



Society of the Sacred Heart at the UN

## ECHOES FROM (CSW70)



Arrival at the CSW70 forum

### Opening of CSW70

The 70th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) took place from March 9 to 19 at the UN Headquarters in New York. As the UN's largest annual gathering on gender equality, the 2026 theme focused on: "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls." Government officials, civil society representatives and UN leaders called for renewed efforts to dismantle the discrimination and legal obstacles that continue to limit women's and girls' rights worldwide.

Unlike the past 70 years, there was a significant shift where the members voted to adopt its action consensus at the start of the gathering rather than at the end. One main challenge was the introduction of eight amendments from the United States seeking to replace inclusive terminology with a binary definition of gender and to change language related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), reproductive health rights, as well as the effects of climate change on women. The Commission instead protected inclusive legal standards.

### Why progress is still falling short



President of the General Assembly: why are we not delivering on women's rights?

The UN women Executive Director **Sima Bahous**, cautioned that advances toward equality are moving far too slowly, warning that the global gap in legal protections for women and girls rights could still take centuries to close. The President of the General Assembly, **Annalena Baerbock**, emphasised that the world no longer needed to debate the importance of women's rights, but rather why progress remained incomplete



António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

Speaking at the opening of the session, the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres warned that: "despite decades of progress, inequality remain deeply entrenched and that the world still live in a male-dominated world and a male-dominated culture". He stressed that gender equality "is and always has been a question of power" and that justice remains "a distant dream for millions upon millions of women and girls."

He noted that Discriminatory laws and patriarchal norms continue to limit opportunity for women and girls, while conflict, climate change and widening inequality intensify the challenges,"



UN Women Ex. Director: "Prioritise women's participation in decision-making processes".

## General Discussions, Side and Parallel events



Throughout the forum, panels at the general assembly and at the side and parallel events enriched the discussions. The resilience of the global advocacy community stood out most in all the discussions.

The principal outcome of each CSW is the Agreed Conclusions (ACs). These documents provide a deep analysis of the priority theme and offer concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society stakeholders to implement at the international, national, and local levels. The collective advocacy of the civil society on the final day of CSW70 was marked by the push back against the critical rights in the agreed conclusions. Despite the geopolitical tensions and procedural disruptions, the core theme of CSW70—access to justice for all women and girls—remained a unifying thread.



Many delegations acknowledged the constructive contributions of civil society and technical experts, while also expressing regret over the increased reliance on contested voting processes. Furthermore, delegates repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to advancing gender equality. The Commission adopted its outcome document – known as the Agreed Conclusions – on the theme of access to justice for women and girls.



The text was approved by a recorded vote of 37 in favour to 1 against (United States), with six abstentions, departing from the Commission's traditional practice of adopting such outcomes by consensus.

Attending the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations as a delegate representing the Society of the Sacred Heart was a rewarding experience. It provided a unique opportunity to engage with people from across the globe who are passionate about advancing gender equality and justice. Throughout the many events this week, I was able to attend discussions, share ideas, and connect with several other keen individuals from different countries and backgrounds, who strived for the same outcomes as I did. I also had the chance to participate in meetings and conversations with representatives and organisations both in person and online, which broadened my perspective and strengthened my commitment to continuing to advocate for positive solutions in the future.

The first event that occurred was a Working Group on Girls Parallel event. It was led by a group of five girls, including myself, to lead a teen orientation session. Being a teen leader at the WGG Teen Orientation was a one in a million experience. I led a breakout room on identity, where we explored case studies and had really engaging discussions about how identity shapes who we are and the world around us. I loved collaborating with teens from across the globe, sharing ideas, and thinking about the changes we can make in society to be more inclusive and fair. We also had some amazing guest speakers, and one of the girls I was working with even got to interview them, using the question prompts we put forward, which was both inspiring and so eye opening. At the end of the day, I was honored to receive an award for my contributions, which was a moment that made me feel proud and grateful for the chance to work with such a passionate and driven group of young people. The whole experience reminded me how powerful it is when youth come together to share their voices and take action.



## Eliana's Experience



The second and one of the biggest events, and biggest opportunities overall was being present at the opening ceremony on March 9th. It took place in the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations Headquarters and was an incredible experience. Hearing global world leaders, diplomats such as Mr Antonio Guterres and Ms Annalena Baerbock, as well as advocates speak about justice and equality for women and girls was insane, and the atmosphere in the room was unreal. I couldn't believe I saw real life progress being made in regards to women and justice systems - I will never forget it! It was also so inspiring to see several influential figures such as Michelle Williams from Destiny's Child, Anne Hathaway, and Malala Yousafzai in attendance, all supporting the advancement of women's rights. Witnessing these discussions firsthand and seeing the international community come together to work toward greater access to justice for women and girls made the moment feel enticing!!

The following day, I had the incredible opportunity to serve as a girl advocate at the Working Group on Girls' parallel event during CSW70, "Girls Lead Justice: Beyond the Commitments." As part of an intergenerational panel discussion with Member State representatives and UN officials, I prepared and delivered speech highlighting the urgent need for humanitarian relief in countries that often go underreported in the media.



On my final day, I attended an interactive expert panel on the CSW priority theme, which centred on strengthening access to justice for women and girls. A lot of what was discussed had aligned with a large core writing group session that I moderated months ago, where over 150 girls collaborated online through breakout rooms to develop key themes and contributions for the Commission on the Status of Women, so I enjoyed seeing common themes between writing the draft statement and the conference. The discussion focused on promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, removing discriminatory laws and practices, and addressing the structural barriers that prevent girls from accessing justice. Hearing from panelists and Member State representatives made the experience especially engaging, and it was rewarding to see how the work I contributed to connected to real policy discussions and potential change. Afterwards, we visited a Sacred Heart school in New York City, which stood out for its beautiful architecture and welcoming environment; the tour was thoughtfully led by a girl in Year 12 who was really kind and a student at that school for 14 years, and it left a strong impression on me as a place I would genuinely like to return to.

My speech focused on how lack of visibility can mean fewer resources, less support, and greater risks for girls and communities in crisis. It was an honor to bring attention to these overlooked issues and to contribute a youth perspective on how justice systems and humanitarian responses can be more inclusive, equitable, and survivor centered. Being part of this dialogue and seeing other girl advocates and leaders collaborate to propose practical solutions on everything from mental health to digital safety, climate justice, and gender based violence was so impactful.

As a delegate for the Working Group on Girls, I had the privilege of meeting with the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations, where our delegation introduced WGG, presented the Girls Statement and Shadow Report, and engaged directly with senior officials. In my remarks, I emphasised that harmful practices justified in the name of culture or religion must be decisively addressed, and that culture should never be used to legitimise human rights violations against girls. I also highlighted that girls' meaningful participation must extend beyond CSW, into national policymaking, monitoring, and accountability processes, ensuring that girls are recognised as partners in shaping justice systems that directly impact their lives.



**. Eliana Bulla, Sacred Heart High School, Hammersmith**

Overall, these experiences meant a lot to me, and I was especially happy to visit Sister Mwarili and the other Sisters of the Sacred Heart once again. They were so welcoming and kind. I met some really amazing people whom I can genuinely see myself working with in the future, which makes it all feel even more worthwhile.

Throughout my trip, I stayed with 2 other youth who were internationally part of the Society of the Sacred Heart. One youth was an intern, Nicole, from Mexico, and the other one was a student from Japan - Monika, who now studies at the University of California in Los Angeles. She is also an alumna of the Sacred Heart. I spent so much time with them, and I look forward to seeing them at later forums. I'm really hoping I'll get the chance to come back again, especially for the upcoming International Day of the Girl, and continue being part of this.



## Nicole's Experience

My name is Nicole Quintero. I am an intern with the UN-NGO office of the Society of the Sacred Heart in New York. Attending the two weeks of the seventieth Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) was a deeply transformative experience. I was profoundly moved by the opportunity to listen to so many diverse women's voices, each sharing their unique realities. These stories have ignited a strong call to action within me, reminding me that progress requires more than just informing women. It demands the active involvement of men so that we can collectively address issues of equity and equality. I am convinced that we must begin now, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary by fostering deep connections and sharing knowledge that people can integrate into their daily lives.

My goal is to plant seeds of understanding and community, rooted in "truth with charity" across all sectors, never losing sight of our essential duty to be just human beings in every action. I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Society of the Sacred Heart for allowing me to live this grand and inspiring experience. It has empowered me to take greater action in every area of my life, starting within my own family and extending to my community. This journey has reinforced my commitment to leading not just with words, but with meaningful engagement to build a more just and compassionate world.

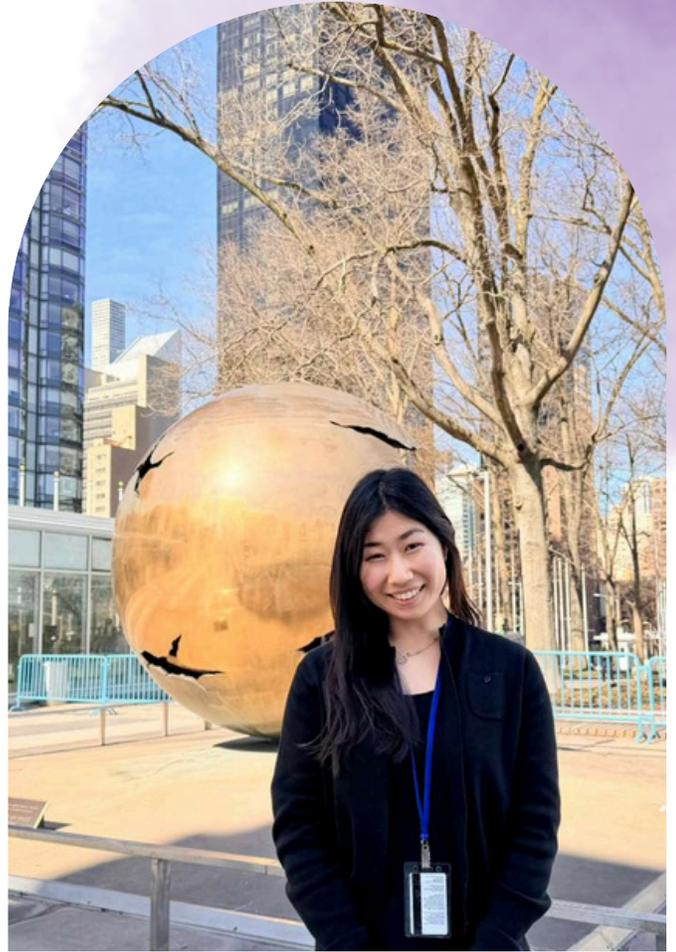


**Teens Orientation prior to CSW70 Forum**

## Monica's Experience

This past week, I had the opportunity to be at the United Nations headquarters to attend CSW70, the UN's annual women's conference. During my 4 days of attendance, one quote that stuck with me was the phrase "the silent 50%," referring to men. In a room full of people, I'd estimate only about 10% were men. Issues around women's rights are not a "women's thing." They require both men and women to show up and have the conversation together. You can't legislate equality with only half the population in the room. This is not meant to shame men for not coming. If I were a man, I would be way too intimidated to attend! It's about the messaging and making it clear that men are welcome and wanted at this event as well.

A topic I came in wanting to hear more about was the advancement of AI and its impact on women. One of the panels raised the issue of deepfakes targeting women. A huge portion of deepfake content online is sexual, and nearly all of it depicts women, with almost zero accountability for the people creating it. As someone who grew up going from smartphones to social media to now AI, I've watched policy consistently lag behind the technology it's supposed to regulate. I went into the conference hoping to hear some concrete solutions proposed around AI and women's rights.



**Monica attends a side event at the UN**

Unfortunately, I didn't. But that gap made me realize that there is a real urgent need for young female leaders who are both tech literate and policy minded. If the people writing the laws don't understand the technology, the laws won't protect anyone. Overall, I had such a wonderful time learning new perspectives, meeting interesting people, and most of all felt very proud to be a woman alive right now. Although we still have many topics to work towards, I feel hopeful and excited for women's rights in the future.

## Closing of CSW70 and Civil Society Advocacy



The closing moments of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women highlighted both challenges and resilience of multilateral dialogue. The outcome of the underlying differences in interpretation reinforced the importance of process, consultation, and continued engagement among the UN member states. The commission concluded with a historic defense of gender equality. Despite unprecedented procedural attempts by the United States to redefine “gender” and roll back language on reproductive health, the commission adopted its Agreed Conclusions (ACs) through a decisive 37-1 vote. The commission will continue to serve as a critical space where diverse perspectives can be expressed and negotiated. The voices of civil society remain essential in international discussions and help to shape the future of women’s rights.

The UN-NGO office was privileged to host 13 delegates: one parent who accompanied a minor from London, three young people: Eliana, a Sacred Heart student from Hammersmith School in London, Monica, a Sacred Heart Alumna, now a student at the University of California in Los Angeles and Nicole from Mexico and an intern at the UN-NGO office. Six students and two teachers from the International Sacred Heart School in Tokyo, Japan, also attended some sessions of the CSW70 before joining the UNICEF conference for the UN international schools.



**CSW70 delegates with  
Sacred Heart  
Community members in NY.**