

Report debriefing CSW67

April 12th, 2023



The Dutch debriefing on the 67th session of the UN *Commission on the Status of Women* (CSW67) took place at the office of WO=MEN in The Hague. Participants from various civil society organisations and two ministries participated.

The meeting was opened by Nadia van der Linde (WO=MEN), who welcomed everyone and summarized this year's CSW process. Paula Thijs (Atria) gave a presentation on the analysis of the CSW outcome document called the 'Agreed Conclusions'. Member of the EU negotiation team Robin de Vogel (Permanent Representation of the Netherlands at the United Nations, New York) shared her views on the negotiations and looked ahead to the role of the Netherlands within the CSW process for the coming years. Delegation member Nils Mollema (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), for whom this was the first CSW, shared his experiences and discussed the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions by the Netherlands. Mariëlle Feenstra (75InQ) reflected on her role as CSW NGO representative and shared her insights as expert on the CSW priority theme. Finally, there was room for civil society participants to share their experiences, ask questions, and discuss follow-up actions.

Engagement civil society

Nadia expressed her gratitude for the great engagement of individuals, organizations as well as the Dutch delegation members. The cooperation with the Permanent Mission in New York, and the Ministries of Education, Culture and Sciences (OCW) and Foreign Affairs is much appreciated. For many civil society organizations in other countries this experience is not similar. It is hard for them to figure out who is in the delegation and how to influence the process. Nadia also mentioned that this year, for the first time in CSW's history, there were so called 'closed paragraphs' in the draft Agreed Conclusions. The idea was that the negotiations could thus be more focused on the priority theme. This did not really work out in practice, as the document mainly became longer and negotiation days continued to be extremely long.

Agreed Conclusions

The key points from Atria's analysis of the Agreed Conclusions are listed below. This analysis compares the CSW outcome document with the Netherlands' [civil society priorities](#) for the Agreed Conclusions and was presented as 'gains' and 'losses'.

- The **potential** – and not just risks and challenges – of technology and innovation to improve women's and girl's lives is mentioned. There are references to the **human rights** of women and girls. Language on this almost doubled compared to last year's text. It is very positive that **gender bias** in data, Artificial Intelligence and algorithms is recognized in the text. Also, the importance of **gender statistics** and analyses is addressed. The reference to '**safety-by-design**' is a big win. This means that the impact on society and the environment is taken into account in the development of products and innovations. The Agreed Conclusions also stresses the **inclusion of women and girls** into innovation teams, and the promotion of participatory, **gender-responsive** approaches for technology design, development and deployment.

- Unfortunately, the link between technology, digital transformations and the **climate** crisis is weak. There are few references to the risks and impact of technology in addressing the climate crisis and climate justice.
- The importance of **(digital) education throughout the life course**, including older women, pregnant adolescents, young mothers, single mothers, and women and girls with disabilities is a win. Furthermore, there is a new paragraph on **digital health technologies** to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning, information and education.
- However, no progress is made on **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)**. This is unfortunate given this year's priority theme and its focus on education. There are a lot of qualifiers in the paragraph on comprehensive education, i.e.: 'where appropriate', 'age-appropriate' and 'relevant to cultural contexts' which weaken its meaning.
- The paragraphs on **gender-based violence (GBV)** are quite strong. GBV is more frequently mentioned: 17 times vs 11 times last year, while the number of references to violence against women and girls stayed about the same. **'Non-consensual'** was added to the paragraph on sharing sexual and explicit material, which is important since otherwise every nude photograph could be considered violence and exploitation. The right to **privacy** and personal data is mentioned. Lastly, **new and emerging technologies** that create new forms of violence, such as deep-fakes, are mentioned in the text, which is essential given the speed of technological developments.
- **'Technology facilitated gender-based violence' (TFGBV)** did not make it into the text but was discussed at great length. Instead, 'gender-based violence that occurs through or is amplified by technology' or 'gender-based violence through the use of ICT and social media' is used. The continuum of violence (the link between offline and online violence) is mentioned but only once. The language on the accountability of social media platforms and big tech to prevent gender-based violence could be stronger.
- Another gain is that the **root causes of the gender digital divide**, such as negative social norms and stereotypes, are recognized. Also, the full engagement of **men and boys** in order to combat and eliminate stereotypes, sexism and negative social norms are mentioned in the text. Moreover, recognition for the full, equal and meaningful **participation and leadership of women and adolescent girls** in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), ICT (information and communications technology) and R&D (research and development) sectors is a win.
- Unfortunately, no concrete actions, such as **quotas**, are suggested, nor are there any references to **ILO convention 190** on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

Reflection on the negotiations by the delegation

The delegation expressed their gratitude to everyone from civil society for their involvement. They stressed the importance of collaboration between the Dutch delegation and civil society organisations and shared that Dutch civil society's commitment was also very much appreciated by other delegations. The delegation shared their reflections on the negotiations of CSW67:

- This year's negotiations were exhausting and frustrating, partly due to difficulties with facilitation. This also impacted the outcomes. The Dutch delegation has mixed feelings about the decision of the facilitator to close a substantial part of the paragraphs, which made it difficult to achieve progress and ultimately resulted in a much longer text with many duplications.
- The delegation appreciated and subscribed to Atria's analysis of the Agreed Conclusions. They mentioned that a similar reflection on gains and challenges had been shared in the recent EU debriefing. Some of the Dutch priorities, such as more gender transformative language, already got lost in the negotiations at the EU level.
- The Netherlands was lead negotiator on behalf of the EU on the paragraphs on 'technology facilitated gender-based violence'. This was a way to be more engaged and to have more influence

in the discussions. At the same time, it can also impact our position within the EU, as it makes it more complicated to challenge issues and to defend our own position as the Netherlands within the EU discussions.

- The delegation acknowledged that there was some influence of last year's UN's Third Committee meeting dynamics into the CSW negotiations. The Third Committee or 3C is the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the UN which deals with UN General Assembly items related to social matters, human rights, and humanitarian affairs. There is some overlap with the CSW in themes, participants and discussions. Generally, according to the delegation, gender discussions are left to the CSW.
- The Netherlands has expressed its interest to join the CSW Bureau for the upcoming two years. This entails that the Netherlands will be involved in the practical organisation of the CSW, such as planning, but also modelling of the sessions. If the Netherlands is elected for the Bureau, the delegation aims to raise the issues of facilitation, accessibility and understandability of the process and improve the engagement with young people.
- Next year's theme is already set: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. The review theme will be: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (CSW63).
- In 2025, there will be a political declaration (because it's Beijing+30) instead of Agreed Conclusions on a priority theme. For the new 5-year plan of priority and review themes, the Secretary General will prepare and propose themes, with input from UN Women.

NGO representative

Mariëlle Feenstra also thanked everyone for their support. For her, it was very useful to get input on agreed language, especially from people who have been following the CSW for a while. The support from the Women's Rights Caucus (WRC) was also extremely important. Other points Mariëlle raised were:

- The participation of civil society organisations in the Netherlands was great, but sometimes this felt a bit too late, since the EU position paper was leading in the negotiations for the EU. There was, however, very little opportunity to provide input on this EU position paper.
- She mentioned that there were numerous side events during the two weeks of the CSW, in which very valuable information and insights were exchanged. Mariëlle wondered how we can better unlock that information to delegates, to use this as input during the negotiations. To her, the side events and the negotiations itself seemed quite parallel processes.
- A big gain for her in the Agreed Conclusions is the mention of 'safety-by-design'. There is an international safety-by-design standard, but this is not used much yet. This can be a first step. Other wins are the focus on gender-responsive technology, and disaggregated data and analyses. A big loss is that electricity and access to energy are not taken into consideration.
- Lastly, she emphasized the importance of implementation of the Agreed Conclusions. There is a huge group that can benefit from knowing about this conference, so there is a lot of work to do. She called upon the government to 'practice what you preach' and also stressed the responsibility of the tech industry.

Discussion

A lively discussion took place with the audience. Some of the points raised included:

- **Youth participation:** For the first time, this CSW included a Youth Forum and a Youth Dialogue and more young people than ever participated in delegations. There were numerous parallel sessions and side events with and by young people. But now many young people are wondering

how meaningful their participation was. Did anyone listen? Did it make any difference? Moreover, the CSW is an expensive and quite exclusive place for many young people. The delegation agrees that the Youth Dialogue was not youth-led and that many people who spoke up could not be considered youth themselves. The delegation was grateful for Veerle Dams from CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality to step in at the last minute and participate in this Dialogue. The intention of the Dutch delegation had been to include a Youth Representative (through the Nationale Jeugdraad, NJR) in the delegation, which they will prioritise for next year.

- **Invisibility of CSW:** Someone in the audience shared that the CSW is very invisible in the Netherlands and that we should make a comprehensive plan how we can tackle this, as civil society and as government. Next year's priority theme is poverty and financing. This could be an interesting topic for media. Paula Thijs (Atria) shared that Atria is working on this as well and Atria will be sharing content related to the CSW67 priority theme throughout the rest of the year.
- **The positive contribution of women** is lacking in the rhetoric. Mariëlle Feenstra noted that women's positive contribution to society is mentioned in the Agreed Conclusions in a couple of paragraphs, e.g. in design and development. It is important to think about the framing of why we need gender equality and to recognise women's contribution to society. Yet, at the same time, Nils Mollema highlighted that we are talking about fundamental human rights issues, so it should not only be necessary if it brings us something positive.
- **Opposition:** A question was raised on how the delegation experienced the anti-gender movement and activities at the CSW. The delegation shares that it was worse – at least in the negotiation room – during the Trump years. However, the Holy See (the Vatican) continued to be very vocal during the negotiations. Nadia van der Linde explained that the NGO CSW Forum has become stricter in terms of accepting sessions and behaviour. There have been actions before in New York, such as big busses with anti-abortion slogans. This is not allowed anymore although the opposition was still clearly present. Someone from the audience added that it was a different experience online, with a lot of online hate speech and attacks on CSW participants.

Follow-up and takeaways

With regard to the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions, the delegation shared that they are determined to take the Agreed Conclusions forward. They are already engaging with other Ministries about it as well. They also stressed the importance of civil society in holding the government accountable for the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions. The delegation will make adding a youth representative to the delegation a priority for next year.

WO=MEN and Atria will discuss with the delegation how to coordinate the input from Dutch CSOs for the EU negotiations, so that civil society's input will be more meaningful and effective.

Would you like to know more?

More CSW experiences and documents are shared on WO=MEN's CSW blogsite [here](#) and Atria's website [here](#).



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