

**Report Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) 61 New York
Thursday 16th March to Wednesday 22nd March 2017
Joanne Ramselaar**

My first impressions of CSW were of friendship. I was greeted at the Westin hotel by Di Lockwood after a very long flight from Melbourne. We went out for dinner and I met our other scholarship recipient Sonia Casanova.



We had a rather delicious meal across from where we were staying and in my jet lagged state, I learned all about CSW and the events of the last 4 days. The hot topic was the huge blizzard which swept through New York 2 days before covering the city with snow. It created a magical backdrop to my time in New York.

First stop in the morning was to the NGO CSW office to register, have my photo taken and pick up my ID card. Its official I am a delegate!!

There are three parts to CSW which occur at the same time: 1. The negotiations being carried out on the Agreed Conclusions which are being conducted by Governments who have come from all over the world. 2. The side events held in the UN building and comprise presentations by Permanent Missions and UN entities on the themes of CSW. 3. The parallel events in which civil society participate by holding presentations on programs run by their organisations.



The themes were: **Priority theme:** Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. **Review theme:** Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. **Emerging issue/Focus area:** The empowerment of indigenous women. All the presentations during CSW 61 are on these topics.

I made my way through the security screening and wound my way along what would be become very familiar corridors and up many floors to meet my fellow Soroptimists. Members from all over the world had gathered for our morning meeting



and it was great to meet so many wonderful women. The SI UN New York representative Bette Levy and International Director of Advocacy Pat Black explained the day's events. Which presentations SI clubs were involved in, what topics in the Agreed Conclusions the negotiations were covering that day and highlighted areas of interest.

Sonia and I left the UN building to go to the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGS) Body Image event. We ended up on a bit of a wild goose chase and a long way from where we were meant to be due to dodgy directions! After figuring out where to go (right next to our hotel!!), we joined a packed room and listened to speakers talk about their body image program. The WAGGS program #freebeingme – www.Free-being-me.com The program is a partnership with the Dove brand to empower girls to reach their full potential in life through initiatives that strengthen body confidence and self-esteem, so the way they think they look never holds them back. The program will be delivered to 3.5 million girls around the world. Very inspiring. How can we as Soroptimists worldwide do something similar? My one take away from this event was that women are disadvantaged before they even leave the house in the morning. We are taught that we need to 'make ourselves ready' before we can go out in the world. Being able to leave the house in our natural state is not good enough.



The day ended, as all days would, with a briefing from the Australian Government delegation and the three delegates Beth, Jahna and Leann. Every afternoon we met with the delegates on the progress of the Agreed Conclusions. We were asked to provide feedback on the language, using our knowledge from the organisations and clubs we represented. I found this part of the experience quite overwhelming in the beginning. I didn't

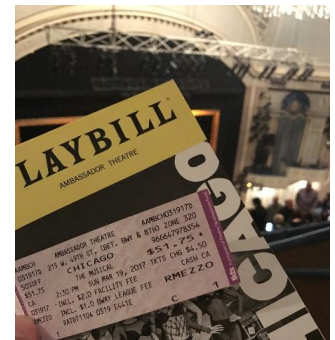
understand how it worked and listened to what the other CSW delegates were saying around the language.

Saturday was freezing and then it snowed! Couldn't believe it as I walked to the Church Centre of the United Nations. The main UN building was closed today and there were a few side events being held by civil society. I attended a fabulous event on developing programs for girls. There were 17 women who attended the event from 15 countries including Sweden, Nigeria, Tibet, Nepal, Russia, Uganda, Australia, USA! Even though we came from different countries the problems/challenges were very similar. Lack of access to education, girls not valued in patriarchal societies, feminine hygiene, early marriage and poverty.



Sunday was a day off, no events at the UN and I set off early to explore New York. I have never been and was excited to look around and take in all it had to offer. I walked up 42nd Street where our hotel was and came across Grand Central Station. What a magnificent building, the architecture was beautiful with massive chandeliers.

Next stop was Times Square and it didn't disappoint. It looked like it did in the movies with electronic billboards on every available space. Continuing up Broadway I went to Central Park. It was a snow covered wonderland with squirrels!! I had desperately wanted to see one and they were everywhere! A brief stop at the iconic Tiffany & Co to add quite a few more pieces to my wish list! I got half price tickets to see Chicago on Broadway and ticked another item off my bucket list. Topped the day off with dinner with Di Lockwood and a well earned rest. My fit bit told me I had walked 14.81 klms today – no wonder my feet were sore!



The 2nd week of CSW is much quieter than the first as most people head home. There are less events to attend and a stronger focus on the Agreed conclusions. Each morning the NGO Committee on the Status of Women held a briefing to provide information on where the Agreed Conclusion negotiations are up to and what will be the focus topics of that day. I attended quite a few events but I will highlight a couple that stood out. One was a world delegation event on data collection. The takeaway was that without good data there is no basis to fight. It is important that as many groups as possible collect data on their activities and share that data to highlight the issues which need attention and support.

An event on the Economic empowerment for women was very interesting. It was an event attended by world government, civil society and NGO organisations. It stated the world is heading towards a crisis of employment with the rise of a casual workforce. The care sector in particular is struggling with people to respect the work and care for the elderly and children. Our own Pat Black spoke at this event, using the information our clubs provide in their PFR's. It highlighted the essential need for all clubs to submit the data for the work they do. Seeing our data being used on a world stage really hit home how important this is.



As Soroptimists we are privileged to have a seat at the United Nations ECOSOC Council. It provides an opportunity to directly influence and change world policy. When I joined as a Soroptimist I was told about this status but didn't understand what it meant. I knew I wanted to get to New York and find out.

I am very grateful to SISWP for granting me the scholarship and providing me with the opportunity to experience another part of what it means to be a Soroptimist. Seeing our members advocating with world governments about our programs, how many women and girls we assist every year and the challenges the women and girls face in all areas we have clubs.

It really highlighted the importance of collecting data at all events and ensuring the data is submitted. You may think that what you do in your club is a small program, it may only help a few women but when you combine all our clubs and programs together. We have a very powerful voice.

Thank you
Joanne Ramselaar
SI Melba

If you want to learn more about what the Commission of the Status of women is go here:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

<http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2017/L.5> - Agreed Conclusions

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw61-2017/side-events/calendar-of-side-events>

<https://www.ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum/ngo-parallel-events>

<http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/un-rep-bette-levy-on-what-makes-the-si-global-network-so-powerful/>

