

“Strategies from the South” at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

54th Session of the CSW
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In the framework of the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from March 1-12, 2010, “Strategies from the South” organized and sponsored an official parallel event about: “**The challenges of HIV/AIDS from Beijing to 2010**”. The session was held on March 4, from 6:00-7:30pm on the 10th Floor of the UN Church Center.

The session reviewed the Beijing goals on HIV/AIDS, especially related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, how they’ve been reached so far and how to take them forward. This included discussion about the incorporation of the diversity of women and girls, sexual identities and other populations with risk factors into the HIV/AIDS response, and how we can use the Beijing goals on HIV/AIDS to achieve Universal Access, including to prevention and treatment, for all women and girls.

The speakers featured in the session were **Mabel Bianco** from Argentina, President and Coordinator of FEIM/IAWC and General Coordinator of Strategies from the South; **Siphiwe Hlophe** from Swaziland, Deputy Chair of the International Community of Women



Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) and Regional Coordinator for Africa in Strategies from the South; and **Rathi Ramanathan** from Malaysia representing APNSW and Asia Pacific Co-coordinator of Strategies from the South. The session was moderated by **Alessandra Nilo** from Brazil, Executive Director of GESTOS and Regional Secretary of LACCASO as well as Regional Co-coordinator of Strategies from the South.



Mabel Bianco presented the project Strategies from the South and expressed the importance of linking agendas between sexual and reproductive health and rights networks and HIV/AIDS networks. She shared experiences from the project since 2006 to show how these groups identify commonalities and differences and

strengthen the impact of their actions through joint advocacy at the global, regional and national levels around the follow six main issues: 1) Sexualities and vulnerabilities; 2) Sexuality education; 3) Limitations of current approaches to prevention and treatment; 4) Abortion and Sexual and Reproductive Rights; 5) Gender based violence; and 6) Financing: vertical versus integrated programs. **Siphiwe Hlophe** addressed issues around HIV and AIDS criminalization laws in Africa, especially focusing on their impacts on women, as well as issues related to HIV treatment for women, reaffirming the need to integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights with HIV/AIDS. She also put special emphasis on the fact that the sexual and reproductive rights of women living with HIV/AIDS are *not* special rights; rather, they are the same for all women and need to be recognized as fundamental Human Rights. In her presentation, **Rathi Ramanathan** highlighted how the driving cause of the epidemic in Asia went from being drug use to intimate partner transmission. In this context, she discussed sexuality issues for all women including sex workers and their rights. She expressed the need to include these in women's rights, seeing sex workers as adult women who have the right to have consensual sex. To achieve this, we need to extend ideas around sexual rights to cover all populations. She prompted the audience to consider how we would be able to push this agenda.

Following the speakers' presentations, there was a rich and long discussion. This part of the session generated positive dialogue focused in large part on issues related to sexuality and women. This began with comments by women from different regions about their diverse conceptions of and realities regarding sexuality and how to relate these to sexual education in different contexts, where there are often taboos around sex. Some women expressed very comprehensive notions of sexuality, while others had much more limited definitions, conceiving sexuality more as sexual relations. It was agreed that, no matter which



conception of sexuality is used, if we don't talk about sexuality it is impossible to talk about HIV prevention for women and girls. This discussion of sexuality was later linked to issues of sex workers and sex workers' rights, including the right to consensual sex. One participant from Europe brought up the issue of the tensions between sex worker's movements and anti-trafficking groups, who associate sex work with trafficking. Another participant from Europe responded and shared her experience in a project in her country that successfully brought together groups of sex workers and anti-trafficking groups. These groups were able to integrate because they found that they do not have opposite perspectives or agendas, since sex workers are promoting their sexual rights, including their right to consensual sex as adults, which is *not* synonymous with trafficking. The experience of sex workers' rights in Africa was also emphasized. Another main issue that came up during the group discussion was how to overcome the competition for funding that exists between sexual and reproductive health and rights networks and HIV/AIDS networks. An example was made about how, instead of competing, some networks in Strategies from the South are currently designing projects together and requesting joint funding.



Overall, the session achieved a wide geographic and thematic representation, attracting an audience of over fifty people from around the world, including from diverse countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, North America and Europe. To allow the full participation of the Spanish-speaking members of the audience, Spanish-English translation was provided. The highly participatory group discussions were enriched by this diversity as well as the interest and engagement shown by the audience and the project representatives attending the session.

