

United Nations on the Commission of the Status of Women

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work: Final Report by Sarah Cibart

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I had the utmost privilege to attend the 61st United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) in New York City March 13-17 2017. This event annually brings together feminist stakeholders, international leaders and activists to work on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed out of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Each year CSW has a theme, 2017 being *The Economic Empowerment of Women in the Changing World of Work*. Attending this year of CSW was a particularly unique and interesting experience. Firstly, the theme of CSW61 related so closely to the work of unions and the labour movement when considering how feminism and labour work together and rely on one another. Some examples of the topics discussed within the theme included: pay equity for women, ensuring women have access to maternity leave, defending rights of workers in the private sphere, sex trade, human trafficking, the inclusivity of intersectional identities (plus considering the lack of women of colour, differently abled women, Indigenous women, and LGBT women or non-binary people represented at CSW61), and ongoing conversations about women's reproductive rights and how they impact women's economic empowerment.

CSW61 was also unique given the recently elected Trump administration in the USA and subsequently the rise of fundamentalist right wing groups. For example, this year the US Government officially appointed two hate groups as its delegation for CSW61. Centre for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam) and the Heritage Foundation outwardly oppose the UN human rights system, LGBTQI rights, and women's sexual and reproductive health rights. The presence of this official US delegation was evident throughout my week in New York- often people were being challenged in sessions for being too liberal, questioned for their beliefs and morals if advocating for women's reproductive or sexual rights, and questioned for their gender identity or expression. In addition to the US delegation being right wing fundamentalists, I learned very early on in my week that this CSW was also particularly bad for NGO's/civil society being disregarded inside the UN and were not given a fair chance to participate in deliberations. Even worse, after I left New York, NGOs were actually locked out by the UN for negotiations on the last night, which resulted in activists and part of our labour delegation actually doing a sit in outside the negotiation rooms overnight to try and get in to have their voices heard in the agreement writing process.

I spent the majority of my time at CSW61 attending civil society meetings and workshops, hosted by a variety of countries on many topics. If you visit <http://unioncsw.world-psi.org/> and search my name, you'll find some blogs I wrote on specific workshops that particularly peaked my interest around intersectionality, labour and feminism. I was also thrilled to be able to engage in discussions within the Canadian labour delegation about the national goal we are working towards for legislation and bargaining language to protect those impacted by domestic violence at work, and it was very exciting to be able to deliver the news to the delegation on March 15 that the Saskatchewan NDP was tabling a private members bill in legislature on this. Additionally, I was very proud to be able to share with folks I had connected with the *Indigenous Women's Declaration of Well-Being* by activists at University of Saskatchewan as some of the exciting work Saskatchewan is doing on international intersectional feminism. Although these conversations were brief given the packed schedule and as I was wearing many hats, I now have many exciting contacts and connections with organizations like OutRight, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), Youth Coalition, YWCA of Toronto, Disability Rights Fund, Red Umbrella, and deepening connections with many union activists. In addition to the work I was doing with civil society education and advocacy, there was great work happening with other Canadian labour delegates on draft agreed conclusions from analysis of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (the key global policy document on gender equality). These now agreed conclusions with participation from our Canadian Labour Delegation can be read here: <https://www.ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Agreed-Conclusions.pdf>

Aside from the obvious need to work against the political climate currently in the US with the Trump administration, the two themes that were consistent throughout my time at CSW61 were: having more diverse women attend CSW, and more resources delegated to research to update statistics, specifically for diverse women. For example, a panellist with the disabilities rights fund exemplified the need for more diverse representation at CSW pointing out that of 4,000 participants at the conference, only a handful were visibly differently abled (in contrast to the data that shows that one in five people live with a disability worldwide and three out of five of these people with disabilities are women). There were definitely moments

as a young queer person representing unions that when I spoke up in panels, I was very much in the minority, and people disagreed agreed with my comments. I also think it's valuable to know that Canada should continue to lead in qualitative research around statistics of women in the workplace, such as we're seeing in Saskatchewan with the work of the Women's March on Washington Saskatoon, and continue to collect data on Indigenous and Canadian LBT (lesbian, bi, trans) women's economic wellbeing. Knowing these gaps that Saskatchewan and Canada can fill in the international arena. I am proud to represent this country and this province, and can say with full confidence we are progressive leaders at the international level. I was honored to be asked on the final day of my attendance of the conference to be a part of the #YoungFeminist movement where I was a part of a promotional photoshoot and gave a statement on my vision of the world as a feminist and labour activist. This campaign has not yet gone live, however, if you search youngfeminist.org you will be able to view my photo, statement, and many others from young feminist activists internationally. This was a really cool experience to be able to participate with and I met some really great activists at this event.

I want to thank my employer, NDP MLA David Forbes for his support in granting me time off to attend CSW61, as well as my union COPE 397. Although I am new in this role, your wiliness to invest in my passion for feminism and labour advocacy is sincerely appreciated. I also want to thank the Canadian Labour Congress, most specifically, Secretary Treasurer Barb Byers for their flexibility in me joining the labour caucus late in the game, and providing me support. Being 24 years old and getting to make international connections with likeminded activists is a privilege and opportunity I take very seriously, and I am committed to continue with the knowledge I cumulated at CSW61 by meeting with other young feminists, labour activists, and LGBTQ community groups to share contacts and start thinking inventively about how Saskatchewan can be a leader in our country and ultimately internationally for being inclusive and innovative.