

Global Interns

Grassroots advocacy, on a global scale

By Emily Dickson



Emily Dickson takes notes during one of the many meetings in Geneva

It may be tucked away in a small office above the hustle and bustle of the streets of Kuala Lumpur, but International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP) has an impact that is felt by women around the world. For three months I was fortunate enough to contribute to their work.

IWRAP aims to achieve universal realisation of women's human rights by primarily working under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other relevant human rights treaties. IWRAP further educates women and national women's groups on their rights under CEDAW and possibilities to undertake advocacy work on women's rights.

extent of the implementation of, and compliance with, CEDAW by their government. During the 45th session, representatives from various women's groups from Botswana, Egypt, Malawi, Netherlands, Panama, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine and Uzbekistan participated in this program and dealt with diverse issues ranging from lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights, to maternity leave schemes, the inadequacies of sex education in schools, and sexist advertising. Participating in the "From Global to Local" program broadened my understanding of international law, the CEDAW Convention and Committee, and the ways in which women's rights are viewed in a global sense.

My time at the UN was fast paced, varied and exciting. Because IWRAP does not represent one particular country, the team was required to attend every public Committee meeting. This allowed the IWRAP team and the NGOs a chance to lobby Committee members and prepare last minute documents for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), the body which services the CEDAW Committee. My association with IWRAP gave me the opportunity to mingle with Committee members, OHCHR representatives and many brave and inspiring women from the NGOs, some of whom risked persecution in their home country for simply attending the CEDAW session and speaking out against their government. The interaction between the Committee, the government delegations and NGOs was fascinating and allowed me to witness international politics at play. I believe this transformed my somewhat idealistic notion of the UN and

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I began my internship conducting research on how the CEDAW Committee has historically addressed economic, social and cultural rights in its Concluding Observations. This task broadened my appreciation for the interaction between the various UN committees and conventions. I also wrote information for the IWRAP website on how CEDAW can address women's reproductive rights and disability rights.

While my research tasks were interesting, they did not compete with the experience of attending the 45th CEDAW session at the UN in Geneva in January 2010. The majority of my time with IWRAP was spent preparing for and reporting on this session. IWRAP conducts training and mentoring courses during each CEDAW session as part of its "From Global to Local" program. This program brings together representatives from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of countries reporting in that session. The NGOs provide the Committee with alternative information on the conditions of women in their country and the

international human rights conventions into a true appreciation of each organ's ability and willingness to protect women's rights. Most interesting was how the Committee and government delegations dealt with the compatibility of, for instance, some aspects of Islamic law and traditional cultural practices such as female genital mutilation to be practiced under CEDAW.

Working with an international grassroots women's NGO, I was able to observe how individual women living under very different governments, cultures and religions experience their rights under CEDAW. The internship was a truly unique experience and one that I will remember fondly for years to come. I would like to express many thanks to the Castan Centre, especially Erica Contini and Marius Smith, for their continual support and for granting me this once in a lifetime opportunity. I feel very privileged to have worked with the team at IWRAP and to have contributed to the progressive work that they do.