Permanent Missions of Armenia and Cyprus to the United Nations, 
University of the Highlands and Islands and Armenian Relief Society 
in partnership with

*Diaspora African Women’s Network*

On the Occasion of the CSW 59th Session Cordially Invite You to a Panel Discussion on

**“Women and Diaspora: From Past to Post-2015”**

**Monday, March 9, 2015, 03:00pm - 04:15pm**

Conference Room 11, United Nations

*Opening & Closing Remarks:*

*Ambassador Nicholas Emiliou, Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the UN*

*Ambassador Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the UN*

*Panelists:*

**Harriet Pavles George**
Former Judge of the Housing Part of the Civil Court of the City of New York 
and attorney in private practice

**Jim MacPherson**
Lecturer in History, University of the Highlands and Islands

**Sarah Gammage**
Policy Adviser, Economic Empowerment Section, UN Women

**Semhar Araia**
Executive Director, Diaspora African Women’s Network

**Nora Simonian**
Armenian Relief Society

*Moderated by:*
Nanore Barsoumian – Editor, Armenian Weekly
“Women and Diaspora: From Past to Post-2015”
Throughout centuries women have been powerful drivers of progress. In many countries and communities women play an increasingly significant role in all aspects of society, while historically their influence within their families has been of fundamental importance. At crossroads of history, women have shown their strength and resilience to survive and revive, and in difficult circumstances that may have seemed hopeless, due to economic and social hardships, they combined scarce resources together with their abilities and power of will to sustain their families, educate their children, preserve their culture, and advocate for their rights and for the improvement of their societies.

Women of the diaspora are uniquely positioned to use their exposure to and experience of different cultural, social and gender norms to drive transformational development at all levels of society. Diasporan women of all backgrounds living in foreign lands can serve as living bridges of knowledge and experience, and can help promote a national discourse on women empowerment and issues affecting their host as well as their own countries.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (2000), significant progress has been achieved towards women’s empowerment and gender equality around the world. Particular progress has been observed in the realization of women’s human rights and of gender equality, by, inter alia, developing relevant legislation and setting up national gender mechanisms. There have been also strong advances in the criminalization of gender-based violence, while public acceptance of violence against women and girls has declined, equal access to education has improved and in some cases women outnumber men in higher education.

Despite this progress, multiple challenges remain and much still needs to be done. A wide gap between legislation and its implementation in areas of the Beijing Platform for Action exists, discrimination towards women remain widespread, negatively affecting women’s access to education and active participation in the economy and in public life. Entering a turning point of 2015, as the international community marks the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and 15 years of the UNGA Special Session, and embarks on the next generation of development goals, it is important to highlight the need to see gender equality and empowerment of women both as a stand-alone goal and a cross-cutting target throughout other goals.

Being one of the first countries to submit its National Review on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the GA 23rd Special Session, as well as having chaired the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the period of 2009-2011, Armenia continues to exert efforts towards an increased participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making through the implementation of measures stipulated in its National Gender Policy Concept Paper (2010) and Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan for 2011-2015 (2011). The Armenian Government fully respects the institution of the Ombudsman as an independent body in protecting women’s rights and guaranteeing gender equality, and based on this understanding, the Ombudsman’s office has recently appointed a Women’s Rights
In addition, the Government in collaboration with diaspora organizations is taking steps to promote and enrich the social, economic and personal advancement of Armenian women worldwide through educational and other activities.

Cyprus is committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women and has made significant progress in the last decades through numerous efforts that were intensified following its accession to the European Union. The setting up of the National Machinery for Women’s Rights in 1994 represents a landmark in accelerating the promotion and implementation of policies for the advancement of gender equality and tackling discrimination against women. It comprises of government departments, as well as women’s and civil society organizations that provide a significant input to the Machinery’s work. The Government of Cyprus also maintains strong links with the Cypriot women of the diaspora, who have historically been very active and vocal, among others, in raising awareness and advocating for the promotion of human rights of Cypriots and solidarity to the struggle for the reunification of Cyprus. By maintaining close contacts with and supporting the Cypriot women of the diaspora, the Government of Cyprus aims to enhance their empowerment, as well as to encourage them to contribute with their unique experiences and knowledge for the benefit of the Cypriot society.

Since its founding in 1910, the Armenian Relief Society Inc. has championed human rights for women and girls. As a global humanitarian organization with 15,000 members across 26 countries, ARS Inc., with its grassroots capacity, advocates human rights, social justice and civil society, along with promoting education, health, and women’s empowerment. The late 1800’s was a time of great influx of Armenians to the new world. The early settlers came to study or to earn money to help their families in the Ottoman Empire. This initial emigration, mostly young and able-bodied men, was facilitated by American missionaries active in the Empire, such as Alice Riggs. Many more Armenians came to the US after World War I, primarily women and children who had survived the violence of the Medz Yeghern. Many of the women were picture brides, entering to marry men they knew only by letter. For all these women and girls, needle crafts were a crucial life skill. The Armenian women empowered themselves to support their families by utilizing skills learned in their homeland. In so doing, they helped to reestablish their lives and a culture almost lost.

Women’s involvement in diaspora organizations and in creating diasporic connections is nothing new. For much of the past two centuries, the nature of many diaspora communities has been shaped by women and contemporary policy-making has much to learn from this example of women’s activism in the past. In particular, women have often challenged conventional gender roles through their participation in diaspora organizations, creating new and hybrid identities. The research of Dr. Jim MacPherson from University of the Highlands and Islands (Scotland, UK) builds on the work of the anthropologist Avtar Brah and her notion of ‘diaspora space’, a concept which accounts for how migrant groups forge novel identities in their communities of settlement. Looking at Irish women’s diasporic engagement allows us to see how these new, hybrid identities also shaped the experience of those ‘back home’, creating diaspora spaces both at home and abroad. Contemporary policy across the globe needs to be aware of and informed by historical precedent and example – the potential of women to shape diasporic communities and identities, both in ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ societies, is immense.
The lessons learned of Cyprus, Armenia, UN-Women, NGO and academia partners may be of interest for the advocates of women empowerment and diaspora communities around the world, as well as for the governments committed to advance gender issues domestically. This panel provides a discussion framework and sharing of experiences of women of the diaspora, the academia, the civil society, the UN and the member states. The goal is to give an impetus in further considering opportunities for strengthening gender equality and empowering women and girls in the post-2015 development agenda through the integration of a gender perspective and utilizing strong ties between ancestral homelands and diaspora communities based on historical, local, global and modern perspectives. The panel will:

- Present a historical reflection of experiences of women and girls in the past by exploring their collective memory;
- Reveal challenges that women and girls currently face in some nations and diaspora communities on their way to becoming agents of change;
- Discuss how Homeland and Diaspora can influence and reinforce each other and build synergies with the common goal of fostering women empowerment, gender equality and enabling women to continue playing a crucial role in preserving culture and traditions in post-2015.
Panelists

**Judge Harriet Pavles George** has been an attorney in private practice in Queens County for 20 years and has served as Judge of the Housing Part of Civil Court for 20 years, in both Manhattan and Queens. She has also served as President of the Queens County Women's Bar Association and The Housing Court Judges Association. She has also served as an active member in many Religious, Civic and Philanthropic Organizations. was born and raised in Queens County where she continues to reside today. She was born to Philip H. Pavles, from Cyprus, and Nelia Sommese Pavles, an American of Italian descent.

**Dr Jim MacPherson** is a Lecturer at the Centre for History, University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland. He previously held academic posts at University College Dublin, the University of Bristol, Leeds Trinity and All Saints College and the University of Sunderland. He is a social and cultural historian of gender and migration. His research focuses on Irish and Scottish migration, diaspora and the British Empire and has recently published a book on Irish women and diaspora with Manchester University Press.

**Sarah Gammage** is an Economist and Policy Advisor on Economic Institutions working with UN WOMEN in the Economic Empowerment division. Previously she worked for the regional office of the International Labour Organisation in Chile on Social Protection and Development in the Southern Cone region. She has written academic and policy research articles on gender and trade, poverty, labour markets, migration and environment. She has worked with and for a number of international and multilateral organizations. She is an active member of the Network on Migration and Development and the International Association for Feminist Economics.
**Nanore Barsoumian** is the editor of the Armenian Weekly. Her writings focus on human rights, politics, poverty, environmental and gender issues. She has reported from Armenia, Nagorno Karabagh, Javakhk, and Turkey.

**Nora Simonian** is a lawyer, mother, educator, and advocate for women's causes. She served as an editor on the *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies*, a legal journal examining the underlying issues in the relationship between gender, social justice, and the law. She is a veteran expert on United States tax laws (Internal Revenue and Treasury Codes) and a legal consultant specializing in code compliance. For over 20 years, she has been an active advocate for women and children's rights, often working with legal aid clinics and other public interest law organizations. Mrs. Simonian has worked with many not-for-profit organizations, most notably the Armenian Relief Society Inc. (ARS). Fleeing the civil war in Lebanon and immigrating to the United States in 1975, Mrs. Simonian grew up in the Armenian diasporan community of Los Angeles.

**Semhar Araia** is the founder and executive director of the Diaspora African Women’s Network (DAWN), an organization whose mission is to develop and support the next generation of African diaspora women focused on African affairs. A specialist on US-Africa relations, diaspora engagement, humanitarian affairs, conflict resolution and international development, Semhar is an adjunct professor at George Washington University's Elliot School for International Affairs and teaches on conflict & development in the Horn of Africa. As a consultant and lawyer, Semhar’s clients and employers have included the Center for International Policy, the International Organization for Migration, Oxfam International, US Congress, and Nelson Mandela's organization The Elders. From 2002-2005, Semhar also served as an attorney for the implementation of the 1998-2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia peace agreement. Semhar has extensive experience working with local communities in the diaspora and East Africa. She was born in New York City to Eritrean immigrant parents and resides in Washington, DC.