

Commission on Status of Women 60th Session

Concept

Side Event

**THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:
POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES**

**UN Women Liberia in partnership with Rainbow Intercultural Dialogue Center, Thailand
Achievement Institute, Ufuk Dialogue Foundation, The Journalist and Writers Foundation**

Thursday, 17 March 2016; 6:30 pm - 7:45 pm

Location: Conference Room 7

INTRODUCTION

The 60th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (60th CSW) provides an opportunity through its priority theme "Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development" to focus on The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) especially Goal #5 which is dedicated to gender equality by a specific target: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [1]. UN Women Liberia and partners have agreed to organize a side event during the 60th CSW. The side event will address the influence of culture as a catalytic effect on women and girls empowerment. The panel will highlight the impact of beliefs, tradition and practices that have prevented economic empowerment of women and girls and the experts will discuss how these challenges can be turned into possibilities and opportunities with the collaboration of civil society organizations, educational institutions, intergovernmental organizations and governments.

OBJECTIVE

While this panel addresses some of the challenges tradition poses for women's empowerment, it primarily seeks to discuss the importance of utilizing local tradition and culture in achieving women's equality and empowerment as stated in UN Sustainable Development Goal 5. It is frequently mentioned in the SDGs' adoption that "there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development"[3].

Connecting with tradition/traditional practices and local culture can be a powerful approach, model, and tool for the what context? context, because people are invested in their traditions and culture, as it is already how they understand and organize their lives.

Topics to be discussed at the panel:

- Concrete recommendations for action in support of women and girls in this context to guide Country Level implementation of policies and Plans
- Explore key strategies to overcome cultural barriers that prevents women and girls' empowerment
- Promote best practices and lessons learned from women who have overcome beliefs, tradition etc.
- What is the role of the stateholders (Government, Civil Society, Activist etc)
- Civil society organizations from Thailand, Nigeria will elaborate on the preventative role of culture on women's empowerment
 - Traditional mechanisms to eliminate violence against women
 - The role of tribal forces and traditional rulers
 - Culture and gender equality

Moderator

Dr. Nuray Yurt is the Director of Peace Islands Institute (PII) in Central Jersey since 2005. As the director of PII, she organized several interfaith and intercultural activities. Her passion is raising awareness of the Value of Women in the society where she organizes an annual award ceremony " Value of Women Awards" in collaboration with JFK Medical Center Pastoral care. She has given several speeches about Women in Islam in Canada and US.

Dr. Yurt has Ph.D in economics. She thought several classes in this subject at University of Arizona. She is currently working as a Senior Director of Business Insights in a biotech company. She is married and currently lives in Cedar Grove NJ with her husband and 3 beautiful kids.

Panelist

H.E. Julia Duncan-Cassell, Minister of Gender, Children & Social Protection of the Republic of Liberia. Before Hon. Duncan-Cassell's appointment as Minister of Gender and Development, she served as Superintendent of Grand Bassa County for six consecutive years. As the Chief Administrator of one of Liberia's most strategic counties, Hon. Duncan-Cassell oversaw investments in the county's infrastructure, such as roads, healthcare, communications, and

education, thus providing a foundation for economic activities as well as improving the quality of life of county residents.

Prior to her service in the Government, she served in various positions in the Banking Sector in the USA (Assistant Vice President/Customer Service Manager -Bank of the West, Antioch, CA,-Risk Analyst Bank of the West, Northern California and Customer Service Manager -Bank of the West, Oakland,CA. Hon. Duncan-Cassell has studied Business with emphasis on Banking and Finance, University of Phoenix, Walnut Creek, CA; Banking and Finance, College of Marin, Marin, CA and Banking and Finance/Business, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX.

Roberta Clarke is the first Regional Director of UN Women for the Asia Pacific and Representative in Thailand. Ms. Clarke has extensive experience in civil society engagement at national, regional and international levels and currently sits on the Advisory Councils of Inter-rights and the International Council for Human Rights Policy. She was a Board Member of the Women, Law and Development International and the Trinidad and Tobago Family Planning Association. Ms. Clarke was the Regional Programme Director of UN Women Caribbean from 2003-2012. By Profession, she is an Attorney-at-Law with Master's Degree in International Human Rights Law from the York University, Canada.

Dr. Sa'adatu Hassan Liman, is lecturer in the department of Islamic Studies, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Nasarawa State University, Keffi-Nigeria. She is a member of several learned societies which include among others Member, American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), African Humanities Programme (AHP), also has the following fellowship awards among others: American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), African Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Award (AHP), 2011-2012. Her area of specialization is in Women's Rights as well as her M.A. and PHD Thesis.

The UNESCO/Suzanne Mubarak/Japan-Egypt Friendship Research Fellowship Award for the Empowerment of Women in Peace and Gender Studies, Egypt, 2006. She is the only person who was nominated for that fellowship from Nigeria that year having gone through a keen contest.

Ms. Awa Ndiaye Seck is originally from Senegal, with over thirty (30) years of experience at national, regional, and international level in areas of gender equality, governance, conflict prevention, peace building, decentralization, and electoral processes. Prior to joining UN

Women as Liberia Resident Representative, Awa served as Crisis Prevention and Recovery (CPR) Regional Practice Coordinator at UNDP Regional Service Center for Africa - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Johannesburg, South Africa. She also served as Senior Gender Advisor for UNDP in Burundi as part of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) global program on advancing gender equality and women empowerment.

Awa has extensive experience on partnership, including with Government, Parliament, Civil Society and Women Organizations, Political Parties, bilateral and multilateral agencies and the media. She also has vast experience working with regional bodies including the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities including ECOWAS and known within the Africa region for her policy-level involvement in the 2000 democratic transition in Senegal and for her work as an activist for the promotion of women political participation and economic empowerment. She is fluent in French, English, and her mother tongue (Wolof) and she has good working knowledge of Spanish; Holds an MBA, a Masters in Law and Public Administration, and a Diploma in Decentralization/City Management.