Introduction

Ever since the international legal system shifted from the Westphalian model to the International Organizations (IOs) model – those organizations formed by a number of States by treaty, charter or constitution – sex equality has been an issue. Indeed, there is documentation that as early as 1946 States raised concerns about women's inclusion to the United Nations' (UN) attention. That year France asked that women's presence in UN delegations be an important consideration. Unfortunately, these, and many other pleas for equality and inclusion have not translated to actuality.

Notwithstanding the reality that the international structure has neither historically nor currently succeeded in effecting sex equality, it has been a location in which women have sought to obtain support in the quest for a world free of sex discrimination. The UN, possibly '[t]he most significant [International Organization] from an international legal perspective', given its size and breadth, has a mandate for sex equality. The UN Charter itself articulates as one of its purposes the promotion and encouragement of 'respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion'.

Sex equality as a goal for IOs is significant because these institutions, which play a key role in the creation and application of law in the myriad disciplines of international law, operate within the defined parameters of their constitutive

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document. International Organizations have an increasing presence in the participation in and the formation of treaties. Indeed, IOs are responsible for the drafting and crafting of many of the currently applicable international legal rules as well as for the development, expansion and transformation of what subject matter is appropriate for international regulation. Many such International Organizations are part of the UN system, but some significant organizations are not.

Indeed, actions of the United Nations and its Millennium Development Goals have sought to take measures that will improve the lives of women in the public and private spheres. International programs, such as International Organization-sponsored conferences, have brought to light the plight of women around the world. The studies that these organizations conduct are central to the dissemination of information about the condition of women. Moreover, the sponsored gatherings have served to provide a location for women to network and form a women’s movement at a global scale.

While rhetorically committed to women’s equality, however, the reality in the practice of IOs reveals continuing and persistent inequality. Neither in the presence of women within the ranks of organizations nor in the focus of the organizations on issues of concern to women have these structures succeeded in the quest for equality. To be sure, these organizations have set standards. Yet, they have failed to meet them with respect to women’s full citizenship. One explanation lies the structural or implicit gender bias that exists within these institutions that are statist in focus and largely led by men. The absence of women at decision-making levels in IOs has an impact on the understanding of women’s issues, limits the way international concerns are perceived and understood, and serves to retain the status quo which is not a neutral position. In turn, these realities interfere with promoting the change necessary for women to be fully visible and full participants within these institutions. In the end, the lack of women’s presence in International Organizations skews the way they carry out their admittedly key roles in the world by reproducing patterns of inequality.

These persistent patterns of inequality are sometimes obscured by the choice of language. Although usage of the term ‘gender’ commenced in academic circles around 1960, the term did not appear in UN documents regarding

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