



## 2017 Commission on the Status of Women:

### Women and Girls' Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work

By Sally Bean, Zonta Club of Janesville

It was a privilege to attend my first United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York from March 12-17. As a rookie, I was a bit overwhelmed, but I had some very good help in navigating the experience from ZI/ZIF Director Judy Kautz. I arrived on Saturday to get settled in and to see **The Lion King** with President-Elect Susanne von Bassewitz, her very first Broadway show. She was thoroughly delighted! I used Uber to get everywhere unless I walked.

On **Sunday**, we first visited the New York Historical Society before attending the CSW Zonta orientation held at the UNICEF-USA offices. At orientation, I learned that there were only 20 UN passes for over 60 Zontians registered. The good news was learning that it is possible to gain access to the UN buildings under a special pass for a specific side event, space permitting. Judy and I spent time on Monday morning applying for admission to several side events during the week, and we scored entrance to two events on Thursday! On Sunday night, there was a fun dinner for Zontians at a nearby restaurant.



On **Monday**, we attended parallel event sessions several miles away from the UN:

- From Equity to Equality – Strategies for Women's Economic Empowerment (moderated panel of four significant women)

Panelists included the inaugural Executive Director of the Commission on Gender Equity for the City of New York. This woman from Iran was undocumented for 10 years before gaining her green card, who works with 50 government agencies to look through a gender lens at three priorities: economic development/living wage jobs, ending violence against women, and access to health care and reproductive justice. Another panelist is an international lawyer and is Executive Director of Mina's List for women's political representation. She partners with women's rights organizations and provides training for political resources.

- Women Fostering Peace and Co-Prosperity: Creating Intergenerational Collaboration sans Arrogance (moderated panel of seven intergenerational speakers)

Panelists ranged from 17 to 72 years old, including a student, a lawyer, an educator, a UN employee, an anthropologist from Thailand, a financial advisor, and a migrant researcher. This session was sponsored by the Women’s Federation for World Peace, International.



On **Tuesday**, all sessions had been cancelled due to the snow storm. This was disappointing, especially because the UNICEF reception for Zonta was scheduled for Tuesday evening. Some went shopping, but I had come down with a severe cough on Monday, so I got some extra rest. We had a spontaneous dinner for Zontians staying in our hotel.

**Wednesday** was special because President Sonja Honig Schough was speaking all over!

- First President Sonja was the moderator for the Soroptimist International parallel event Opening the Door to Economic Empowerment for Women and Girls. I enjoyed a front row seat for this filled past capacity session. The panelists were all leaders of Soroptimist International.
- That afternoon, there was a special event at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office where President Sonja was a panelist on Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work. One of the keynote addresses “Building Economic Autonomy for Different Sectors of Women” was delivered in Spanish and translated by a Taiwanese woman. One fact I picked up was that women perform on average 5.3 hours of unpaid work each day, while men perform 1.3 hours. The second keynote speaker discussed the Gender Inequality Index which is comprised of three dimensions: health, empowerment, and labor market. Sonja spoke on “women’s self-sustainability – a necessity for development and growth.”
- That evening provided an event cosponsored by The Permanent Mission of Zambia to the UN and Zonta International, but I did not attend as it was published as requiring a UN pass. Judy and I went to Broadway to see Glenn Close in **Sunset Blvd**, an outstanding performance and a huge audience reception!



**Thursday** was my day at the UN. We arrived early and had to wait to enter the grounds. Once inside, we toured the special display featuring women at the UN in history. Zonta PIP Helvi Siipila from Finland was featured as the CSW Chairman 1967. Between sessions, we shopped at the post office, the bookstore, and the gift shop. Our side events were:

- Trafficking of Women and Children Fleeing Conflicts. Trafficking is involved in SDGs 2, 5, 7, 8, and 16. This impressive panel included women and one man from Italy, Philippines, Jordan, Nigeria and the US. In 2016, over 25,000 unaccompanied minors migrated and became targets for trafficking.

The UN Ambassador to Jordan told us that 167,000 Syrian children are in Jordan, and that youth issues were discussed at the Security Council for the first time ever.

- Violence Against Women in the Workplace. This session took place in a huge auditorium and was almost filled to capacity. This incredible panel included leaders from Rwanda, Mexico and Australia governments, and from civil society in Australia - Our Watch, USA - AFL-CIO and US Council for International Business, and India - Breakthrough. The Rwanda speaker, Her Excellency Esperance Nyirasafari, spoke highly of the One Stop Centers which were piloted in a Zonta service project! The Zonta clubs in Australia are partnering with One Watch (which I learned at their conferences in 2015).
- The Zonta Club of New York and the ZI UN Committee cohosted a dinner for about 90 Zontians at the National Arts Club.



**Friday** was a leisure day. Judy and I had breakfast with a friend of hers from NYC. After a full afternoon nap, we headed out for dinner and **Hello Dolly** starring Bette Midler and David Hyde Pierce! This was a thrill because the show opens in April, so I was not expecting to get tickets. We were able to find tickets online during this preview period, and it was fabulous! What a great close to a great week in New York!

I hope to make the CSW an annual trip. There is so much work to be done, and as an NGO with consultative status, Zonta has a role in advancing the status of women.

