

REFLECTIONS ON THE CEDAW EXPERIENCE

14th July to 23rd July 2011

IWRAW Training

The training provided by IWRAW for the CEDAW process was useful and critical to our active participation in the CEDAW process. The knowledge gained over the days prior to the week's activities at the UN was a crash course that gave us the 'nuts and bolts' of CEDAW. Additionally the training did not end at knowledge input – the IWRAW trainers were mentoring us during the week at the UN. The debriefing meetings at the end of the day for the three countries, Korea, Nepal and Singapore helped us develop our advocacy skills using CEDAW. Indeed the IWRAW team journeyed with us as our faithful companions to a fruitful 10 days' experience using CEDAW to advocate human rights for women.

CEDAW Process

My participation in the CEDAW process as observer and advocate – giving oral statements, NGO lunch briefings with the CEDAW Committee and the constructive dialogue sessions – was an eye opener and gave me hope on how an international treaty like CEDAW could be used to advocate the rights of migrant women workers and trafficked victims at the national level. Interaction with members of the CEDAW committee to lobby our concerns developed our advocacy skills strategically to work with experts at international level.

The CEDAW committee members were truly interested in our concerns raised and as they understood the context of our issues they were focused and purposeful in their dialogues with the States. At the constructive dialogue with Singapore, the Committee Members tore apart the curtain of success so well presented by the Singapore government. Gruelling questions were asked of Singapore such as, why is Singapore lagging behind on the ratification of human rights treaties e.g. ILO DW convention, the Palermo Protocol etc.; why has Singapore not set up a nation human rights body, why are migrant domestic workers deported on grounds of pregnancy and HIV infection and so on.

The State's responses as in the case of Singapore were purposely evasive on some of the pointed concerns. The Singapore government was armed with data on the progress of women in the country. The impressive record of Singapore was paraded before the committee and the State maintained a position of Singapore is doing a great job in fulfilling obligations under CEDAW. On women migrant rights and trafficked women and girls, the Singapore delegation maintained that work is still in progress at the national level to work towards the ratification of the Palermo Protocol and the ILO DW Convention. The Head of Delegation, Minister of State, Madam Halimah Yacob also reiterated several times that Singapore is fully committed to human rights and her obligations und CEDAW.

Parallel Sessions

At the invitation of the Singapore delegation, the Singapore NGOS had a tea session with delegates of the government at the Singapore UN mission. We were introduced to members of the delegates from MCYS, MOM, MOH, MHA and MUIS. The member delegates headed by the Minister of State were accommodating to some of our concerns. The meeting was held as prelude to the constructive dialogue to take place the next day. At the meeting, I took the opportunity to initiate follow up dialogue meetings with the delegates upon our return to Singapore. I believe that closed door advocacy to engage the relevant policymakers would effectively advance our cause for the rights of women migrant workers and trafficked women and girls.

The NGOS were also given an opportunity to meet with Madam Lakshmi Puri, newly appointed Assistant Secretary General, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women. It was a getting to know you session to provide

the new appointee with our work for women. UN Women is interested in my work in Batam, Indonesia and has invited me to send my funding proposals.

I found the 10 day process an opportune time for developing future partnerships among NGO advocates from Korea and Nepal. HIM Rights of Nepal has expressed collaboration with HOME on human trafficking. It was also a time for me to work with women rights' advocates at country level – SCWO, AWARE and SAYONI - now and the challenges ahead.

Follow up and challenges

I had been quite cynical of international treaty advocacy until I had the opportunity to participate in the CEDAW process. With this experience, I hope to ensure that the government will fully commit to her obligations under CEDAW particularly in relation to migrant women and trafficked women and girls.

Among my many considered follow up actions to CEDAW are:

- Conduct and share “CEDAW and migrant domestic workers’ rights” in a series of debriefing sessions.
- These debriefing sessions would also include the ILO DW Convention and the Palermo Protocol.
- Produce information leaflets on CEDAW articles and the migrant domestic worker rights.
- Initiate close door dialogue sessions with relevant ministries on migrant women rights under CEDAW obligations.
- Work with cross border NGOS in Indonesia to produce a shadow report on migrant women rights and human trafficking to submit to the CEDAW Committee in early 2012 when Indonesia makes its periodic report.

Conclusion

On a personal note, not only did I trip at the steps to the UN and hurt my elbow and knee, I also lost my reading and distance eye glasses at the UN. Every day was a full day and there was not much of an opportunity to explore New York City as we were really exhausted at the end of day - walking 10 blocks to the UN and back from Hotel St. James. On the last day, my legs felt like lead as I pulled myself to the last debriefing session by IWRAW. At last, several hours before my midnight flight home, I visited ‘ground zero’ and prayed for the victims of violence everywhere and resolve by God’s grace to be a builder of peace in our work for justice and human rights.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank MFA, IWRAW , the CEDAW committee, and fellow NGO advocates for giving me the opportunity to crown my year’s exploits with this awesome and ‘heated’ (New York was hotter than I ever imagined) experience.

Bridget Tan
Founder & President
Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics