

United Nations
57th Commission on the
Status of Women Sessions
Reflection Paper

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Attending and presenting at the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was a unique experience that provided me with opportunities to learn from governmental and nongovernmental organizations around the world working to end violence against women and girls.

From the beginning of the week at Consultation Day until the closing at International Women's Day, I was bombarded with stories from women around the world who have experienced different types of violence. Throughout the course of the week, I learned about the power of sharing and learning from stories. While I learned very important information from the governmental, fact-based panels, I found the non-governmental, and often story-based panels, most helpful and inspiring. It was in these sessions that I could hear real passion from women and men working on the ground to implement change.

I was astonished by the number of topics covered under what I considered to be a specific priority theme- "the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls". I attended panels about a variety of topics ranging from sex trafficking in Nepal to the violence induced spread of HIV/AIDS in Liberia to prostitution laws in Sweden. The Commission on the Status of Women opened my eyes to numerous forms of violence against women. While this recognition of my own ignorance was discouraging, I was encouraged to learn about what governmental and non-governmental organizations are doing to enact change in nearly every country around the world in order to eliminate and prevent these cases of violence. While I would like to include all that I learned, my reflection paper will

be limited to the topic my research focused on, domestic violence or intimate partner violence.

One of the first panels I attended began with a woman from Mozambique sharing her personal story with intimate partner violence in a country where domestic violence was not against the law. Throughout the panel, she spoke about the difficult, fifteen-year-long battle for laws against domestic violence in Mozambique. Her chilling story turned into one of determination and endurance as Mozambique recently passed their first laws against domestic violence. Sadly, there are still many countries with no laws against domestic violence because it is viewed as a part of the culture. Even when laws are created, the implementation of these laws is the most difficult element because domestic violence is often considered a private, family matter.

One city that has been effective in eliminating these false stereotypes about intimate partner violence is San Francisco. At the panel co-hosted by WomenNC and a team from San Francisco, I learned that San Francisco has not had any domestic violence homicides in the past year. North Carolina had 761 homicides in the past ten years, and an estimated 7,000 near-fatal incidents. San Francisco's success is in part due to a change in the way their culture views women, the passage of CEDAW in their city, and also the provision of comprehensive services to survivors.

After learning about the successful San Francisco model, I was eager to learn about policies and solutions in other countries. I attended a session titled *Making Our Domestic Violence Laws and Policies Work in Practice* where an array of countries, including the Netherlands, Albania, South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Peru,

Nepal, and China presented information about The Human Rights Assessment Instrument on Domestic Violence, or DOVA. This panel was particularly interesting to me because it involved my passion for the implementation of public policy recommendations. At this session, I was given my own copy of the extensive DOVA. DOVA stresses that many legal systems do not view domestic violence as a human rights violation, but as a private, family matter. However, being a victim of domestic violence can violate a range of individual rights held by the survivor including: the right to life, the right to physical and mental integrity, the right to security of person, the right to not be inhumanely treated, the right to equal access to justice, the right to property, and the right to health care. DOVA is a lengthy document but, most importantly, outlines steps that help to assess if your country is complying with the written policies. These steps involve identifying the problem, knowing the government's commitments, understanding the social and political circumstances, discussing implementation, the impact of the policy on practice, accountability, and finally recommendations. Overall, DOVA is a comprehensive document important for the implementation of domestic violence laws and policies.

Along with the other fellows, we were able to attend a session inside the U.S. Mission to the UN called "Intimate Partner Violence: Effective Solutions." This was an exciting session because experts in the field of intimate partner violence like Valeria Jarret, a Senior Advisor to President Obama and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls, Lynn Rosenthal, White House Advisor on Violence Against Women, James Cole, Deputy Attorney General, and world leaders from Guatemala and Nepal shared about effective solutions. The panel stressed that

intimate partner violence affects communities everywhere, so the solution will require community based solutions. These solutions should be comprehensive and sustainable. It is important for several resources, like medical aid, legal services, and counseling, to be under one roof. Each panelist also stressed that engaging and involving men in our solutions is vital. James Cole discussed the importance of the Violence Against Women Act and claimed that domestic violence costs the United States \$8 billion every year, contrary to the statistic I used. I also learned about the importance of changing norms in Nepal, where they recently launched a campaign with major sports teams called, "our ball: end violence against women." Finally, the panelist shared new technology initiatives working to end domestic violence, like an app that allows shelters to coordinate. Their presentation and discussion turned out to be one of my favorite panels I attended during the week.

In sum, the 57th Commission on the Status of Women was an incredible experience that provided me with opportunities to further explore my research topic, learn about innovative solutions around the world, and make connections with people who share my passion for ending violence against women and girls. I look forward to the coming months and my opportunities to bring the global perspective and solutions back to North Carolina.