

**Brahma Kumaris Events**  
**Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)**  
**March 10-21, 2025**

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# COMMISSION *on the* STATUS OF WOMEN

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## Introduction

The United Nations hosts the world's largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's empowerment—the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**—every March at its **New York** headquarters. CSW amplifies women's voices worldwide and helps shape global standards for gender equality and empowerment.



UN Photo/Manuel Elías The 69th session of the Commission on Status of Women opens in the UN General Assembly Hall in New York.

### *The Brahma Kumaris at the United Nations*

The **Brahma Kumaris** have been actively involved in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) since **2007**. This year in 2025, the BK delegation, Julia Grindon-Welch (USA), Marianne Lizana (Costa Rica), Nalishha Mehta (USA), Pratiba Daya (South Africa), and Sabita Geer (USA), **co-hosted** a parallel event, **three** community events, and **participated** in many workshops and panels discussions organized by **UN Agencies and NGOs**. A written statement was also submitted and published on the [UN Website](#).



The Brahma Kumaris' 2025 CSW69 Statement **emphasizes** the need for inclusive, values-based leadership rooted in collaboration, spiritual empowerment, and **supportive networks**. It calls for **policy** and **educational initiatives** that nurture inner strength, shared responsibility, and ethical decision-making to advance gender equality.



### Parallel Event Hosted by the Brahma Kumaris



This year's parallel event, "*Where Does the Future of Power Lie for Women's Leadership?*" on **March 19, 2025**, was sponsored by **WDB Trust, African Women in Dialogue (AfWID), Magnolia Moonshot 2030, and The Brahma Kumaris**. The event offered an interactive space for women to explore new ways of decision-making, connection, and leadership. The design applied the Shiv Shakti Approach, the root of the **Transformative Leadership** program initiated by the Brahma Kumaris. This supports the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**.

### Opening Meditation

The event opened with a brief meditation, guiding us inward to connect with our inner being, creating a sense of stillness and clarity. We turned this shared energy into unity in presence and purpose, creating a safe space for authentic connection.



**Junia Flavia d’Affonseca**, flutist, then filled the room with her melodious music, preparing hearts, minds, and body for the rich conversation that followed.

### Lead Conversationalists



**Gayatri Naraine (left):** An author, speaker, and dedicated Raja Yogi, Gayatri serves as the **Brahma Kumaris’ Main Representative to the UN**, focusing on developing spiritual life skills.

**Linda Vilakazi (middle):** A South African leader in community development, education, and gender advocacy, Linda has co-led **African Women in Dialogue** since 2018, strengthening the continental African women’s movement.

**Jaha Marie Dukureh (right):** An activist, entrepreneur, and author, Jaha overcame FGM and

child marriage to become **UN Women’s first Goodwill Ambassador for Africa**. A **TIME 100 honoree** and **Nobel Peace Prize nominee**, she champions global women’s rights.

### Shared Experiences

#### **Where Does the Future of Power Lie for Women’s Leadership?**

**Darcy Winslow**, Founding President and Co-Founder of the Academy for Systems Change, skillfully moderated the conversation among the speakers, drawing upon their lived experiences in order to illustrate profound examples of “**Shakti**” being apparent.



**BK Gayatri Naraine** opened the conversation by reflecting on the challenge that lied in finding ways to **integrate spiritual expertise into the UN system**, a platform primarily consisting of state leaders who initially failed to recognize that a lack of spiritual awareness is at the heart of all secular challenges. The resistance to engagement was further amplified by the fact that the organization was led by women—would they be taken seriously on the global stage. Confronting these challenges pulled Gayatri to reflect inwardly: Why am I resisting the resistance?



Often, what resists is the sense of "I"—am I coming from a place of superiority or inferiority? **This fluctuating sense of "I" is the ego.** True transformative power comes from working on one's self-respect, which is rooted in spiritual strength. This approach fosters a new way of engaging, leaving a lasting impact that draws us all closer to a shared truth. There is an inherent power (shakti) within us, deeply grounded yet also nurturing and supporting others (like a tap root). Our true power lies in reaffirming one another, and our role now is to serve as the palliative caregivers for a world in crisis.

**Linda Vilakazi**, highlighted how apartheid dehumanised black women, whereby they were seen as a tool rather than a human being. This led to **poverty** being seen in the face of a woman. With AfWID, the **aim** is to give back to the women of Africa who supported South African women during the years of the struggle. The **cornerstone** of power that is transformative is TRUST and LOVE as experienced through the AfWID program. Acknowledging women, her worth and providing an **environment** where her voice is listened to gives her agency to **initiate, organize and develop** programs that can **uplift communities**. Women know what is needed and, when affirmed, will find the means to build **communities of peace**.





(Left to right) Linda Vilakazi, Gayatri Naraine, Jaha Marie Dukureh, Darcy Winslow, Junia Flavia d'Afonseca



**Jaha Dukureh** passionately conveyed that every issue needs a **human face**. As survivors of FGM, we go beyond statistics and begin to reconnect with the individuals impacted. This awakens **compassion** and **courage** to dare to lead and provide a safe space for girls irrespective of the resistance from patriarchal systems and cultural norms.

Transformative power is **rooted** in perseverance, supported by **humility**, and the **willingness** to **listen** to understand and restore the dignity of the individual. Women's leadership is through building a strong network and community around, and the strength of that lies in the commitment to honestly engage, which is critical. This gives the courage to speak truth to power and **never** to **sacrifice truth** and **justice** for women and girls.



During the event, everyone paired together, sharing their **experiences** and deeply connecting with each other's **inner world**, despite being strangers.



These conversations inspired dozens in the room to take control of what is within their power—to lead with **courage**, embrace their **voices**, to show up **fully** and **authentically in order to** shape a more



**just world.** True leadership is not just about **authority**; it's about **presence, resilience**, and the willingness to **create change**. Many felt inspired to **lead from the heart**—not just the head. As Jaha said, *“Every issue needs a **human face**—it's not just **statistics** we're dealing with, it's **lives**.”*



### *The Brahma Kumaris- The ShivShakti Approach*

This approach provides women with a framework for **ongoing inner growth** and encourages women to **awaken their self-awareness, connect with a Higher Source, and cultivate consciousness**.

Through this inner transformation, their **power, dignity, and choices** become infused with a higher love, shaping their leadership with wisdom and strength.

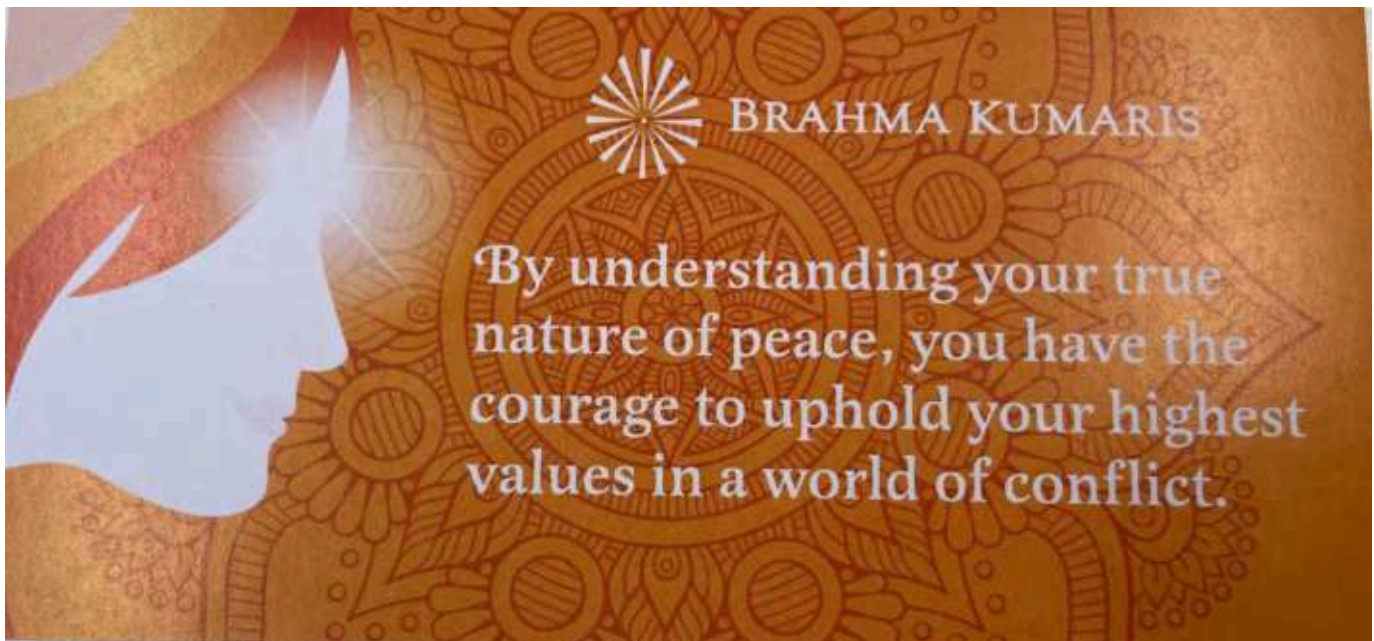
#### **Practices Encouraged to Support Inner Power (Shakti)**

- Create a sacred container and safe space for dialogue
- Meditation to center and connect to the self, each other, and the Higher Source.
- Pause after each one speaks - to honor what was heard and to maintain a high vision.
- Storytelling - it is through our lived experiences that we learn from each other
- Bring music and art to connect with pure feelings and energetically hold the space



## Conclusion

Unlike previous CSW events, we noticed a much **greater openness** to connecting with spirituality to restore hope and embrace the **power** of love and compassion. The prior **co-creation** process with all partners allowed for the development of a shared vision, where the **unique talents** and specialties of each facilitator added value and enriched the **overall experience** of the event.



## CSW69 Community Events



*The Brahma Kumaris team organized three community events during CSW69.*





## Informal Meet and Greet with Our CSW Friends

*Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025*

Friends and colleagues from various organizations affiliated to the United Nations attended. During the meeting, a meaningful space was created so each one can share insights and reflections that emerged during their attendance of CSW this year. The importance of UN hosting gatherings such as this international conference was highlighted, as they allow for the creation of alliances and the opportunity to learn about diverse realities. However, more importantly, many expressed a growing concern about the setbacks in advancing gender equality, peace, and justice.

Participants from the United States, especially, expressed how disturbed they are with the current situation in their country. Their testimonies reflected a sense of disillusionment, but also the urgency of continuing the work through collective action.



One of the most significant moments was led by Sister Gayatri, who offered a powerful meditation. During her intervention, she shared the idea that the world is in a state of "palliative care" and invited reflection with a profound question: What do we do when caring for someone in this state? She emphasized the importance of being fully present, acting from that internal power that needs to be nourished now more than ever, as taking care of ourselves becomes essential in order to continue offering the world what it so desperately needs.



## Being the light in Chaos: Leading with Love and Courage - Transformative Women's Leadership – Online panel conversation – Manhattan Center

*Date: Thursday, 20 March, 2025*

This panel discussion was filled with stories of passion which developed into a rich and meaningful conversation between **Marianne Lizana**, Coordinator of Brahma Kumaris Activities in Costa Rica, and **Linda Vilakazi**, a South African leader in community development, education, and gender advocacy. They were asked to share their own lived experiences, about being a light in a challenging situation, bringing hope and courage, what that light is and how they nurture the inner light so that they don't fall into depletion or helplessness.



‘Being the Light’ as expressed by Marianne and Linda is about holding a safe space whilst maintaining a clear and transparent vision. Always see the other for who they are and build trust so that it gives the opportunity for the other to open up. Patience in allowing the other to live their process and find their own agency for change offering options and choices.

Linda highlighted that acknowledging the bravery in the other, and giving the notion of leadership to the other is the best gift you can give. People can find their solutions when they are reminded of their own agency. “Impossible is an attitude” - Christina Figures, remember innovation is the light.

Marianne stated that one can only offer this light when one has reconciled the pain in one's own heart and creates healthy feelings remembering that what I am feeling is what I am vibrating... using meditation to support this process. Listen deeply and connect to the One Source in the Universe, so that I do not burn out but become a conduit for this pure power. This offers the opportunity to create a new approach. Learning to hold silence within the mind helps to maintain positivity and look at all situations as opportunities for doing things differently with love.





Kindness is transformative, it brings strength and keeps one grounded. We all have the feminine and nurturing side in us naturally, using this has the greatest impact. Do not allow the self to be caged by attitudes but act from kindness and create space for others. Through our collective feminine power and the space we create, we will allow for something new to emerge. Being the light is about creating from love and not fear, it is about moving forward to a higher level of awareness.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uyazj-EypFQ>



**Being the Light in Chaos: Leading with Love and Courage (Global Harmony House) Co-organized by the Shiv Shakti Leadership Approach (SSLA) USA chapter and the core group of CSW.**

*Date: Saturday, March 22, 2025*

In honor of the occasion of celebrating women, on Saturday, March 15, 2025, The Brahma Kumaris (BK), USA, together with the BK UN International CSW team, hosted an event at the BK Regional Headquarters, Global Harmony House, in Great Neck, New York. The theme was, 'Being the Light in Chaos- Leading with Love and Courage: Transformative Women's Leadership.'

Given the chaos and confusion in the world, there is a call for redefining leadership. Women were invited to this event with a challenge - to reflect on whether or not they can have the audacity to be authentically present, to show up with integrity, and to allow their natural light to shine in the world at this time.



The event began with a brief icebreaker, and the creation of a safe environment in which each participant was fully present. This was followed by meditation using the image of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of the characteristics of "Shiv Shakti." The participants were taken on an experiential journey of the deeper meaning of those qualities.





Holding that space within, questions were asked for silent reflection, to explore what the meditation awakened within each one, and how to be that light in times of darkness. This was followed by sharing in small groups and then in the plenary. The experiences were very profound, one of them commented *“in these days we have been afraid of the changes brought by the new government, but the meditation made me feel that we have a lot of power, and united we can do something that brings light and hope for all us”*.



BK Gayatri Naraine, Main representative of the Brahma Kumaris at the UN, delved deeper into the topic. Her presentation opened with a short video describing the process of how a tree grows:

*“...a tree is always growing in two directions at the same time... The nature of a tree is gravitropic and phototropic.... Gravitropic means it grows away from light and toward gravity. That is the root system. The seed goes into the ground, and the roots and the tree grow down before it starts growing up. When the seed is under the ground, it is dark, damp and it has resistance. The root system has resistance and has to push through the earth to go down further. Once it breaks through the earth growing up there is no more resistance. The part of the tree above the earth is growing towards light and away from gravity. The tree is growing in two directions.... How does that help me in my life? It is one of the most beautiful pictures of*



*the way life works... How? It is the work that you do in the dark when it is difficult and damp that makes the work that you do and everyone sees in the light work ...Everyone desires the fruit system, reach for the stars...but if you are unwilling to go down, you cannot go up.*

Gayatri then shared as follows: using the metaphor of underground roots—like those of carrots and parsnips—to describe the silent, deep power of women, a power known as *Shakti*. Like roots that support and nourish other plants from the darkness, women also grow from hidden and challenging places, radiating strength without needing to impose. *Shakti* is described as a sacred feminine energy, a powerful presence, like that of the Statue of Liberty: firm, silent, yet deeply meaningful, especially in times of crisis or difficulty.

In today's world, where power is often associated with control or destruction, a different vision is proposed: true strength comes from the soul. The crown of the Statue of Liberty, with its seven rays, symbolizes the essential qualities of *Shakti* that live within each being: faith, truth, peace, love, joy, purity, and liberty. These are not external virtues we need to seek but inner gifts we remember and cultivate when we connect to a higher power and to our spiritual essence.

Humanity is in a kind of “palliative care,” and what is most needed is not just medical help, but a genuine and compassionate presence. This is the function of *Shakti*: to offer comfort, love, and strength from the depths of one's being. When a woman connects with her soul and with a divine source, she feels full, capable of responding to any situation with hope and wisdom. Her light becomes a tool of transformation, radiating calm and healing to those around her. *Shakti* does not impose; it flows authentically. Each woman has a unique expression of this energy, which strengthens when she confronts both internal and external resistance with courage. True self-respect is born from this process: accepting differences, embracing one's uniqueness, and letting the inner *Shakti* manifest as a gift to the world. Amid darkness and challenge, the call is to allow this force to emerge and become a guide for oneself and for collective well-being.

Finally, each of the 40 participants received a postcard of the Statue of Liberty, and a reflective exercise was done, where the “inner shakti” of each one wrote a message to the present self. It was a very powerful exercise, in silence. It ended with specially prepared sweets and affirmation cards for all.





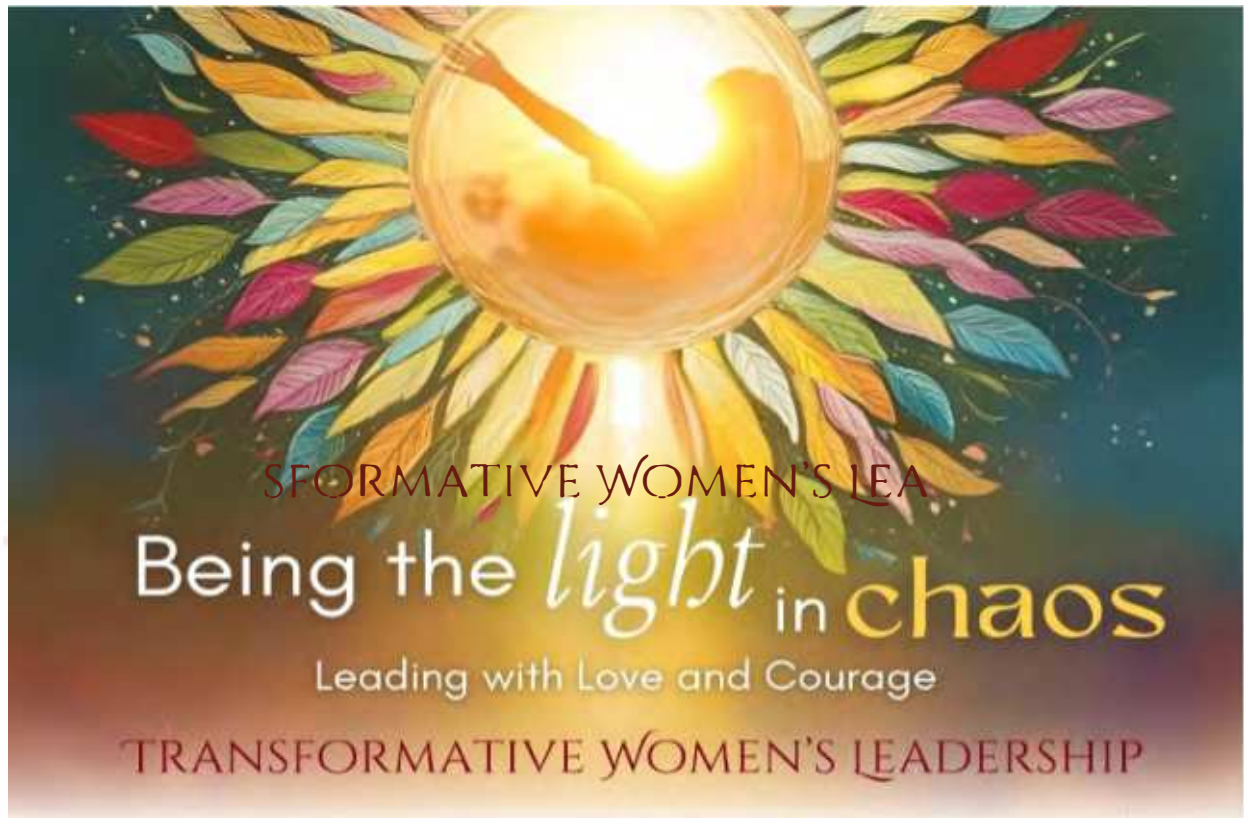


Forty-seven (47) like-minded women, who were either leaders in their professional roles, or had an interest in leadership, were present and explored the theme by reflecting together on what is meant by a transformative approach to leadership which is what the world truly needs now. Women reflected on what it means to bring this transformed and enlightened approach to leadership into their own life, for those they serve directly, and for our world in general.

The leadership model that was explored in this gathering is one designed by the BK UN International CSW team, in response to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This unique Leadership approach is called Transformational Women's Leadership Approach, also referred to as The Shiv Shakti Leadership Approach (SSLA). It is an emergent and experiential approach to leadership, at the heart of which is to be a living model of feminine leadership principles founded on self-empowerment through connecting to one's spiritual core and connecting to a Divine Source.

The co-created safe and sacred space enabled deep reflections, rich, meaningful, open, honest and authentic conversations to take place, influencing enlightened awareness and deep self-realization to emerge. The archetype of the Statue of Liberty was reflected on as a symbol of authentic feminine leadership. One which inspires and nurtures the feminine qualities of love, trust, inner strength, compassion and dignity. The process was interactive and experiential, where each voice was a significant contribution and added value to the learning.

The experience was deeply enriched by reflections, meditation, 'Heart-to-Heart' conversations in which each woman had the opportunity to reflect on her own inner qualities which she embodies, and also, that which she needs in order to continue to grow.



## CSW69 Events Attended

## REPORT

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**COMMISSION** *on the*  
**STATUS OF WOMEN**

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*The delegation of the Brahma Kumaris at the UN attended and participated in a number of side events and parallel events during CSW69. Here is a summary of what took place.*





## The Government of India and UN Women co-hosted the Ministerial-level Roundtable on March 12, 2025 in New York during CSW69.

Date: March 12, 2025

Ministerial Roundtable on:

*(I) Digital and Financial Inclusion for Women's Empowerment*

*(II) Financing for Women's Empowerment - Criticality of Core Resources*

Investing in women's education and health upholds their fundamental human rights and empowers them in economic terms. Empowering women is important for the economy since women typically reinvest up to 90 percent of their earnings in their families and communities. This can help expedite development, overcome poverty, and promote gender equality and economic growth.

Digital and financial inclusion has proven to be a transformative lever for achieving gender equality, empowering women and acting as a catalyst for women's empowerment and their full equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of societal life. Digital and financial inclusion not only bridges gender gaps in access but also creates pathways for women to take on leadership roles in entrepreneurship, governance, and policy-making. The next critical shift lies in leveraging this inclusion to cultivate women's leadership across sectors. This transition from inclusion to leadership marks a significant evolution in the women's empowerment agenda.

### **Rationale for Digital and Financial Inclusion as a pathway to women's empowerment**

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#### **1. Economic Empowerment as a Foundation for Leadership:**

Financial independence enables women to participate confidently in decision-making at the household, community, and institutional levels.

#### **2. Digital Access Catalyzing Public Participation:**

Digital tools have empowered women to engage with governance systems, lead businesses, and advocate for rights, enhancing access but also building managerial capacities for women to lead enterprises.

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#### **3. Leadership's Role in Accelerating Equality:**

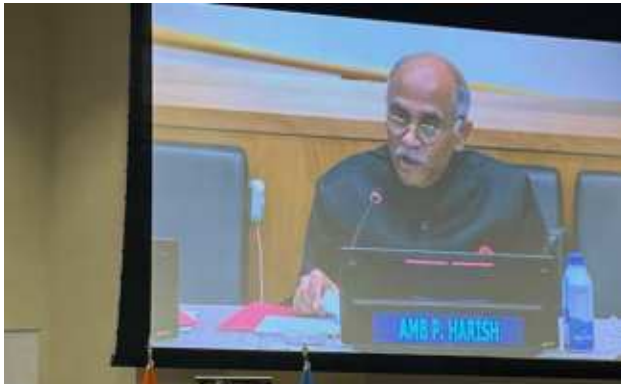
Women in leadership roles influence policies that prioritize gender equality, women's safety and inclusive growth.

#### **4. Global Advocacy for Women-Led Development:**

India's G20 presidency prioritized women-led development, showcasing the country's commitment to advancing women's leadership on global platforms.

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**H.E. Parvathaneni Harish, Permanent Representative of India to the UN**  
welcomed everyone and set the stage.

There were many esteemed women sharing on both panels. Here are some of the highlights:



**H.E. Sima Bahous, UN Women Executive Director**  
“it is not just a case of finances and digital inclusion... it is about power”... we must make sure we don’t just exclude women ... but make things work for women.”

**H.E. Annpurna Devi, Minister of Women and Child Development of India**

“inclusion is important but also security of digital information is just as important. women as entrepreneurs using technology for innovation among many other things... resources are needed for women-led development - the digital age should be a bridge and not a barrier.”





**H.E. Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi, Minister of Social Development and Family, Qatar**

“we work closely with UN Women to improve and sustain finances to UN Women to support the empowerment of women in engagement social structure.”



**H.E. Stephanie Copus Campbell, Ambassador for Gender Equality, Australia**

“when you sit and design programs in air-conditioned rooms, it often does little good and can sometimes harm. but it is the women themselves who have the solutions and so better to give finance directly. getting money into the hands of women who understand the needs of the local institutions and communities.”





## Healing and Wellbeing Space



This space served as a haven offered daily for an hour twice a day for participants seeking quiet and time to unwind, especially at the beginning of or after a full day of dialogues. Sounds of Tibetan singing bowls, colored paper and crayons to capture insights, and sharing of peace for the world were a few of the highlights of the experience.





# US WOMEN'S CAUCUS

Feminist Advocacy at the United Nations

## US Women's Caucus - Advocating for Women's Rights in the USA

Date: Thursday March 13

The event was very well attended and the room was packed leaving standing room only. The 2 main speakers were Elie Smeal and Carolin Maloney.

**Ellie Smeal** is an American women's rights activist. She is the president and a cofounder of the [Feminist Majority Foundation](#) and has served as president of the [National Organization for Women](#) for three terms, in addition to her work as an activist, grassroots organizer, lobbyist, and political analyst.

She once described why she feels called to fight for equality in a 1995 interview with Babara Koeppel:



"And I think you affect your own moral well-being in the process. It's like, if I step over a body that is lying in the street, I have not helped that person who needed my help, but I have just as surely lost a part of my own humanity. Eventually, you become numb to human suffering. Those of us in the abused classes do the most pushing, but there are no winners in this

kind of thing. It should not be a divisive thing; no one should feel threatened. The appeal is to all people. We should all rise."

At this event she said "The importance of the women's vote cannot be underestimated ... the powers have to be made to be 'afraid' of the women's vote... There is no one strategy... day in and day out we need to get people voting... young people included. Knowledge is power... so they try to close down the education department and want women back in the kitchen... do yourself a favor and read project 2025... their plan is all there..."



**Carolyn Maloney** is an American politician, Former House of Representative, ERA leader in domestic and international women's issues. She was the first woman to represent New York City's 7th Council district where she was the first woman to give birth while in office. Now working at Eleanor Roosevelt's house.



"I never thought that our daughters would have less rights than we had at their age.

Laws aimed at making the laws a level playing field - Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has to be in the constitution ... women rights are not written into the constitution ... 101 years since the ERA was introduced to congress...".





## Women of Faith Leading Change: Going Further, Faster, Together for Climate and Gender Justice

Hybrid Event held at the Tzu Chi Center, NY

Moderated by Azza Karam

Powerful words there too: we need **radical connection and radical collaboration** if we wish to bring about the change. There's a great connection between gender justice and climate justice and Faith. All three are needed to bring the 'new' that we seek.

Women of faith have always been in the frontline of justice so policymakers should work with them. Women are not waiting for salvation, she is wielding the sword, she is here to push a mountain. Indigenous women are deeply interconnected with the land and so environmental protection is important - it informs their identity. We must ensure technology is a space of equity and not violence. The only way forward is to work together as teams intergenerationally.

Event organized by the **Women, Faith, and Climate Network** and Co-Sponsors included: Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN, Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the UN, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN, and UNEP



69TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

**WOMEN, FAITH, & CLIMATE NETWORK**

**WOMEN OF FAITH LEADING CHANGE:**  
GOING FURTHER, FASTER, TOGETHER FOR CLIMATE AND GENDER JUSTICE

**13 MARCH 2025 13:30 - 14:45 EDT**

TZU CHI CENTER, 229 E 60TH ST. NEW YORK

RSVP FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE PARTICIPATION: [BIT.LY/WFCNETWORK](https://bit.ly/WFCNETWORK)

**WOMEN, FAITH, & CLIMATE NETWORK**

Buan-ionad na hÉireann  
chun na Náisiún Aontaithe  
Permanent Mission of Ireland  
to the United Nations

Ministry of Women Affairs, Community,  
Small and Medium Enterprises  
Development

UN  
environment  
programme



The opening of the Conference, where the Secretary General was present:  
Key remarks made by various speakers:

***When indigenous women are included, communities thrive, our women and our girls are sacred.***

In the current climate, we need to ensure that women's full participation at every level is needed policy, business, and governance to ensure peace-building efforts to ensure sustainable peace. Gender equity is the driving force of the 2030 goals, we have an obligation to fulfil it. ECOSOC President - history will judge us by the courage we have in resolving our challenges, and women are at the center of social change. It's important we leave no one behind.

H.E. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General, warmly stated that there have been encouraging stories of progress around gender equality thanks to the persistent efforts of women and feminist groups across the world. However, she reminded all that there's still much more to be accomplished.

To watch the opening program, click here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1z/k1zea7os0z>



### African Caucus

Women bear the brunt of care work. National policies on domestic and care work are needed to enable fair pay. Women are facing greater levels of violence, whether it's sanctioned violence through wars, domestic violence, digital violence or femicide. Greater resources, policies, and attention need to be given to create places of safety for women and girls.

The participation of local women in international forums is being prevented due to visa prevention is unacceptable. There is a call to move the conference from region to region to make it affordable and more inclusive.



## COMPASSION IN ACTION: Feminist and Narrative Methods for Transformation

Date: Tuesday 18 March

Session facilitated by co-sponsors, Footage and SayItForward.org

They offered a beautiful model where compassion is the bedrock on their process of transformative change.

They are actively advocating for the integration of **compassion, feminism, empathy, and diplomacy** as key strategies for transformation within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their work is grounded in principles of **care and justice**, which they apply intentionally in contexts marked by **gender-based violence, inequality, and forced displacement**. In particular, they support women living under **totalitarian regimes**, offering **therapeutic narratives and compassionate approaches** to healing and empowerment.

For them, meaningful change will be driven by **education, advocacy, compassion, empathy, awareness, community, and connection**. They view **compassion not just as an emotional response, but as a strategic force**—one that has the power to **reduce shame, foster connection, and advance the SDGs**. By centering human dignity and emotional intelligence, they are reshaping the way we approach global challenges and building a more just and caring world.

Their processes use storytelling as there is power in the narrative. It was an interactive session that invited participants to share messages with women in places of war or conflict.





## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN WAR AND PEACE

### FEMINIST APPROACHES TO JUSTICE



Date: Monday 17th

Anwarul Chowdhury

Democracy without the participation of women—who represent 50% of the global population—is simply another form of authoritarianism. Women’s participation is not only a matter of justice, but a win-win strategy for societies. Women are powerful agents of peace and sustainability, and their leadership brings inclusive perspectives to decision-making processes. Investing in girls is not just the right thing to do—it also drives economic growth and long-term development.

However, the challenges remain urgent and complex. Over the past eight years, the practice of female genital mutilation has increased, and today, more than 300 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance due to conflicts, climate crises, and other emergencies. Girls living in conflict settings face heightened risks of gender-based violence, kidnapping, and exploitation. Without peace, development is impossible—and without women, peace and development cannot be achieved.

#### Protection of Girls and Children in Armed Conflict

Approximately 100 million children around the world are currently affected by war and armed conflict. These children are exposed to unimaginable horrors, including death, forced recruitment into armed groups, rape, and sexual exploitation such as prostitution and pornography. The impact is devastating and long-lasting. Recent data shows that violence against children has increased by 21% due to ongoing conflicts in places like Gaza, Israel, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, and at least 20 other regions across the globe.

In response to this alarming situation, a network of universities was established in 2020 with the mission of protecting children in armed conflict. This initiative began with strong support from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the collaboration of several



NGOs. Today, the network includes 40 universities, primarily from Italy and the United States, as well as Johannesburg University in South Africa. Together, these institutions are working to raise awareness, conduct research, and advocate for effective policies to safeguard the rights and lives of children caught in the crossfire of war.

### [Misogyny in the U.S. Army: Sexual Violence](#)

The U.S. Department of Defense is officially responsible for ensuring the security and well-being of women within its ranks. While comprehensive policies exist on paper to prevent and address sexual harassment and violence, their implementation remains weak and inconsistent. As a result, the number of women victims of sexual harassment and rape in the military has increased significantly in recent years. This issue is further compounded by a military culture that often reinforces harmful gender norms and stigmas. In many cases, interpersonal dynamics are shaped by values that dehumanize women, with soldiers being conditioned to view them as inferior or as objects.

Women in the military report disturbing experiences that highlight the systemic nature of the problem. Many face constant intrusions by male colleagues into their private quarters, and requests to be assigned night duties alongside other women—for safety reasons—are often ignored. Pornography is commonly consumed and even displayed in shared spaces, with cases reported where women's bathrooms have been wallpapered with explicit content. When women do report incidents of harassment or assault, they are frequently dismissed or retaliated against, leading many to stay silent out of fear.

This culture of violence and impunity becomes even more dangerous in war camps and conflict zones, where the lines between ally and threat are blurred. Some women feel safer traveling in convoys through hostile territory than staying in the camps where the greatest danger comes from their own colleagues. The fear is so pervasive that some avoid going to the bathroom alone. These realities underscore the urgent need for cultural and structural change within military institutions to ensure that women are protected, respected, and heard.

### [Gender Discrimination in International Law and How is the Impunity of Sexual Violence Allowed?](#)

Gender justice requires the recognition and active dismantling of deep-rooted social inequalities. One of the most pervasive manifestations of gender injustice is sexual violence, which serves different yet equally oppressive purposes in times of peace and war. In peace, it is often used as a tool of control and subjugation—marital rape, for instance, remains unpunished in many parts of the world. In times of conflict, sexual violence becomes a weapon of war, deliberately used to terrorize communities and destroy the social fabric. Despite its devastating impact, it remains severely underreported and underprosecuted, and survivors are often left without justice or support.

A human rights approach is essential to address these systemic abuses and to affirm that even in times of war, women have the right to be protected. Achieving lasting change requires breaking cycles of misogyny and dismantling harmful gender stereotypes. This



transformation can only happen when women are present and empowered in decision-making spaces—where policies are shaped, and justice is defined. True gender justice demands not only legal reforms, but also a cultural shift that centers dignity, equality, and accountability.

### **PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS: STATEMENTS FROM EACH DIFFERENT COUNTRY**

Girls are powerful change makers, yet they continue to be excluded from the very spaces where decisions about their lives and futures are made. This must change. Girls deserve to be included in policy-making processes—not as an afterthought, but as a crucial part of shaping more just, inclusive, and compassionate societies. With access to education, particularly in areas like STEM, and the right to participate safely and meaningfully in decision-making spaces, girls can become transformative leaders for their communities and the world.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where the perspectives of youth are often dismissed and where young women, especially those who are indigenous or from marginalized backgrounds, face layers of discrimination. The voices of girls must be heard—not just on global stages, but in everyday life. When a girl becomes a mother too young, her opportunities are limited for years to come. She needs support, education, and the assurance that her circumstances do not define her future. Every girl must know that she has the power to rise, to move forward, and to build the life she dreams of.

We must ask ourselves: how many more years until gender equality is truly achieved? Human rights, which should be a universal baseline, have become a privilege enjoyed by only a few. True liberation means that no woman or girl is left behind—*we are one*, and none of us will be truly free until all women and girls are free. The time to listen, to act, and to include girls in shaping our collective future is now.

### **SOCIOLOGISTS' PANEL FOR WOMEN IN SOCIETY**

In contexts of conflict and armed violence, women are systematically subjected to rape, forced pregnancy, abortion, torture, and other severe human rights violations. The number of women and girls living in conflict zones has increased by 50%, and yet, impunity for the atrocities committed against them remains widespread. These grave violations often go unpunished, further silencing survivors and perpetuating cycles of violence. Human rights are routinely disregarded in war zones, leaving women and girls extremely vulnerable and unsupported.

To confront this reality, it is essential to create spaces for women's active participation in the resolution of conflicts, the promotion of a culture of peace, and in the development of strategies to address migration, especially as it relates to climate change. While one of the goals of the CSW has been to reduce military spending, current global conflicts have led to a significant increase in funding for armies. In response, a strong commitment is needed to build resilience in post-conflict settings, ensuring that recovery efforts are gender-responsive and rooted in justice and accountability.







*Section of participants during the opening event, March 12*

### Conclusion

Both the online and in-person sessions held during the Commission on the Status of Women conference highlighted the determined spirit of women from around the globe to push forward the gender equity agenda. The COVID pandemic and its lingering impact as well as the cut in funding, haven't deterred women; in fact, it has inspired a greater enthusiasm to be more creative, collaborate, and share resources for common initiatives. The voices of young women and indigenous women were powerful and touched hearts.

As one facilitator used the analogy, "Do not see these **dark times** as a **tomb**, but rather as a **womb**".

