/DPI NGO Resource Center. In addition, Co-Chair Margo mentioned that Ms. Sheima Sweiss sent us a donation toward the light refreshments for our meeting.

Co-Chairs Margo & Yvonne discussed the importance of addressing Child Brides and how it relates to five of the Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all, Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries & Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In her introduction of the topic, Co-Chair Yvonne mentioned a book to be published on November 25, "Scars Across Humanity" by theologian Elaine Storkey, where the author referred to child marriage as "child abuse by another name." The Co-Chairs suggested that everyone visit the NGOCSD-NY website: www.ngocsd-ny.org and the link to the SDGs & Targets to open the **TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** - Document to research the 17 Sustainable Development Goals & the 169 Targets.

Co-Chairs Margo and Yvonne introduced H.E. Mr. Henry Leonard Mac-Donald, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations, but before Ambassador Mac-Donald gave his presentation Co-Chairs Margo, Yvonne & the members of the Executive Board presented him with his official NGOCSD-NY Declaration of Appreciation for all of his dedicated work within the UN Community & globally to raise awareness for gender equality and to stop violence against women and girls, as he leaves the UN in December to work at the Foreign Ministry in Suriname. In addition, he become an Honorary Lifetime member of the NGO Committee of Sustainable Development-NY. Ambassador Mac-Donald began his statement by elucidating that he came here today to talk on behalf of Suriname and now he is an honorary member of the NGOCSD-NY. He further explained that he is also here to learn more about Child Brides, which, he agreed with what Co-Chair Yvonne presented, is also another form of Child Abuse. Ambassador Mac-Donald noted that he has been speaking about the responsibility of men to talk about the violence against girls and women. Since the Beijing declaration, women have made advances in numerous industries on different levels, but violence against women hasn't changed much. To stop this, men need to join women and condemn all forms of violence against women and girls. The statistics are staggering, one out of two women murdered violently, will be in the hands of a loved ones. We are talking about half of the global population that have to go through this issue. It will take us 81 years to tackle gender equality, but we can tackle this issue in 15 to 20 years if men join the struggle. It is time for men to understand that this is their struggle, as well.

The Co-Chairs introduced Mr. Ravi Karkara, Strategic Adviser, Partnership to the Assistant Secretary-General & Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women and Co-Chair of the Policy Strategy Group, for the World We Want Platform. Mr. Karkara began his speech by thanking Ambassador Mac-Donald for his leadership and continuous support. Moreover, he explained that he agrees with Ambassador Mac-Donald, the stats vividly explain the issues, more than 700 million women are married before the age of 18. Also, in the world we want survey, when women are asked to prioritize gender equality they put it as 4, 5 or 6 in ranking and when men are asked to prioritize gender equality, they put it as 14, 15 or 16 in ranking. Gender equality is also an issue in developed countries, in the Americas 47% of women make it to universities and only 3% make it as CEOs of organizations. He ended his speech by informing us of the launch of the Youth and Gender equality strategy group.

Co-Chair Yvonne introduced Ms. Satvika Chalasani, Ph.D., Technical Specialist, Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch at the Technical Division, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She elucidated in her statements that the more we talk about child marriage, the more we can change the dynamic. At UNFPA, they are focused on evidence based change. Child marriage has negative impacts on girls. In 2012, UNFPA launched the "Too Young to Wed photo exhibit" and also released the data report "Marrying Too Young". The organization also launched an initiative that works to protect adolescent girls' rights, empower them

with health, social and economic assets, and help girls delay age at marriage and childbearing. For example, in Niger, 93% of adolescent girls now think that it should be their decision to choose their spouse. Ms. Chalasani concluded her statements by explaining that UNFPA aims to delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Co-Chair Margo thanked NGOCSD-NY Honorary Adviser Mr. Isaac Reshad for opening up the opportunity for Ms. Melissa Jane "MJ" Kronfeld, Ph.D. (ABD), Founding Member & Co-Chair of the Nexus Working Group on Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery to participate in our program before the Co-Chairs introduced "MJ" who began her speech by explaining that the countries with the highest rate of child marriages are the counties in which violence and crimes are not under control. She mentioned the important work that her organizations are doing to raise awareness of modern slavery, child brides and human trafficking to stop these crimes against humanity. It is time and well overdue for gender equality to become the norm in all communities. "We have yet to truly come together to tackle child marriage, you may choose to look the other way, but you can never say you did not know. Moreover, nation-states strive when women and are given the same opportunities as men."

Co-Chairs Margo and Yvonne introduced, Dr. Padmini (Mini) Murthy, Associate Professor and Global Health Director at New York Medical College. In her presentation, Dr. Murthy explained that there needs to be a societal support to end child marriage. Moreover, she explained that child marriage occurs around the world; and it cuts across countries, cultures and ethnicities. Some of the figures around the world are 46% of girls under 18 are married in South Asia; 39% in sub-Saharan Africa; 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa; 16% in East Asia and the Pacific. It is prevalent in some communities in Europe and North America as well. Moreover, she explained that there are numerous health risks such as increased risks of infant mortality, increased risk of STIs including HIV and increased risk for Cephalo Pelvic Disproportion. Health professionals along with NGOs, Academia, and Parliamentarians should address and challenge child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. She ended her statements by explaining that it is hard to take care of a child when you are a child yourself.

The Co-Chairs introduced, Ms. Ashley Marinaccio Co-Founder/Director of Girl Be Heard. She explained that Girl Be Heard is uniquely positioned to engage at-risk youth and open up dialogue about social justice issues affecting their communities—from gun violence to sex trafficking. They run both afterschool and weekend education programs in underserved areas of New York City, where all of their girls' theatrical work is generated. Building self-esteem, growing individual talents (step dancing, singing, rapping, and acting), and empowering girls to become leaders in and advocates for their communities is Girl Be Heard's unique model and why Girl Be Heard has been so successful. They also teach girls to be brave and confident; to rise above circumstances and expectations; to make the world better. Today 6 out of 10 girls have or will experience physical violence in their lifetime, if a girl can change her own life, she can chance the lives of girls everywhere.

The Co-Chairs, introduced Mrs. Stella Ayo-Odongo Executive Director the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network & a Custodian of the Africa Wide Movement for Children who joined our meeting via a Skype phone call from Uganda. She explained that they are pushing for awareness in the issues, because girls are looked at as property. The focus in Uganda is to increase prevention and make sure leaders know the value of girls. She also explained that they also need to empower girls to participate and take leadership in their own lives. The Co-Chairs thanked Austin Schiano for his tech assistance to make the call possible.

Co-Chair Margo mentioned that today's meeting was inspired by Ms. Amin who wanted to tell her story to raise awareness of the child bride cultural travesty. The Co-Chairs welcomed Ms. Naila Amin, who is a 26-year-old Survivor of a forced marriage and now a college student residing in New York. She gave an inspiring speech about her life, goals and future dreams. The whole problem stemmed from the fact that she was betrothed to her first cousin at the age of 8 when she and her parents were still living in Pakistan. At age 13, she was taken back to Pakistan to marry her first cousin. She started experiencing problems at home back here in NYC at the age of 14 when her parents found out she was dating an American boy; this was looked upon as adultery. She was taken away from her parents in 2004 after she went to school here in NYC and school officials noticed she had bruises and she entered foster care here in NYC, Ms. Amin did not like the foster care system, because no one understood her situation of what it means to be a child bride. She escaped and went back to her parents who helped her leave the country to go to Pakistan; little did she know she was being set up in a trap. She was met by her husband who was armed with a rifle together other male relatives who had rifles. She was married to her 28-year-old cousin in January of 2005. She managed to escape with the help of her uncle. Ms. Amin is currently going to Nassau Community College to be a social worker and wants to specialize in working with survivors of forced marriage. She wants to open up the first group home for survivors of forced marriages, and for males and females escaping honor violence. She has big plans for the future. Her biggest dream is to criminalize forced marriage in the U.S. and raise as much awareness as possible.

Co-Chair Margo thanked Ms. Gloria Starr-Kins for introducing her to Ms. MoniCa Singh who is a Survivor of being attacked by Acid and now a Fashion Designer - Motivational Speaker. Co-Chairs Margo & Yvonne welcomed Ms. Singh to share her story with everyone. She began with how she had an acid attack on her face in 2005, when she was 18 years old by a teenager whose marriage proposal she rejected. The teenager was never convicted of any crime against her. After 10 years and 46 surgeries and being hidden under veils for a number of years she is now speaking about her own story and she is fulfilling her dream of becoming a fashion designer. Currently, she is pursuing a degree in Marketing at Parsons, The New School for Design in New York. In her own words, "Strength and support are the tools that helped me go from being a victim of an acid attack to a survivor. These are the gifts I received from my family, especially my father. Though he is gone today, I think there is still a lot more he wanted to do to help others in need, as he was always

ready to come to the aid of those who wanted help while he was still alive. I want to share and spread his message and legacy with the foundation that I have started in his name to help others in their journeys, to go from being helpless to becoming strong enough to thrive and help others.” Spreading awareness about violence against women and girls has given her a motive to create a new life through her mission. She wants to help others to live their dreams. Ms. Singh mentioned several times that she relates to Ms. Amin and she wants to support of her cause, as well.

The Co-Chairs welcomed Ms. Iqra Shafiq, Youth Representative of Girl Be Heard at the United Nations was the last speaker and spoke reiterated the Ambassadors MacDonald’s speech. She was very moved by the statements of both Ms. Amin & Ms. Singh. She knows of the Child Brides in her own country of Pakistan. She talked about the fact that women have a right to education and they have a right to their own body and we need funding to give NGOs the ability to fight for legislative laws that can make child marriage illegal. We also need to fight the culture here in America. Ms. Shafiq vowed to continue her education and get her PhD.

Ms. Shafiq said, “We Stand With You” in support Ms. Amin & Ms. Singh. The Co-Chairs motioned to everyone to stand & repeat “We Stand With You.”

The Q&A session was moderated by the Co-Chairs. As the Q&A began Ambassador Mac-Donald stated that this was the most important meeting of his entire Diplomatic career and that everyone who attended the meeting had to be moved by the experience. During the Q&A the Co-Chairs & the Executive Board were repeatedly thanked by those in attendance for raising awareness of these important global issues. Following the Q&A the speakers gave their final reflections.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30pm.