

❧ NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN ❧  
**ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2002**  
**FACING GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CRISES: WOMEN DEFINE HUMAN SECURITY**  
**Thursday, May 30 - Saturday, June 1, 2002**  
Roosevelt Hotel, New York City

*At the Cutting Edge: A Gender Lens on Human Rights and Social Justice*  
NCRW Annual Conference – May 31, 2002

Panelists:

Gloria Bender (Area of Gender, Society, and Policies; FLASCO, Argentina)  
Leslie Calman ( NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund)  
Nicole Carter (Women and Public Policy Program; Harvard University)  
Kim Sloate and Cynthia Mesh (Wellesley Centers for Women: Wellesley College)  
Moderator:  
Elmira Naombe (Center for Women's Global Leadership; Rutgers University)

This session focuses on the efforts of women in local, national, and international arenas, to address issues of human rights, gender injustice, and security.

A) Gloria Bender – Area of Gender, Society, and Politics

Ms. Bender began her presentation with a discussion of fear: the need to address fear to break the cycle of impotence and negative reactivity; the need to confront the fear brought about by “ideological terrorism”(a belief system that supports only “one reality” or one way of thinking); and the fear described by a Uruguayan poet in his work “The Global Fear.” Ms. Bender spoke about The Regional Training Program on Gender and Public Policy, based in Flasco, Argentina. She noted that this is a distance learning program designed to provide access to different perspectives and input from different disciplines on gender.

B) Nicole Carter – Women and Public Policy Program (Harvard)

Ms. Carter spoke briefly of WAPPP's program in human security and of the two programs in this area. The Women Waging Peace Initiative brings women experts from conflict areas to participate in a two week Colloquium serving to connect the work of women in the policy arena, women in academics, and those women who are active at the grass roots level. The Peace and Security Fellows Program supports the work of two fellows annually who investigate issues of “prevention, peace building, sustainable security, and gender.”

C) Leslie Calman – NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund

Ms. Calman gave a brief introduction about the history and work of NOW noting that during its 32 year history NOW has worked towards economic justice for women, defended the reproductive rights of women, addressed childcare issues, and worked to support the rights of women in in non-traditional employment and the rights of immigrant women. Currently a key focus for NOW is its campaign to promote the implementation of CEDAW in NYC as a means to insure gender equity in education, health care, and economic development. She noted that San Francisco serves as a model as it is the only U.S. city to date to pass local legislation enacting CEDAW principles. The challenges that NOW faces in this campaign include integrating issues of race and gender, learning more about local governance in order to determine how best to integrate CEDAW with local legislation, addressing the opposition, financing the campaign to support the implementation of CEDAW into NYC law, and creating a timeline for this campaign.

D) Kim Sloate and Cynthia Mesh – Battered Mother's Testimony Project (Wellesley)

The presentation centered around this Massachusetts based initiative which seeks to address the difficulties battered mothers face in the Massachusetts family court system regarding issues of child custody and visitation. (see handouts)

Battered Mother's Testimony Project cont.

1) Methodology

- Documentation and fact finding (including qualitative research), focus groups,

written surveys of providers and advocates throughout the state, interviews of state actors (particularly those with the most egregious records.)

- Human Rights Tribunal – Held May 9<sup>th</sup> (Mother's day) to launch awareness of the problem.
- Human Rights Report – To be published in October 2002. Recommendations for reforming The system.
- Statewide community organization and implementation of recommendations plus Nationwide replication of the project.

2) Survey (Participants)

Primary sample of 40 women. Three criteria for inclusion in the survey:

- Women who were victims of both domestic battery and of family court litigation
- Women no longer living with their abusive partner
- Women who felt that their human rights had been violated through the family court litigation process.

3) Findings (tentative)

Few women in the study did not have shared custody or unsupervised visitation despite laws Which disallowed the granting of child custody to batterers

4) Arguments

State actors have an obligation to uphold the basic human rights of its citizens

Four arguments proposed:

- Is the family court system neglecting its human rights obligations by failing to adhere to a "due diligence" standard?
- Is the family court system acting in the best interest of the children?
- Is the family court system upholding fundamental human rights?
- Is the family court system upholding women's rights to equal protection under the law?

5) Challenges

- Judges don't believe/ understand the relevance of spousal abuse to child abuse, or the effect Of spousal abuse on children.
- Inability of state actors to see the long term effects of spousal and child abuse (Women and children are seen as "scapegoats"[expendable]. "Society can continue to function" without them.
- Power imbalance – women without money to support their case, male spouse may have Higher status compared to female spouse, women may look desperate compared to men who appear in control.

Audience comments:

- With regards to the proposed national debate/ federal implementation of CEDAW, How do we overcome the usual objection that states have to be in continuity before feds can look to adapting new legislation?
- If CEDAW is adopted nationally, albeit with reservations (as intimated by President Bush), What might these reservations be (i.e. examples from other countries who have adopted CEDAW)?
- If the U.S. adopts CEDAW prior to NYC, what impact will this have on New York's behavior?