

## Beijing + 25 and the Coronavirus

The cancellation of CSW64 was heartbreaking for NGO CSW/NY. We had been working on NGOCSW Forum 64 since October. Houry Geudelekian, the new Chair of NGO CSW/NY, and the Executive Committee of which I am an ex officio member and the Planning Committee, had planned all kinds of new things: five Woman of Distinction Awards to women in the 5 regions of the world who would tell us their stories at Consultation Day, Conversation Circles that would last all day for three days at the Armenian Center where women could network or join all kinds of sessions on the 6 thematic clusters for Beijing + 25, a larger and longer Artisan Fair, and the 550 scheduled NGO Parallel Events

On 2 March the Commission on the Status of Women led by CSW Chair, Mher Margaryan, Ambassador from Armenia, held a briefing at the UN to announce that the Secretary General Guterres had announced that all CSW64 Side Events and Round Tables were cancelled and that no ministers/ambassadors who were not already in the US should come to NYC for CSW64. CSW64 would consist of a very short meeting to pass the Political Declaration for CSW64 and to agree on the Program of Work for the next 5 years.

An intense meeting ensued. Many countries (and NGOs) wanted CSW64 postponed to a later date after the coronavirus was no longer a threat, not a short meeting at which the majority of people, many ministers and members from the Global South and around the globe, would not be able to attend. The Ambassador from South Africa was most eloquent: “CSW is of high value as is Beijing + 25. Let us wait for the correct time and postpone until all the women can be with us.... This [cancelling] is discrimination. You cannot discriminate.” The UK responded CSW without Civil Society (NGOs) is not CSW. Kenya said, “We can’t have CSW without Civil Society organizations.”

And so it was decided that at the next meeting on 9 March there would be a short event with a few speeches, the Political Declaration would be presented for a vote, and the CSW64 would be rescheduled as a smaller 2-3 day event in July. The short CSW64 meeting is necessary, Chair Margaryan said, to ensure the continuity of CSW65. Finally, Chair Geudelekian announced that all NGO CSW64 Forum events would be cancelled, that CSW64 would be postponed and repeated, “There can be no CSW meeting without Civil Society.” On 9 March after speeches by Secretary General Guterres, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and the President of the General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, Ambassador from Nigeria, the CSW64 Political Declaration was passed

unanimously although many countries lamented that there was no mention of universal health and reproductive rights necessary for gender equality and agreed to in the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action and no mention of UNSCR1325 on Women, Peace and Security that is being celebrated this year. Other NGOs were concerned that once again there was no mention of the plight of widows.

In addition, the Beijing + 25 events in Mexico City (May) and Paris (July) have been postponed to the end of 2020 or early 2021.

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04-01-2020