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Dear KARAT News Readers !

I would like to draw your attention to important news about CSW 56 in New York which many women NGOs describe as "disaster" and "great disappointment". Further, please read about very positive effects of KARAT's campaigns concerning CEDAW and Corporate Social Responsibility. Take action signing the women NGOs' statement in protest to safeguarding the "traditional values and practices" at the cost of women's human rights. I also encourage you to visit KARAT's new website and to post your news on KARAT's Facebook profile. Remember that I am always looking forward to receive your news. Let all the KARAT members know what happens in your country concerning women's issues. Please send me a short paragraph till the end of each month. Have a nice reading !

Agnieszka Walko-Mazurek, KARAT Networking Officer

56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Backlash on women's rights reaches UN level

The negotiations at the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 56) ended on March 15th without the agreed conclusions. This lack of consensus among the states on their common policy and measures to empower rural women shows that some states openly question the importance and need for gender equality promotion, instead giving priority to traditional values and practices, which are harmful to women. This is very alarming and causes a great concern about the future of women human rights' advancement. It raises a question whether the states will fulfill the commitments made through their agreement to the Beijing Platform for Action if the global human rights framework is being undermined by growing conservative forces already present at the level of United Nations.

The failure to adopt the agreed conclusions caused an outrage of the representatives of NGOs focusing on the advancement of women as well as representatives of European Union and some representatives of United Nations.

The feminist and women's organizations are alarmed and call for action to stop this highly negative changes in the global debate on women's rights and gender equality. The NGOs strongly protest against making the advancement of women's rights dependent on political battles between the states. They do not consent to any re-opening of negotiations on the already established international agreements on women's human rights and call on all governments to show their commitments to promote, protect and fulfill human rights and fundamental freedoms of women. The NGOs are especially alarmed by the fact that the states failed to reach consensus on the basis of safeguarding "traditional values" at the expense of fundamental human rights and freedoms. They also call upon the member states of the UN and the various UN human rights and development institutions to recognize and support the important role of women's groups and organizations working on eliminating of harmful traditional values and practices which contradict fundamental human rights norms, standards and principles.

On final day of CSW the Norway's UN Ambassador Morten Wetland delivered a strong statement in defence of gender equality and women's rights. He stressed that we cannot accept that the states use religious, cultural and so-called moral arguments to block decisions and avoid obligations that would lead to women's empowerment and freedom, and would save hundreds of thousands of lives every year.

In a similar manner, the representative of the EU and its Member States stressed that avoiding any further commitments concerning women's empowerment means that the key concepts included in the fundamental documents such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are now being questioned by some states. EU finds unacceptable their attempts to weaken the internationally agreed agreements on gender equality and women's rights by blocking the decisions, especially these concerning the issue of harmful traditional practices which make women suffer in many parts of the world. Eventually, he declared that EU would pay special attention to gender equality and the rights of women and men in order to meet the MDG's goals and remain committed to the full implementation of the broadly ratified treaties constituting the global human rights framework.

[The Statement of Feminist and Women's Organizations](#) (you can sign the statement by 5 April [HERE!](#))

[The statements from Norway and EU supporting women's human rights](#)

For more information please contact Kinga at: kinga.lohmann@karat.org.pl

NGOs from North America/Europe formulate their expectations towards UN WOMEN

The North America/Europe Caucus at 56th session of CSW in New York, after the meeting between representatives of all regional caucuses with UN Women on March 3rd, continued a heated discussion about the cooperation between UN Women and the women NGOs from Region by e-mail, formulating their expectations towards UN Women.

In a developed paper the women NGOs stress the need for strong UN Women being a partner of NGOs and member states as well as an effective door opener and liaison agency for the cause of gender equality.

Further, the NGOs expect UN Women to make CSW a large exchange space, accessible for much larger number of NGOs than it is now, for an open and substantial mutual dialogue. They expect also formalization of the rules, methods and channels of communication between NGOs and UN Women, e.g. similar to those between NGOs and the UN Treaties bodies like alternative/shadow reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee.

The women from North America and Europe being well aware of current threats to gender equality expect UN Women to inform the women NGOs of all regions about the ongoing destructive work of those who are trying to create a backlash and seeking to destroy the human rights and other UN concepts of agreed international law.

Astonished by an official announcement on UN plans to hold the 5th UN World Conference on Women in 2015 at the very end of CSW, the NGOs recommend that if the conference is going to take place UN Women should support and secure decisions that will not open up the Beijing and Beijing+5 documents for any negotiations and advocate focusing on the new challenges, obstacles and measures which the member states must respond to and agree upon.

Specific recommendation concerning the North America/Europe Region:

The NGOs point out that UN Women cannot leave any region behind and should add the “sub-regions” to its system of representation and priority work in the region.

The NGOs’ recommendations refer also to the current global economic crisis strongly hitting the women rights NGOs in Europe which now get less or no funding. Because of the financial cuts on NGOs’ funding it is necessary for UN Women to pay more attention to the financial situation of NGOs in this region and put steady pressure on the governments to re-define their funding policies towards NGOs in Europe not to let them disappear from a global map of women’s rights advocates.

For more information about the women NGOs’ initiatives at CSW 56 see the articles below or contact Kinga at: kinga.lohmann@karat.org.pl

KARAT at CSW 56



“Tradition as a barrier to rural women’s access to justice” was a title of the event organized by KARAT Coalition and its [partner organizations](#) from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan during the 56th Session of CSW in New York in February. The panel debate allowed the audience to get a picture of the impact that traditional practices and values have on the life of rural women and particularly on the reality of their access to justice.

The panelists shared their views on the reasons for the backlash on women’s rights in the region. They discussed women’s rights violations, such as non consensual marriages, bride kidnapping and domestic violence, that are not only common but also unrecognized due to their deep immersion in traditions so vivid and influential in rural areas. The specific problems of women – victims of human trafficking – were also addressed. The panelists explored various barriers that prevent women from using the legal mechanisms to claim their rights and agreed that most of them are linked to women’s vulnerable economic and social position resulting from conservative and patriarchal approach towards gender roles. Women who challenge this situation are likely to lose support of their family and community, which can deprive them of livelihood,

housing and custody of children and result in social isolation. In this context it was interesting to hear about the barriers experienced by women from Eastern European country – Poland, trying to claim their right to a lawful abortion.

Collaboration with WIDE PLUS (initiative for restoration of Women in Development Europe). KARAT was also a part of WIDE PLUS group including KULU (Denmark), WIDE Austria, and WO=MEN, the Dutch Gender Platform at the 56th CSW. Several meetings of WIDE PLUS (informal network) were arranged to share information about main challenges, strategic events to attend and entry points for advocacy and lobbying, including for the progressive shape of the agreed conclusions. It was also an opportunity to discuss the process of the development of WIDE.

North America/Europe Caucus. One of the strategic event was the Regional Caucus and KARAT (representing there also WIDE Plus) contributed to the important and timely dialogue. In the context of UN Women structure's development, the regional NGOs debated their expectation of and possible collaboration with UN Women's to present the main points of this consultation at the face-to-face meeting with UN Women on 3rd March, 2012. The discussion among women from the North America and Europe was continuing straight after the meeting with UN Women and through e-mail discussion. The feedback and recommendations to UN Women as to the consultation with them on the 3rd of March was sent on 23rd March 2012 (see the main recommendations above "NGOs from North America/Europe formulate their expectations towards UN Women").

Participation of KARAT's partners in NGO/CSW Forum allowed them not only to promote the findings of the research on women's access to justice but also to benefit from experience of other NGOs, and to share their own knowledge and views with other participants. Further, they had an opportunity to attend the events which other KARAT members contributed to. For some of them it was the first opportunity to gain new experience at the UN level, for the others - a chance to update their knowledge on women's rights related processes ongoing on the international and regional level.

For more information please contact Kinga at: kinga.lohmann@karat.org.pl or Aleksandra at: aleksandra.solik@karat.org.pl

What's New in KARAT

Our Dear Friend Lena



A month ago we lost in a rail disaster our dear friend Lena Kondratieva-Bryzik, a member of the registered Polish Board of KARAT Coalition. Many of our members and partners may remember her from our CEDAW meetings, always ready to smile, always ready to help with Russian-English communication. Being actively engaged in KARAT's activities since 2008, and particularly in our women's human rights programme, she participated in almost all our initiatives focused on CEDAW and OP CEDAW.

She was an accomplished lawyer and legal researcher, an author of many publications in Polish and Russian, among them a monograph addressing women's reproductive rights in Poland and Russia in the context of human life's legal protection international standards. She contributed with her human rights legal expertise to our programs, trainings and publications, including through translating to Russian the IWRAW Asia Pacific publication "Our Rights Are Not Optional! Advocating for the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women through its Optional Protocol".

Lena was an extremely active, dynamic and gifted young woman. She worked for Poznan Human Rights Center and Institute of Legal Studies of Polish Academy of Sciences. She was involved in a number of CSOs' initiatives and activities for women's reproductive rights and human rights in Poland. She also loved to sing and was a member of the Academic Choir of Warsaw University. We will always remember her as our very good friend and a strong, reliable and supportive person fully engaged in human rights protection issues. Her death is a great loss for all of us.

Success of our consumers' campaign!

The campaign “Reserved: don’t reserve the information!” demanding transparency and social responsibility from one of the largest Polish clothing company (LPP and its most common brand – Reserved) brought very satisfying results. The LPP has committed to work on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy and update company’s Code of Conduct taking into consideration the Clean Clothes Campaign’s guidelines. It has also announced to undertake inspections assessing working conditions in supplying factories.

The campaign started with letters sent to LPP by consumers from Poland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Romania asking how the company ensures decent working conditions in its supply chain. Then, it was supported by action on the company’s facebook page. The outcomes of these actions will be presented in a report and the plan of improvements is going to be developed by the end of 2012.

KARAT is a member of Clean Clothes Polska and has been involved in the campaign since January 2012. Thanks a lot to KARAT members: [GERT](#) from Bulgaria and [Org AUR](#) from Romania for supporting the action!

For more information please contact Joanna at: joanna.szabunko@karat.org.pl

To read more about Clean Clothes Campaign go to: <http://cleanclothes.pl/>; www.cleanclothes.org

What does social economy have to do with gender?



The Roma people, unemployed women over 45, young people from orphanages and single parents learnt about social economy’s issues during a week-long training (March 19th-23rd 2012) for social economy managers in Romania. The representatives of KARAT, which is an international partner in this initiative provided a workshop “What does social economy have to do with gender?” on principles of socially responsible business. They presented social economy, including its democratic, inclusive and cooperative character, as an answer to a number of problems women face on the labour market (discrimination in the recruitment process and in the workplace, discrimination in the access to recourses, problems with reconciliation of work and private life etc). They also showed the participants the examples of good practices from Poland ([Spoldzielnia Mam](#) and [Café Spoldzielnia](#)) and Nicaragua ([Fair Trade Zone](#)).

The training was a part of project “Creating and promoting social economy instruments for the inclusion of marginalized groups on the labour market” managed by KARAT’s Romanian member: [Org AUR](#). It was the first in a series of events planned within the project. The project’s outcome is to create 6 social enterprises.

Among others the project also involves: capacity building for social economy experts supporting the newly established enterprises as well as the promotion of social economy brand in Romania.

More resources on social economy from gender perspective will be available on [the project's KARAT website](#) soon.

For more information please contact Joanna at: joanna.szabunko@karat.org.pl

Poland: CSOs consulted about the delayed report to CEDAW Committee

The Polish government has finally developed the draft Report on the Implementation of CEDAW. It was possible largely due to the over one year long campaign by the informal CEDAW coalition of 7 organizations coordinated by KARAT in Poland. The government put the Report for consultations with CSOs following the CEDAW Committee’s recommendation and the coalition’s

demand.

At the end of March 2012 the members of informal CEDAW coalition submitted a joint statement on the government's CEDAW report to the Office of the Government's Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. Along with the detailed comments on the report, the statement highlighted a general remarks related to government's performance in terms of advancing women's human rights.

First of all, the coalition stressed that there has been a serious political backlash in terms of the state's commitment to improve situation of women. Since 2005 the government has not developed nor implemented any National Program of Action for Women, despite the fact that it was urged to do this by CEDAW Committee. Secondly, there has been no sustainable institutional machinery for the advancement of women since a closedown of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men in 2005. These results in the lack of significant progress in women's issues in the last few years, especially in the most problematic areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as the growing phenomenon of working poor among women.



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Coordination of the informal CEDAW coalition and participation in the consultations are part of the KARAT's initiative "Advocating for women's access to justice through CEDAW reporting process" that is implemented thanks to the support of the Open Society Institute.

For more information please contact Magda at: magda.pochec@karat.org.pl

Tajikistan declares to ratify OP CEDAW

KARAT is very glad about the outcomes of the last Universal Periodic Review of Tajikistan (March 14th 2012) where the Tajik government declared to ratify the Optional Protocol to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (OP CEDAW). This positive change in the government's attitude towards women's rights was possible in large due to the KARAT and its' partners long-term initiative on promoting of CEDAW and OP CEDAW in CEE and Central Asia.

Tajikistan also agreed to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women and assured that an appropriate legislative basis for gender equality had been established and a law on domestic violence is being developed. Although the Tajik government was praised for its efforts to meet the international human rights standards, some were concerned about the growing restrictions on the liberty of conscience and belief, civil society organizations and independent media.

[The statement of Government of Tajikistan presented during the Human Rights Council session](#). Available in Russian

For more information please contact Margarita Mamedova at: rita_mamedova@mail.ru

Resources

UNDP: From transition to transformation. Sustainable and inclusive development in Europe and Central Asia

This report was launched at the first Global Human Development Forum which brought together high-level experts from governments, corporations, civil society and international organizations to examine the global policy changes in order to ensure a sustainable future. The report, supported by 13 U.N. agencies, calls for a transformation to integrated policy making, where social equity, economic growth and environmental protection are approached jointly. It is a contribution of governments, experts, researchers and development practitioners ahead of the 'Rio+20' U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development in June in Brazil.

You can download the report from UNDP website [HERE](#)

Social Watch: The 2012 Gender Equity Index

The Gender Equity Index (GEI) measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment. Social Watch calculates a value for the gender gap in each of the three areas in a scale from 0 (when for example no women is educated at all and all men are) to 100 (perfect equality). The GEI, in turn, is the simple average of the three dimensions. In Education, GEI looks at the gender gap in enrolment at all levels and in literacy; economic participation calculates the gaps in income and employment and empowerment measures the gaps in highly qualified jobs, parliament and senior executive positions.

You can see the results of GEI at: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/14366>

Call for Action

Sign on to Say NO to safeguarding "traditional values" over women's human rights!

Sign the [Statement of Feminist and Women's Organisations on the very limited and concerning results of the 56th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women](#).

This will be submitted to UN Member States, CSW and other relevant UN human rights and development entities. **The deadline 5 April 2012.**

Sign the statement by clicking [HERE](#)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

KARAT Secretariat would like to sincerely thank the following for their contributions to the News (forwarding information and providing us with 'original' information): Public Foundation "Panorama" from Tajikistan, Clean Clothes Polska, EWL.

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