



### CSW 2015 Reflections Paper

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When I look at all of the places around the world that I have had the opportunity to celebrate my birthday, I must say that CSW (The Commission on the Status of Women) in New York City was one of the most noteworthy. In order to document the progress of women's rights around the world, CSW was created. I feel fortunate that I was able to attend and present at the 59<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This year's CSW was particularly important as it focused on the progress that women have made worldwide twenty years after the implementation of The Beijing Platform. As a former Marine, I have seen first-hand in a variety of countries, the struggles that women face. Prior to my experiences in the WomenNC fellowship, I had no idea that such a commission existed to protect and support the rights and developments of women. I am more than delighted to have had this opportunity to attend CSW 2015, to advocate for women's rights and to further develop my leadership skills.

During CSW 2015 I attended a variety of side (sessions at the UN) and parallel (sessions sponsored by non-government organizations (NGOs)) events that presented a plethora of topics and programs that are affecting women worldwide. The sessions that were most impressionable discussed issues surrounding programs that supported women's health, women in leadership and migration. In addition to the powerful and educational sessions, I had the opportunity to meet many inspirational women from around the world who are fighting for the same causes that I am. The power of strength in numbers was evident in our discussions and in the voices of the presenters at the various sessions. What I learned from networking and parallel and side events is priceless and needs to be shared with others who believe in the power and rights of women all over the world.

Of the most impressionable points emphasized during both the parallel and side events was the importance of women in leadership and decision making processes. As highlighted in my research, one of the solutions to women's rights violations is to have more women in leadership positions. Almost



every session that I attended mentioned the importance of women in leadership and decision making positions. With governments and parliaments run by a male majority and women's limited access to government positions, there is not a voice from the top that can advocate for and help to push important legislation through at the level where most action occurs. I was amazed at the countries that have already ratified CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the impact that it has had on the number and percentages of women in their governments. Most countries reported to have the goal of 30% women in their parliaments by 2015. Of the countries who reported, many have met or are near meeting this goal with about 20% women in their parliaments. These numbers are astounding and show the progress that can be made if CEDAW is ratified. In the United States, CEDAW has not been ratified. As a result, women are not as involved as men at the highest levels of government, leaving the United States trailing behind many other countries with respect to women in leadership as outlined by the Beijing Platform and CEDAW.

Women's health was also a powerful topic of many of the sessions that I attended. The health issues of the highest concern centered on reproductive health and access to healthcare. While attending a side event featuring the Vice President of Guatemala, I was blown away with the lack of prenatal care and education that young girls and adolescents receive. The rate of childhood pregnancies did not surprise me, as I have done work in other Central American countries focused on supporting adolescents who become pregnant. What was surprising was the steps that Guatemala's Vice-President is taking to educate indigenous people and other Guatemalans on the health risks and issues of youth and teen pregnancies. Her initiatives highlight prevention strategies as well as how to help the young girls continue with school while continuing to care for their child. It was refreshing to see a government agency taking time to address one of the underlying issues concerning women's health and access to healthcare. Educating people as to what their reproductive rights are and how to prevent youth pregnancies is key to the health of women worldwide.

The final most influential theme discussed in the sessions was migration. Migration affects every



country all over the world. Prior to the panel discussion that I attended I had no idea the extent to which other countries perceived the United States with regards to how we receive and address immigration and migration issues. Due to my work in the Latino communities, and my job, I am more than familiar with the issues that migrant workers and immigrants face here in the United States. Attending CSW side events opened my eyes as to how other countries truly view our policies. A woman from Nepal who is active in her community shared her experiences as a migrant supporter in her home country. She informed us that Nepal has various programs that support migrants with respect to healthcare, housing and education. While the programs that Nepal has to offer are wonderful in supporting the human rights of migrant works, she was more concerned that Nepal is losing more and more of its native workers to countries like the United States due to the “wonderful programs that we have.” Her perceptions were astounding to me. I know that the policies that we have in the United States do not adequately address issues concerning migration. During our group discussion I felt like the expert. It was empowering to educate and right the misconceptions that outsiders have about the United States. She as well as others in our group from countries such as Norway, Japan, India and Canada were aghast as to what actually happens in the US with respect to migrant workers and immigrants. Most of the sessions that I attended educated me on the status of women from around the world, but this was my turn to educate others as to the status of women migrants in the United States. This experience helped to shape what CSW is really about: the learning and growth that can occur through open dialogue on an international level that we may advance the status of women worldwide.

Overall I am grateful for this once in a life-time opportunity to attend the 59<sup>th</sup> CSW. There are not enough words that can describe the impact that one week in New York City and attending a variety of parallel and side events has had on me. Since actions speak louder than words, the best way that I can show how great an impact CSW has had in my life, is to take my experiences and put them into play. I fully plan on continuing to do work with WomenNC by working with them to create a high school level program that will engage and encourage more youth leaders and young women to be active participants in the global support on advancing women’s rights.