



# Ecumenical Women at the United Nations

## Sing to the LORD, She has triumphed gloriously!

Every year, thousands of members of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) —both faith-based and not — gather alongside the Commission on the Status of Women and exert tremendous amounts of energy to influence its outcome documents and enforce the resolutions and conventions member states have agreed upon. These advocates work to impact political processes, to tell their stories, and to share their lives. This is the story of a group of young people of faith experiencing the 54th Commission on the Status of Women, March 1-12, 2010.

**Monday morning** awoke us with the shaking of timbrels, the beating of drums and the raising of voices as we kicked off the first week of the 54th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women with the song of Miriam. Leading the charge that morning were thirty-four delegates between the ages of 18 and 35. Through a collaborative effort between the National Council of Churches, the World Student Christian Federation, the Episcopal Church and others, an international, ecumenical delegation of young adult delegates took their place at the table with Ecumenical Women this year in new and exciting ways.

The effort to organize young adults began months ago in three way conversations between Geneva, New York, and Seattle. Four primary pieces were put in place: 1) Our three delegations and any who wished to join us would be housed together off Union Square at the Seafarers and International House; 2) Young Adults would be placed in charge of Monday morning’s worship service; 3) Young Adults would lead a side event on the first Wednesday of the CSW on behalf of Ecumenical Women; and 4) Young Adults would spend Sunday together at a separate event to build community and plan for worship and the side event. Each of these elements played an instrumental role in creating a transformational and life-giving experience for our delegates and for the whole of Ecumenical Women.



### Seafarers and International House

As young adults, our delegates benefitted from a balance of peer support, inter-generational engagement and full participation and responsibility. Our housing provided a space for casual conversation and processing as well as nightly debriefs with peers. Common spaces created a sense of common experience and purpose and aided delegates in forming relationships across denominational and national boundaries. In conjunction with our Sunday gathering, the housing framed young adults’ experience of the CSW in a Christian community that was safe as well as challenging and engaging.

**Sunday preparation** After an all-day orientation with Ecumenical Women on Saturday, the young adults spent Sunday getting to know one another by worshipping together and planning a young adult-led worship service and side event. Bible study and story-telling helped move the CSW and the Beijing Platform from remote conceptual frameworks to relevant and lived experience. Gathering that morning in shared worship and framing our time with prayer helped to encourage us in what can be tiring and draining work. Working together to design the worship, to write music and to design the side event also gave young adults a sense of ownership over their experience and contributed to their sense of purpose in being invited to the table. Not only were they there to experience the CSW but they saw that their stories, their experiences, and their perspectives were valued and mobilized to further the cause of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

**Worship** As mentioned above, the young adults opened the working week at the Commission with a highly collaborative, provocative, encouraging worship service Monday morning at 8 a.m. Ecumenical Women begins each day with a worship service organized by a different community

### What is the UN CSW?

For two weeks each March, thousands of women and men from around the world converge in New York City for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations (UN). The Commission meets once a year, and is made up of governmental delegates from UN member states who gather to assess the status of women in the world in relation to a yearly topic. While there is usually a more narrowly-defined yearly theme, this year the CSW focused on reviewing the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (see box on reverse), which was adopted 15 years ago with the support of 40,000 NGO and civil society women.



**Ecumenical Women is a coalition of:**

- Anglican Communion Observer
- Anglican Women's Empowerment
- Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand
- Church Women United
- Episcopal Church (USA)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in American
- Lutheran World Federation
- National Council of Churches (USA)
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- The Salvation Army
- United Church of Christ
- Untied Methodist Church
- World Conference on Religions for Peace (Collaborator)
- World Council of Churches
- World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church women
- World Student Christian Federation
- World YWCA



Grounded in our faith and commitment to global justice, Ecumenical Women trains and empowers our expanding network to advocate for gender equality at the United Nations.  
[www.ecumenicalwomen.org](http://www.ecumenicalwomen.org)

as an expression of our understanding of our work's grounding in worship, theological reflection, and community. As we sought to bring Miriam from the background of the Exodus biblical text into the light, we were encouraged to make space for each member of Ecumenical Women to express the fullness of her or his gifts in the community.



**Side Event** Side Events are ways for NGOs to highlight their concerns for the larger NGO community and governments. Ecumenical Women always tries to plan one or more that will educate, inspire, and equip people to do better advocacy at the CSW, based on the focal theme. In this year's review of Beijing, the UN encouraged NGOs and governments to lift up positive examples and proposals for making change as well as highlight the problems facing women. Ecumenical Women invited the young adults to organize their one official Side Event, and the young adults prepared the event in a highly communal process, where everyone gave input and help, which already lifts up an under-used model for making change in society. The title was *A Rabbi, A Rapper, and A Radio Host. Accessing culture, Re-imagining meaning: Breaking the*

*Institutional barriers to Cultural Texts.* Our panel consisted of two of our members: Facia Harris from Liberia, who produces an all-girl magazine radio program that allows girls and young women to speak out about their issues and speak with mentors and policy makers about the advancement of young girls and women, and Garrett Quinton Braaf aka "G-Quinn" from the United States, who

engages the art of hip-hop to provide positive and life-affirming messages dedicated to the principles of equality and fellowship. As an expression of our desire to nurture interfaith partnerships, we also invited Rabbi Alissa Wise, a young woman rabbi from the United States as a panelist. Rabbi Wise works especially to inspire young Jewish girls to use their gifts fully. Christine Housel of the World Student Christian Federation moderated the panel.

**The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** is a set of commitments by governments to work on advancing women's equality and full incorporation into all aspects of society. It is made up of 12 "planks":

- Women and poverty
- Women and health
- Women and armed conflict
- Women in power and decision-making
- Human rights of women
- Women and the environment
- Education and training of women
- Violence against women
- Women and the economy
- Institutional barriers
- Women and the media
- The girl child

The consensus among Ecumenical Women this year was that, while there has been progress in the last 15 years, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains largely unfulfilled. The young adults, along with the rest of Ecumenical Women, worked hard this year to think about actions we can engage in at home to continue this work throughout the year. As faith communities, we accept our responsibility to challenge our governments, but also ourselves and our communities, to move forward in supporting the full rights and access of women. Learn more at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm>

**How can you stay connected?**

- Check out a video of our side event at <http://vimeo.com/10619075>
- Follow us on facebook: Ecumenical Women—Young Folks at the 54th CSW
- Hold a "Resurrect Beijing" meeting in your local community to reignite conversation around the Beijing platform for Action: [www.ecumenicalwomen.org/advocacy](http://www.ecumenicalwomen.org/advocacy)

**To hear more about our experiences, or to connect with us for future events, please contact:**

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