



WOMEN  
WITH  
DISABILITIES  
AUSTRALIA  
(WWDA)



## **Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) People with Disability Australia (PWDA)**

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**Disability international participation funding program:**

**59<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

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**Post-Event Report**

**April 2015**

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### **DISCLAIMER:**

**The Post-Event Report has been prepared by and reflects the views of Women With Disabilities Australia and People with Disability Australia and not that of the Australian Human Rights Commission or the Australian Government.**

## 1. Introduction

In January 2015, People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) successfully applied for and received funding under the *Australian Government's International Mechanisms funding program for people with disability* to support two delegates to participate in the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) held at the UN in New York from 9-20 March 2015.

CSW is the key UN global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. Every year, State Parties and non-government organisations come together to evaluate progress, gaps and future actions in implementing the key global policy document on gender equality, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA).

CSW 59 was particularly significant as 2015 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the BPFA, and 15 years since the outcomes of the 5 year review of the BPFA were adopted at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Importantly, the outcomes of CSW 59 will contribute to the September 2015 Special Summit on Sustainable Development, which will adopt the post 2015 development agenda that will continue the work to eradicate poverty that was actioned through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Over many years, WWDA and PWDA have been actively engaged in both the work of CSW and the global discussions leading to the development of the post 2015 development agenda. We have also been integral participants in UN reviews of Australia under a number of treaties and mechanisms.

For CSW59, the WWDA delegate, Ms Carolyn Frohmader and the PWDA delegate, Ms Therese Sands worked together as an Australian delegation to represent issues and concerns of women with disability at CSW59. The key purpose of the delegation was to ensure that the intersection of disability and gender was recognised and translated into tangible outcomes for women with disability.

In addition, and despite expertise in the work of CSW, both delegates were participating in person at CSW for the first time. This experience provided a long overdue capacity building opportunity for both delegates to strengthen existing expertise, skills and networks, which will greatly benefit their work in the area of gender and disability in Australia.

This post-event report is made jointly by WWDA and PWDA in recognition of the collaborative role of both organisations in forming an Australian delegation to CSW59.

## 2. Key activities

While the CSW59 had an official program of meetings and events, the WWDA and PWDA delegates used the opportunity to identify an additional program of meetings and activities to maximise capacity building and strengthen participation. These activities are outlined in this section.

Prior to CSW59, the delegates also met with the unsuccessful applicants for this funding – SpeakOut Tasmania and the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) – to obtain information about issues and concerns for women with disability to take to CSW59 as well as discuss CSW59 more generally. The key issues that were identified and discussed included:

- ensuring the post- 2015 development agenda is inclusive of gender and disability and intersectionality;
- a strong focus on girls, particularly adolescent girls and particularly sexual and reproductive rights;
- violence in all its forms against people with disability in all settings with a particular focus on gendered disability violence;
- participation, representation and decision-making at all levels for women with disability;
- right to parent, and the discriminatory removal of children from mothers with disability, particularly those with intellectual and psychosocial disability;
- closure of institutions and adequate supports to live in the community.

### a) Preparatory activities and meetings:

Prior to arriving at the United Nations for CSW59, we participated in meetings of the Australian women's NGO delegations to discuss opportunities for collaboration, to discuss the draft and negotiations for the CSW59 Political Declaration, to highlight the need for inclusion of women with disability in activities and share strategies and expertise. This included meetings with the NGO representatives on the Australian Government delegation, Ms Maria Osmond and Ms Kimberley Abbott. There were about 50 women from Australia representing a range of women's NGOs who participated in CSW59.

We also organised strategic opportunities and meetings with delegates of the International Network of Women with Disabilities (INWWD), the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Human Rights Watch, Disability Rights International and the Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

We applied to deliver a formal statement during the official meeting program, but were unsuccessful in our application due to the significant number of civil society organisations also wishing to make statements.

### b) Official program and related activities:

- The official program began on International Women's Day with the UN Women **March for Gender Equality and Women's Rights** in commemoration of the 20 year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and

Platform for Action). It was vibrant and exciting to be part of thousands of people, placards and chants marching for gender equality from the UN to Times Square. Despite the numbers of people, we managed to meet members of the Australian NGO delegations and the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Elizabeth Broderick.

- The official meeting program provided the opportunity to listen to the views and negotiations between governments from a range of countries. There were a number of more conservative governments, largely from USA, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Holy See that consistently attempted to water down the language of human rights, sexual and reproductive rights, sexual orientation and diversity. We were pleased to see the Australian Government delegation, led by the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash strongly speaking out against 'watering down' language and human rights principles and advocating for strong content regarding gender equality.

There was considerable concern expressed by civil society about the lack of government engagement and interaction on key issues, including the Political Declaration. During the Opening Session, when the Political Declaration was adopted, a number of civil society representatives protested this lack of engagement by placing their hands over their mouths. PWDA and WWDA signed up to joint civil society statements that outlined concerns about the marginalisation of civil society from the negotiations on the Political Declaration and the weakness of the text.

- The NGO representatives on the Australian Government delegation organised daily debriefings for Australian civil society delegates. These were very valuable and included discussions on aspects of the day's negotiations from Australian Government officials. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss concerns about the lack of engagement with civil society, the lack of focus on intersectionality, including gender and disability, and issues that we thought required more focus. We found the Australian Government representatives responsive and sympathetic to our issues, although stressing the 'sticking points' in negotiations and the difficulties in pushing issues with the more conservative and less receptive governments.
- The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN, Her Excellency Ms Gillian Bird hosted a formal reception for the Australian Government and civil society delegations. This provided an opportunity to formally hear from the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash and the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, as well as informally discuss issues with them and other members of the Australian Government delegation, including Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Elizabeth Broderick. It also provided an opportunity to network and discuss the progress of CSW59 with a broad range of participants.

**c) Parallel and Side-events:**

Throughout CSW59, there was an extensive program of government sponsored side-events and civil society sponsored parallel-events covering a broad range of topics, including some that focused specifically on women with disability.

We were particularly pleased to see that the Australian Government had hosted an event in association with the UK Government and UN agencies on women and girls with disability in situations of conflict and displacement, the specific human rights' violations experienced in these situations and measures to address this (see dot point two below). This event included women with disability as key speakers.

Over the week, we participated in the following:

- ***Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in the Digital and Technological Age***, hosted by the Australian Government in association with Women's Services Network (WESNET).

Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash chaired this event. Keynote speakers included Ms Julie Oberin, WESNET and Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA); Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls; Ms Bandana Rana, Saathi, Nepal; Ms Cindy Southworth, National Network to End Domestic Violence USA.

- ***Advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities: Reports from the frontline***, hosted by the Australian Government in association with the UK Government, UN Women's Refugee Commission, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UN Women.

Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls chaired this event. Keynote speakers included Baroness Northover, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development UK; Ms Sarah Costa, Women's Refugee Commission; Ms Daniela Bas, DESA; Ms Roseweter Mudarikwa, Chairperson of the Network of African Women with Disabilities (NAWWD); Ms Jolly Acen, National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda (NUWODU); Ms Abia Akram, Chairperson National Forum of Women with Disabilities Pakistan (NFWWD).

- ***Women with Disabilities: 20 Years After Beijing***, hosted by Rehabilitation International (RI).

Keynote speakers included Ms Anne Hawker, Principal Disability Advisor at the Ministry of Health New Zealand; Dr Barbara LeRoy, RI's Education Commission; Ms Ekaete Umoh, President of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities Nigeria; Ms Venus Ilagan, RI Secretary General.

- ***Towards Inclusion of Gender Equality with Beijing+20: Using Good Practices to Address Gender-Based Violence Against Women & Girls with Disabilities***, hosted by Handicap International in association with Women Enabled International and Syracuse University (SU) College of Law.

The keynote speaker was Ms Catalina Devandas, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Ms Stephanie Ortoleva, Women

Enabled International; Ms Nathalia Santos, Colectivo Chuhcan; Ms Jeong Shim Lee, UN Women, Ms Milanoi Koijiet, SU College of Law.

Participation in the parallel and side-events provided opportunities to gather information about new initiatives (including those from Australia that we had not known about or been included in), raise and discuss issues of concern (including those identified by SpeakOut Tasmanian and YDAS), to meet and network with Australian Government delegation members, civil society representations and, importantly to establish and strengthen linkages with networks of women with disability from Africa, Latin America, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Pacific Islands, USA, Canada, and New Zealand.

**d) Key meetings:**

There were a number of meetings and events that we were invited to attend or that we organised with key organisations and groups:

- **UN Women and CRPD Secretariat DESA:**

This roundtable meeting brought together women with disability delegates to CSW59 and their networks to discuss challenges and solutions to fully engage women with disability in mainstream women's organisations, including having our issues integrated into the women's rights agenda. UN Women were keen to discuss how it could improve its own work and inclusion for women with disability.

The meeting was dynamic and rich with ideas and knowledge. Despite participants coming from diverse geographical locations and cultural backgrounds, there was a similarity of views about the difficulties in having a 'voice' in mainstream women's organisations and having our issues and concerns integral to the women's rights agenda. A key recommendation to UN Women was to model inclusion of women with disability within its organisational structures and programs, and to establish a disability expert within UN Women to lead this work.

- **Disability Rights International (DRI) and Colectivo Chuhan:**

We had the opportunity to meet with the DRI Director of the Women's Rights Initiative of the Americas, Ms Priscila Rodríguez Benavides and Ms Nathalia Santos from Colectivo Chuhcan, an organisation of and for people with psychosocial disability in Mexico. Both were delegates at CSW59 and Ms Santos was a keynote speaker at a civil society side-event (see dot point 4 under section c above).

We were keen to discuss DRI's capacity building support for Colectivo Chuhcan and the particular peer support work Ms Santos undertakes with women with psychosocial disability. This information is not only important for capacity building work PWDA undertakes with Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) in Asia and the Pacific, but is increasingly critical to peer support networks being established and supported in Australia in preparation for the NDIS.

We were also able to share information about work being undertaken in Australia to address legal capacity for people with disability and issues

regarding forced sterilisation, both of which were significant issues for Colectivo Chuhcan (as outlined in the 2015 [DRI research report](#)).

We were able to discuss the recent Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry and its findings and various initiatives focused on supported decision making and the General Comment on Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). We also outlined our advocacy work regarding forced sterilisation and the outcomes of the Senate Inquiry into this issue. Since CSW59, we have shared our submissions and resources on legal capacity and forced sterilisation, in particular the significant resources available on the WWDA website on sterilisation.

- **Centre for Reproductive Rights (CRR):**

CRR is based in New York, and given the linkages between our organisations, we took the opportunity to meet with Ms Rebecca Brown, Director of Global Advocacy and Ms Katrina Anderson, Senior Human Rights Counsel. We were especially keen to see how the reproductive rights of women with disability were included in the agenda of CRR.

We discussed common work in relation to the development of the General Comment on Article 6 of the CRPD and our common work in relation to forced sterilisation. We shared a range of resources in relation to these issues, and discussed ways to build on our existing networks and links.

At CRR's request, we also facilitated introductions between CRR and other women with disability delegates at CSW59 so that networks of women with disability, particularly those from Africa and Mexico could be linked into the in-country work of CRR.

- **Human Rights Watch (HRW):**

HRW is based in New York, and our organisations have worked together on a range of issues. We met with Ms Rashmi Chopra, HRW Fellow and Ms Shantha Rau Barriga, HRW Director, Disability Rights to discuss joint work and ongoing collaborations.

HRW are particularly interested in its Australian office focussing more on domestic Australian issues, including human rights for people with disability.

**e) Communications:**

Throughout the week of CSW59, we provided information for our members and constituents in Australia on our activities. We posted information through:

- WWDA and PWDA Facebook pages;
- WWDA Youth Network;
- Twitter (#CSW59 #Beijing20 #genderequalitymarch);
- a [CSW59 page on the PWDA website](#) with information on activities, the final Political Declaration, news stories, and other events and speeches.



### 3. Outcomes and benefits

CSW59 was a significant capacity building opportunity for the WWDA and PWDA delegates. It was one of the largest UN meetings that we have both participated in, and we felt privileged to be there representing women with disability, sharing expertise with the Australian NGO delegation, the Australian Government delegation, other civil society organisations and networks of women with disability. We were particularly assured by the many comments that demonstrated that our work, and particularly the work of WWDA is well-known and highly regarded by a number of mainstream women's organisations and networks of women with disability.

We benefitted greatly from the knowledge exchange, sharing of expertise, networking and building links for future collaboration, building greater understanding of UN Women and the CSW meeting process and how to advocate within the process.

It was also important that we were part of the Australian NGO delegation and learning from previous experience about the activities required to push positions forward. Being recognised as part of the NGO delegation by members of the Australian Government delegation also visibly demonstrated that issues and concerns for women with disability are part of the women's rights agenda.

However, with thousands of participants and a focus on women in general, it often meant that issues and concerns for women with disability were absent from discussions and negotiations, or relegated to parallel and side-events. This point was noted by other delegates with disability.

This absence or relegation was exacerbated by the fact that the Political Declaration was negotiated prior to CSW59 and adopted at the Opening Session. This meant that issues that had been hard fought by civil society, including delegates with disability at previous CSW sessions were absent from the Political Declaration. This caused great concern for all delegates but particular concern for groups of women who are generally more marginalised, such as women with disability and Indigenous women.

The negotiation of the [Working Methods Resolution](#) took place in the second week, and we had to rely on other Australian NGO delegates to push issues regarding civil society involvement, human rights language, and negotiations confined to within CSW not prior.

As we only participated in the first week, and the Political Declaration had already been finalised we needed to focus on seeking outcomes in other ways (see Section 2, Key Activities). Key outcomes that directly relate to our activities include:

- On 28 April, UN Women and DESA announced the development of a global network of women with disability, including representatives of Government, UN agencies, academia, private sector, private foundations and other civil society organisations, including DPOs. The network will provide a common platform to share information, provide opportunities for joint activities and efforts to advance the rights of women and girls with disability in society and development. It also

aims to strengthen the representation and voice of women and girls with disability at all levels.

- UN Women has been invited by DESA to draft a chapter on women with disability for the Global Status Report on Disability and Development. UN Women has approached WWDA for advice on available expertise for drafting this chapter.
- Engagement with networks of women with disability in a number of countries has increased, particularly for WWDA in terms of leadership and capacity building regarding gender and disability.
- Mainstream organisations have formed networks with women with disability in a number of countries aimed at including more women with disability in local country level programs.

#### **4. Budget expenditure**

Funding was provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission to WWDA and PWDA to contribute to the participation of two delegates in the first week of the CSW 59, 9-13 March 2015:

- WWDA was provided with \$12,000
- PWDA was provided with \$12,000

Ms Frohmader requires business class travel and a travel support person. The PWDA delegate acted as Ms Frohmader's travel support person, which alleviated the need to cover costs for an additional support person.

The total funding allocation of \$24,000 contributed to:

- Flight costs = \$21,800 (cost of two return business class flights to New York)
- Accommodation costs = \$13,900 (9 nights plus breakfast for two persons)

WWDA contributed significant additional funds to cover the shortfall in accommodation and travel insurance costs for both delegates. WWDA and PWDA contributed additional funds to cover the costs of per diems and other incidentals.

WWDA and PWDA acknowledge with appreciation the funding provided by the *Australian Government's International Mechanisms funding program for people with disability*.