

World Federation of Engineering Organizations at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations

In March 2017, Stacey M. Delvecchio, represented the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) at the United Nation's (UN) [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW61\)](#), which is the "largest inter-governmental forum on women's rights and gender equality" according to the UN. The priority theme of the 61st CSW is: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. Conversations around the importance of girls and women in STEM and equal pay were key take aways.

Women's Empowerment in the Engineering World

Delvecchio attended the session organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) entitled, "Women's Empowerment in the Engineering World." The session highlighted the global need for women and girls to persist in the field of engineering and technology. Panelists included:

- Martina Roth, Senior Director Global Strategy and Alliances, Corporate Affairs Group, Intel Corporation
- Leslie Collins, Executive Director, DiscoverE
- Renetta Tull, Univ. System of Maryland: Director of Graduate & Professional Pipeline Development; Special Assistant to the Sr. Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; UMBC: Associate Vice Provost
- Marlene Kanga, World Federation of Engineering Organisations (WFEO) President-Elect
- Eileen M. Lach, General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer IEEE



Standing room only at the "Women's Empowerment in the Engineering World" session

Dr. Marlene Kanga emphasized the role of culture and history in increasing the number of women in engineering. Specifically, she highlighted global trends that indicate it is more likely for women to enter and persist in engineering within countries with emerging engineering industries than it is for them to gain equal representation when they are fighting against a pre-existing culture that privileges men.

For example, Dr. Kanga pointed out that in the United States and Australia (where engineering has traditionally been a male-dominated field) women still represent a small minority of individuals in the profession. Yet, women are more equally represented within in areas where the engineering industry is young, such as countries throughout Africa or Asia (such as Malaysia).

Leslie Collins emphasized the importance of messaging and mentors. She shared that 30 countries were signed up to participate in DiscoverE Day Global Marathon and talked about their plans for 5 April Global Day of the Engineer.

Eileen Lach shared all the different channels that IEEE is using to reach women engineers, including YouTube, mobile apps, ebooks, their Women in Engineering TV. They have 110 lesson plans that are free for children to try engineering.

The session concluded with the launch of the Million Women in STEM from WomEng.

Equal Pay Platform of Champions

DelVecchio also attend the launch of the Equal Pay Platform of Champions which included the following impressive lineup of advocates.

- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Patricia Arquette (USA), Actress
- Abby Wambach (USA), two-time Olympic gold medalist, soccer champion
- Anannya Bhattacharjee (India), President, Garment and Allied Workers Union
- Emma Kaliya (Malawi), Chair, NGO Gender Coordination Network, Chair of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance
- Chidi King (Belgium/Sierra Leone), Director, Equality Department, International Trade Union Confederation
- Kamala Lopez (USA), Film maker and activist
- Thorsteinn Víglundsson (Iceland), Minister of Social Affairs and Equality
- Benno Böttig (Switzerland), Secretary-General, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- Nomasonto Mazibuko (South Africa), Commissioner, Commission on Gender Equality, and Executive Director, Albinism Society of South Africa



While women may be better represented in some major emerging engineering markets throughout the world, the issue of equal pay for equal work is felt by almost all women across the globe. Women throughout the world still earn 77 cents to every dollar that a man makes and gender-based wage discrimination is present in 99.6% of positions across all sectors. At the current rate of improvement it will take 70 years to close the gap which highlights the need for change.

The speakers addressed several areas in regards to why the pay gap continues to exist. There is still an assumption that a woman's salary is secondary & someone else will take care of them. Women with children tend to learn less than women who don't have children. Taking care of the family /caregivers is still primarily the role for women. Regarding occupational segregation, education is part of the solution but there's still a gap even in the higher educated. And unfortunately, discrimination is still an issue. While paying men more is technically illegal people get away with this by giving them different titles (i.e. A cook versus a chef).

CSW61 Agreed Conclusions

An event such as the CSW61 covers all aspects of areas around the world where change is needed in regards to women and the conclusions reached by the commission are just as inclusive. Even with all these needs, the role of engineering and the women was still covered in the agreed conclusions.

“The Commission reaffirms that the realization of the right to education, as well as access to quality and inclusive education, contributes to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. It notes with concern the lack of progress in closing gender gaps in access to, retention in and completion of secondary and tertiary education and emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning opportunities. It recognizes that new technologies, which are changing the structure of labour markets, provide new and different employment opportunities that require women and girls to acquire skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in information and communications technology.”



Stacey M. DeVecchio attending the general session of the UN Consortium on Women