



# ***CSW Reflections***

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**WomenNC CSW 2014 Fellowship**

**April 2014**

## **Presentation Topic:**

**Addressing UN Millennium Development  
Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality &  
Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health**

**The Importance of Educating Mothers &  
Bringing Health Care to Women's Communities**



### 58<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women

From March 10<sup>th</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup> I had the honor of attending and presenting at the 58<sup>th</sup> annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year the focus of the 58<sup>th</sup> CSW was “Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls” (“CSW58 (2014)”). Given that there are eight different Millennium Development Goals ranging from improving maternal health to creating global partnership for development, the week was filled with panels discussing all sorts of topics. I attended a variety of sessions ranging from topics addressing the importance of education for girls to why it is important to follow Sweden’s legislation and criminalize all Johns. In addition to attending sessions, I had the opportunity to meet inspiring women and gain insight into what I want for my future. Attending the CSW was an unforgettable experience that provided me with great awareness of current global women’s issues, groups of peoples that need to be added to the conversation, and myself and my future goals.

On our first full day in New York City we attended the NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day at The Great Hall, Cooper Union (“NGO CSW Forum”). The forum was on March 9<sup>th</sup>, one day before the commencement of CSW, and it provided a space for NGOs from around the world to come together and learn about the pressing issues anticipated during the CSW. At the forum, I was amazed to see how many people from all around the world cared so deeply about women’s issues and to see that there are so many different NGOs that work to achieve justice for women. Throughout the day there were discussions of the 1995 Beijing World Conference for Women, the importance of involving youth in women’s rights movements, and women from different NGOs around the world spoke of their experiences. The forum left me incredibly optimistic and excited to be around so many women’s rights activists.



The day after the NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day, CSW began. CSW was incredibly busy and full of opportunities to learn about women's issues. CSW was divided into three different types of sessions: ongoing negotiations between the nations' representatives as they worked to create a resolution, side events hosted by various groups of the United Nations (e.g. UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS), and parallel events hosted by NGOs from all over the world. During my stay at CSW, I attended a number of parallel and side events, and I was informed about the ongoing negotiations both by Max and NGO updates on the negotiations. Each day I attended about four different sessions, and I learned a lot about women's issues. While I feel that I have a general knowledge of women's issues, the women's issues that I learned the most about while at CSW were prostitution and human trafficking.

I had always heard about prostitution and human trafficking, but I never knew too much about the two issues besides the fact that they are prevalent issues today. The very first session I went to at CSW, called "Policies & Practices in Addressing Violence Against Women & Girls: An Interdisciplinary Approach" had quite a bit of discussion about human trafficking. Two of the women on the panel were professors who do a lot of research on human trafficking in Ghana. They emphasized the importance of looking at human trafficking as more than sex trafficking. In fact, they explained that sex trafficking is just a small portion of trafficking that occurs in this day and age. Rather, labor trafficking is much more common and often goes unaddressed. While at the first session, I ended up sitting next to a woman who is incredibly involved in fighting human trafficking in Florida. I was always under the impression that immigrant women are the only women targeted in the United States, but she informed me that a lot of American women are forced into the sex trafficking industry as well.



Needless to say, there was much discussion about human trafficking throughout the week and I gained much more knowledge about human trafficking.

Another women's rights issue that I learned a lot about was prostitution. While at CSW there were many groups with different views on prostitution. There were groups in support of the Swedish model, which criminalizes all Johns, and there were groups in support of legalizing abortion. Prior to CSW I had never heard about the Swedish model, so I attended a NGO session titled "The Swedish Model: Fighting Trafficking by Targeting all Johns?" The session was all about Sweden's legislation, and their nation's choice to criminalize all people that buy sex (aka Johns). Rather than shame and accuse women that are prostitutes, Sweden shames those who buy sex. Sweden believes this policy is more effective in eliminating sex trafficking and helps to prevent women from being coerced into prostitution. Later on in the week I attended another session titled "Is Prostitution Sex Work? When Terminology and Legalization Collide with Human Rights." This session was incredibly heartwrenching as the panel was composed of five women from around the world that had previously been involved in prostitution. All of these women were completely against prostitution and stated that "Prostitution makes a statement that women and girls can be sold." After discussing their horrible past experiences and explaining why prostitution was such a horrible phenomenon, the women proceeded to support the Swedish model and discuss why it is best.

On the other hand, I met quite a few women that believed prostitution should be legalized. The two women I discussed the issue with both came from countries that have legalized prostitution, the Netherlands and New Zealand. Unlike advocates of the Swedish



Model, these women believed that prostitution should be legalized, because there are women that truly want to be prostitutes. Additionally, they believe that legalizing prostitution and regulating it will help to decrease rates of human sex trafficking. Both sides of the debate provided much evidence that supported their beliefs, and it was fascinating to learn about both sides' views. Overall, CSW provided me with a new breadth of knowledge and I became more informed on the women's rights issues of human trafficking and prostitution.

Although I gained much knowledge on women's issues while at the United Nations, I did notice that there was a lack of conversation about certain groups of people. These groups included the LGBTQ community, indigenous peoples, elderly women, and girls. The conference was not completely void in addressing these certain groups, as there were some NGO sessions addressing those groups, such as "Violence Against Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women in Asia Challenges Implementation of Gender," "Indigenous Women and the MDGs – Challenges & Lessons," "Adolescent Girls: The MDGs' Missing Link." However, for the most part, these groups often went unacknowledged. For instance, when we were at a side event to talk to the US mission to the United Nations, I asked what they are doing to address violence against the LGBTQ community, and their response was incredibly vague and provided no indication of efforts to stop violence against the LGBTQ community. There were also many moments in NGO sessions when women that belonged to one of the rarely mentioned groups spoke up during Q&A and stressed the importance of their groups getting more attention. For example, one woman spoke up after a talk about environmental sustainability and said it was incredibly important that the government thinks of the indigenous peoples, because their lands are often exploited when the government makes



efforts to be environmentally “sustainable.” It is important that these groups are focused on more during future CSWs.

The Commission on the Status of Women was an amazing opportunity that allowed me to widen my understanding of women’s issues globally. In addition to providing me with new knowledge on women’s human rights, CSW also provided me with insight into myself and my future aspirations. Prior to arriving at CSW I was so incredibly nervous about presenting my research at WomenNC’s parallel event; however, while presenting in front of about 80 people, I became more and more comfortable. By the end of my presentation, I did not have a single worry and I felt energized from presenting. As someone who has always had trouble presenting in front of crowds, I now feel much more confident and know that I am capable of presenting to large audiences. CSW also helped me to realize that I am meant to work in the NGO world rather than the political world. At CSW, I always felt inspired by NGO sessions, while official UN sessions often led me to feel drained. While it is the UN that has the money, I personally believe it is the NGOs that have the true desire to fight for justice. I now know that I want to be on the NGOs team in my future.

Finally, CSW taught me that there is no wrong path to take when passionate about women’s issues. This past year I have been stressing endlessly about my future. I constantly wonder what is best for me to study in graduate school, how I can best help women, and what will be prepare me to fight for women’s rights. After attending CSW, I now realize there is no “perfect” path. All the inspiring women that I met and listened to at CSW came from such different backgrounds. Some women had MBAs, some were survivors of human trafficking, some were social workers, but one thing that they all were was advocates for



women's rights. I realized that no matter what I choose to pursue in graduate school (e.g. Public Policy, Public Health, Sociology) – or whether or not I even go to graduate school– as long as I stay committed to fighting for women's rights, I *will* be able to make a difference.

CSW was an incredible experience that provided me with great opportunities. I got to hear from NGOs from all over the world, explore the United Nations, and spend a week in New York City. While there were certain aspects of CSW that need to be improved, such as increasing discussion on very marginalized groups of people, overall CSW was a positive experience. I increased my knowledge of current women's rights issues and I gained more confidence in my abilities to present, network, and conduct research. I thank WomenNC so much for the once in a lifetime opportunity.

### Works Cited:

"CSW58 (2014)." *UN Women*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.

"NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day." *NGO CSW*. NGO CSW, NY, n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.