

CSW 63- Ramu to New York- A Phenomenal Experience!

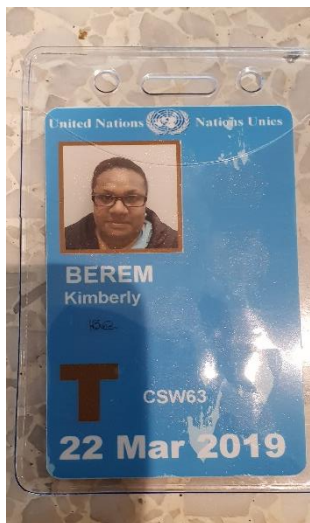
By Kimberly Berem, SI Ramu Inc, PNG

My win was just the perfect Christmas gift indeed as it was Monday 24 December 2018 when I saw the email advising me I had been the successful applicant for the SISWP Scholarship to attend the CSW63 in New York in March 2019. My mind went into a frenzy trying to process it all and I immediately took to google to check all things New York- the weather, what to pack, what to wear, places to visit, the UN HQ, CSW63, and more.

I was going to New York, the United States! The ironic contrast of PNG and New York let alone, Ramu- a contrast by age, design, population, technology, infrastructure and development- just beyond comprehension.

Weeks turned to days and before I knew it, my visas for both Australia and USA were granted and my plane tickets arrived. I had butterflies in my stomach as it dawned on me that this was really happening and that I was going to New York City, United States of America for real. I had a knot in my belly the last day before departure and I kept telling my friends and family that I thought I was coming down with malaria. When the morning came on 6th March 2019, I was packed, pumped and ready to roll. A 2 hour drive from Ramu took me to Nadzab Airport in Lae, a short 45 minute plane ride to Port Moresby where my connecting flight took me to Brisbane where the beautiful Donnell Davies met me and took me to my special sister Chris Knight and Donnell Davies was my host for the night. We drank tea and shared stories through to midnight like true Soroptimist Sisters! Donnell drove me to the Brisbane International Airport the next morning and I was on my way to NYC! I left Brisbane on Thursday 7th March 2019 and arrived in New York at about 5:30pm 7th March 2019. How awesome that worked out for me and due to the time difference I gained a day!

New York welcomed me with its cruel weather but compensated for it with its fascinating metropolis grid and design and off course the million things to see and do. A city so large and complex, buzzing with life and grandeur, yet designed to utmost perfection. Catherine Evans and I managed to find our apartment after a long- freezing while and got in at about 1:00am. My biological clock lost it and I slept until 1:30pm Friday 8th March 2019. Jumped out of bed, had a quick shower and a bite and we were off to the UN Building to collect our UN passes. Once that was done, we had access to the United Nations Headquarters and Catherine was kind enough to give me a tour of the place and I took a few first pics of NY and the UNHQ. I was glad we did a tour on Friday as it was helpful for me in the week that followed. The UN building is an iconic center in the world where world leaders gather to discuss issues, agenda of prominence, negotiate, debate, find solutions, brainstorm alternatives, and to think that some of the most prominent leaders, dignitaries, and world renown people have walked these corridors was truly an humbling experience for me. Such a venue of prestige, had an annual event dedicated to issues affecting the vulnerable people of our societies and countries and I was going to experience firsthand what it's like to be at the UN Conference and make a difference no matter how small it is.



My UN Pass

Outside the UN building, with the Famous Gun

& the famous Globe



Pics taken within the UN Building

From the UN HQ, I met a fellow Papua New Guinean lass, Miss Melanie Ramina who took me to dinner before taking me through the streets of NYC starting at the Times Square (which I later found out is actually 7 blocks running from 42nd to 49th Street), 911 Memorial, walked through the new Oculus Building to World Trade Center before walking a bit in the snow to Dumbo- where we stood under the Brooklyn Bridge to take in the night lights of the city. She was a real blessing and I cannot thank her enough and her namesake, Ms. Jane Kenni for making that connection. I had seen snow from the airport but for the first time that night, I saw snow up close, walked on it, felt it and kicked it. I sadly didn't get to catch snowflakes as it fell from the skies. Once done, Mel called a Lyft and took me straight to my apartment, we had tea before she left.



Times Square with Mel Ramina!



Under the Brooklyn Bridge



First Snow!

Saturday 9th March 2019 was a free day for me so I made the most of it by paying for a Day Tour to Washington DC. My personal belief was that my trip to the US would not be complete without setting foot at the White House, so I set out to make it happen. I made my way to the designated pick up location and we took off at 6:30am in a 15 Seater Bus with other tourists like myself and the bus driver/tour guide. We were told we would be crossing 5 States and the District of Columbia, Washington. The Pit Stop was at Delaware, 2 hours from NY. We saw the Pentagon on the way and it was nothing like I saw in movies and imagined it to be. It was bigger and spread across number of blocks and its car park was equally huge, it was something else. Our first official stop was at the Arlington War Cemetery in Virginia. There we saw the historic gravesite of President John .F Kennedy, his wife and two children. Our next stop was the Lincoln Memorial looking across to Capitol Hill. This was a memorable stop for me apart from the Whitehouse. Having studied History in High School, the Inaugural Presidential Speech by Martin Luther King Jnr “ I have a Dream” sparked an interest in me but little did I know that I would stand in the exact spot he stood to deliver that speech about 6 decades later and look over Capitol Hill. It is a historic place and I made history visiting it. I literally had goose bumps standing there, it was simply phenomenal. I took

it all in before climbing a few steps up to get a closer look at the Lincoln Memorial. Still digesting this historic sites, we are told next stop is the Whitehouse! I was there, this was real, been here, done that, I thought to myself. I pinched myself a few times to ensure this was not a dream. We then stopped at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and had a look around before doing our last stop at the Capitol Hill. We also drove by the FBI Headquarters and the house where Abraham Lincoln died in Washington DC. We got back to New York City just before 10:00pm. Places I saw in movies, magazines, text books, encyclopedias, I now trod and experienced. The day trip was worth every dime. I had a wonderful time and a spectacular experience.



From Lincoln Memorial with Washington Monument behind

The WhiteHouse!!

Sunday 10th March 2019 saw me and Catherine leave our apartment early enough to find the venue for the NGO CSW Consultation Day. Entering the room and seeing women from all across the globe, all walks of life, different ethnicity, race and color, different stories to share, with the common denominator being- an avenue where Women’s Voice is Raised and Stays Raised. It was overwhelming. This was truly the largest annual gathering of the international women’s movement at the UN. We found our seats and got comfortable to the beating of the drums by Paprika an all-female band. Followed by the MC’s getting things to order before the NGO CSW Chair, Dr. Susan O’Malley gave her welcome remarks and set the sessions in motion and setting pace for discussions on the agenda of CSW63 Social Protection Systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. She said ideally Social Protection is about a vision grounded in human rights and gender equality that has attracted more attention after the fiscal crisis of 2008. According to UN Women social protection is a set of minimum guarantees including basic income security for children, working age adults a, older people and peplum with disabilities as well as essential health care for all. The Chair in concluding remarked that for Social Protection is the government’s responsibility and in order for it to be successful, it must be provided by the national governments and be supportive of the idea of solidarity among the rich and poor with redistribution n occurring through taxation. The reality is globally inequality is growing. A special presentation of the Women of Distinction Award was presented to Gharsanay AbnulAmeen, A 22 year old young woman who is the founder of Afghan Girls Sustainable Education Project. The 3 poems by Climbing Poetree shot straight to the heart. We then had the panelists from a few countries share their experiences, their best practices and challenges. Each country’s journey to achieving the SDGs and ensuring a safe and secure community free of violence with social protection and sustainable infrastructure is different. It was encouraging to hear of a country like Iceland who has equal pay and

there is no gender discrimination. We also hear of Bangladesh and how the community would react to a certain tune of clapping of hands to stop a girl child from being given away as a bride. We also heard of challenges faced in counties like Afghanistan, Nepal, Egypt, Peru, India, Kenya and how their stories are similar to PNG and some countries within the SWP Federation. My take from the Consultation Day was Women already have a Voice, we need to continue raising it and keeping it raised but most importantly to RAISE our Voice TOGETHER irrespective of your race, color, ethnicity, country or organization. Our VOICE is LOUDER TOGETHER and we fight for the same cause. I was of the view that Women did not have a voice but my attendance at the CSW63 proved me wrong. We have a VOICE, we just got to keep it raised and increase the volume.



At Consultation Day

Sharing about PNG @ the SI Orientation

From the NGO CSW consultation Day, we head straight for the SI Orientation hosted by SI New York. We were barely in our seats when I heard my name being called for me to share something on my win and the work of SI in my club and PNG. I didn't have any notes, no time to refresh my memory and line up my thoughts but I spoke from the heart that evening telling the world what happens in my home country and the hardships we face as with the no basic infrastructure and the current state of public service in health and education and generally is deteriorating and life is tough and women do it tough but we keep on as Soroptimist and as women across the globe.

I met a lot of amazing women and fellow Soroptimist from across the globe that evening and throughout the course of the week and know this are special connections made for life.



Rubbing shoulders with a few prominent Soroptimist at the SI Orientation

The week that followed came with its own program and agendas and was very good learning experience for me as I sat and absorbed from speakers and panelist through discussions in the sessions I attended.

There was about 400 sessions to choose from. There were Talks and Negotiations on Agreed Conclusions held inside UN Headquarters as well as Side events. Parallel events are mostly organized by NGOs and around the theme and held in venues outside of the UN building. I couldn't do all sessions in my 5 days but I tried to ensure I attended any side event or parallel event hosted or co-hosted by Soroptimist International.



At one of the Ministerial Roundtable Discussions-UN Building

Over the course of my 5 days I attended a number of sessions but the following sessions stood out for me and got me thinking about how, what, whom I can work with in trying to implement in my country and the Federation as a whole:

1. **The Ministerial Roundtable 1** where countries spoke of the good practices they followed in to achieve success and encouraged other governments and countries to use their examples to achieve social protection and sustainable inclusion. No one country had the same story and although some had successes and highlights, countries did not always have the same story and it depended on various factors. All the more, the priority areas were better health and education for women and children especially having more girls in school than boys, safer communities for women, equal pay, and support for elderly and people living with disability and economic empowerment through various schemes such as cash stipends and loan schemes, food safety packages, increase women participation.

2. **Social Protection for All Women:** A life course perspective on Policy Options: this session's discussion focused on women and girls being vulnerable due to their gender and other aspects such as age, ethnicity, and income. Women and girls were victims of all forms violence and poor girls were at a double loss while females with disabilities were 3 times more likely to be victims of violence. Less females were educated or enrolled in schools due to various reasons such as distance, lack of fees, looking after younger siblings or elderly and household responsibilities, menstruation. Girls are even given off in marriage for economic gain and lesser mouth to feed in a family. We heard of how Africa has more women living in poverty and where the practice of Female Genital Mutilation is still practiced.

3. **A Cross-Cultural Conversation: NGO /GO Partnerships serving Women under Domestic Violence (a co-sponsored SI Event).**
 Discussions in this session centered on how vital it was for partnerships between Government organization and NGO to cooperate and complement each other in addressing models and systems practiced by two countries to combat domestic violence issues. Lillian Wang of Taiwan University presented that the relationship between the NGOs and Government must have the 4 C's- Cooperative, Complementary. Co-operative and Confrontational. The benefits of these partnerships is improved quality of service, improved management practices, efficiency and sustainability. Success factors for such partnerships included development of trust between the parties, favorable legal framework and managing cooperation. She concluded with stating that it is imperative to make gender inclusive and used an example of the He For She Organization. Ming-Ping Sung continued with the presentation and gave examples of few specific legislations enacted in Taiwan to eradicate violence and also the creation of Women's Guardian Center and also establishment of the First Domestic Violence Centre in Taiwan. Have legislations enacted to protect domestic violence victims. NGOs should work together and have relationships between courts, judges and magistrates, social welfare office and work towards implementing the Domestic Violence Act or similar legislations. SIA and Taiwan region worked together on this and through this program gave Liberal Dream Awards to more than 20 girls. They have established a Domestic Violence Centre and work in close partnership with NGOs and Government departments. Sarah Gallardo shared her real life experience of how she survived a violent abusive marriage and ran away to save her child and she lives to tell about her new life outside DV. DV is a large global problem and survivors' stories are so critical they break through barriers. The challenges of fleeing from DV is financial. Surveys have shown that people stay in DV relationships

for the following reasons financial, cultural norms, kids. Through NGO and Government Partnerships, shelters can be made to accommodate victims of DV as well as through collaboration have welfare and social workers give counselling and advise to victims on what they can do. This models have worked for Taiwan and can work for other countries.



Pics after this session #3

4. Economic Empowerment of Women through SDGs- Parallel Event- BPW WA and TCF Global Joint Event

This presentation was on economic empowerment of women. The Business & Professional Women’s Foundation shared how they have adopted the SDGS and the projects they are doing on the subject.

SDG 1-No Poverty. Women can be financially independent through Equal Pay. This is a worldwide issue and NGOs, Governments and Countries can work together to ensure there is Equal Pay globally. Having Women on Boards can also empower women. When women are given an opportunity it allows ordinary women to do extraordinary things.

SDG 3- Good Health & Well Being-There is an escalating mental health issue in today’s society. We have become more and more disconnected from each other. This has led to high rate of suicide cases.

SDG5, 8. 10- Gender Equality, Good Jobs & Economic Growth, and Reduced Inequalities: Education is key to getting out of poverty. Economic growth is key to being financially independent. China reduced poverty by 88 %. Support for SME and entrepreneurs will see money retained in the country and citizens being financially independent and secured. Major challenges faced by entrepreneur is lack of visibility, funding, starting late, lack of self-belief, lack of negation skills. 50% of men negotiate salary while women either accept or about 2% try to negotiate. Women need to be fearless and forward with their approach. Two Entrepreneurs gave insights on how they have been successful- the stories of Tijiko and Defacto.

5. Beyond Bias: Access to justice and Social Protection in the Caribbean

The Caribbean has recently appointed its first women judge in 2015. She with help of others started the Jurist Project when they saw the need to ensure criminal justice was not delayed and

victims traumatized by their cases as the cases dragged on. The Key to this project being successful is meaning collaboration from all partners. Maintain dialogue and communication between partners to proactively manage cases also ensuring vulnerable victims are identified and receive appropriate care and counselling. Police were also trained on how to deal with victim and cases appropriately. Juvenile Justice was also an area of focus. Family Court, Children’s Court were set up to ensure victims felt secure and trusted especially when giving their evidence. Children’s Court had its own room with a setting much like a lounge room so children who were victims would feel at ease when giving their story. A number of legislations were enacted to protect rights of women and children. Three women with legal background saw the need for a one-stop model centre so they founded the Support & Referral Centre in June 2017 where they have a Doctor, Police Force, Welfare office and a Court Room that is child friendly and safe pace for juvenile victims. All this has been made possible through COLLABORATION. A strong judiciary is needed for this issue.

Within the week, I managed to do some sightseeing and walking in some of the famous streets in New York: Rockefeller Sky Deck was a spectacular experience in itself. I was blessed with lunch from three Soroptimist of Western Region- who took me to lunch on the Famous Green Tavern on Central Park. I later learnt a few movies were filmed in that location. Empire State Building- I only got to the building and through the lobby. But man this building is something else. Macy’s World’s Biggest Store. 911 Memorial Site/One World Trade Centre

One of the highlights of my trip was bumping into Dame Meg Taylor and having a brief chat with her within the corridors of the UN Building. Dame Meg Taylor is the current Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum and is based in Fiji. A fellow Papua New Guinean who was former Ambassador to USA, Mexico and Canada based in Washington.



Another highlight was meeting with the Permanent Representative of PNG to the UN, Ambassador Max Rai and his team and having the opportunity to attend sessions the Ambassador was giving a statement and also having coffee and photo session at their office in New York.



This experience is one that will be with me for a long while. I felt inspired, empowered, intrigued, wanting and longing to do more even though more has been done, it felt more is never enough with issues that are global and are affecting the vulnerable members of our community. Each session was different and intriguing and I could talk about it all day long and write pages and pages but the one thing I came away with is no NGO or organization will achieve anything if working in isolation. Collaboration and complementing each other is the only way to achieve results. Meaningful partnership with a purpose driven and likeminded people passionate for the cause. Issues dealing with people are not for the faint hearted and one must have that burning desire and purpose within to do more and be the champion for change. All countries that have shared their experiences and success stories have encouraged me however not every country can have the same story as there are certain factors such as governments and their policies, legislations and bodies governing it, economic situations of counties are different, then we have cultures, geographical location, climate, representation of women, this are all contributing factors that affect each one of us but with the SDGs as set guidelines and with the determination to experience similar success stories, people and organizations need to collaborate and work together.

Someone asked me if I would do it again- Most definitely I said but after 3-5 years when I can come back with some success stories to share after being inspired by countries like Zimbabwe, Caribbean, Taiwan, Iceland..

I was blessed with this scholarship and feel the need to do more and do my best and share this experience with other in my country, community and federation. I cannot thank the SISWP Federation enough for this wonderful experience you have given me.

Few Pics from my Trip:



Soroptimists from Mid-Western Region-SI Americas



Networking isn't with Soroptimists only, met the founder of Indigenous Women in Mining & Resource, Australia- Ms. Florence Drummond

The Rockefeller 67th Floor with Empire State Building behind



Empire State Building-Lobby

