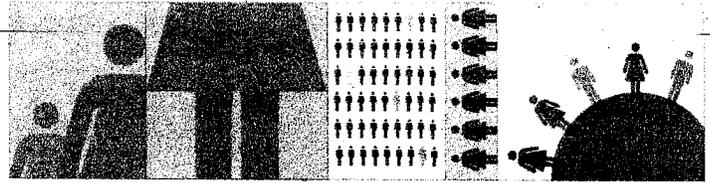


Ecumenical Women

Oral statement
9 March 2009



www.ecumenicalwomen.org

Excellencies and colleagues,

It is my honor to speak on behalf of the organizations of Ecumenical Women at the United Nations; we are an international coalition of Christian organizations working for gender equality.

Ecumenical Women welcomes the discussions on the CSW priority theme. The gravity of the HIV pandemic has exposed systemic issues that foster injustice and multiply the loss of life, including: stigma and discrimination, gender inequality, poverty, unemployment, unjust trade policies, racism, violence and conflict. A silent army of unremunerated caregivers provide care; 90% of this burden disproportionately falls on women and must be recognized. This act of mercy takes women away from their livelihoods, creating a tragic cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

The global response to the HIV pandemic demands bold and creative approaches which recognize how gender inequality contributes to the disempowerment of women. We recognize that as faith-based organizations we have the capacity to help redefine gender roles and responsibilities. Further, we emphasize that a gender sensitive response to HIV must improve policies and programs which allocate flexible and adequate funds and facilities that reach women and girls. Multi-sectoral approaches as well as necessary national and international legal mechanisms to ensure the protection of women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, must be adopted.

We promote universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support in the context of HIV and AIDS including to anti-retroviral therapy along with the full range of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, taking into account the feminization of the pandemic. Institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting is essential; therefore, we encourage budget allocations to critical social sectors, including health and education, and the creation of innovative national responses which fairly remunerate caregivers. Moreover, we urge governments to scale up access to antiretroviral therapy and overcome trade barriers, including distributing generic drugs. Profit motives should not override the urgent humanitarian need for readily available, safe and affordable drugs.

We reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. We continue to call for governments to implement the commitments made in these declarations.

In conclusion, as women and men of faith, we are committed to the creation of a more equitable society between women and men that is also free from AIDS. Grounded in our faith and commitment to global justice, we believe that the church - at its best - can be a transformative center which models gender equality, resists systems of oppression, supports and promotes women's rights. We reaffirm our belief that both women and men are created in God's image. We recognize that the face of AIDS is becoming younger, poorer and more female, and we all must partner to meet the needs of these women where it exists.

Thank you.

Ecumenical Women at the United Nations is composed of the following ECOSOC accredited organizations: Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, Church Women United, Church World Service, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), The Lutheran World Federation, The Salvation Army, World Council of Churches, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Student Christian Federation, World Young Women's Christian Association, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries (Women's Division)