

Commission on the Status of Women 60

Report by Margaret Nijhuis

Part I March 16, 2016

On March 16, Poughkeepsie AAUW had a contingent of 9 members and 4 non-members attending a great variety of events running parallel to the Commission on the Status of Women meeting at the UN. Some came by train and other by car but we all converged on the National AAUW event "Solving the Equation for Gender Equality: Increasing Education and Decreasing Violence."

"Supporting Refugee Girls in Conflict and Migration with Technology" was my first session. This reported on and discussed the technology that would most benefit the girls as to safety and health as well as the problems of language and accessibility. One of the sponsors was AAUW and our National president was in the audience.

"Women and Girls at the Center for Growth and Sustainable Development" was presented by medical doctors from Nigeria. The discussion centered on the HPV (Human Papillomavirus) and its connection to cervical cancer as well as the problems of energy supply in providing health care. Cervical Cancer effects 80,000 people in Africa and 14,000 in Nigeria alone. Their problem in giving the HPV vaccine is not parental permission that we experience here in the US but the money to pay for the vaccine. The lack of reliable source of energy means that power can be lost in the middle of an operation or the storage of drugs is compromised.

The 12:30 session "Solving the Equation for Gender Equality: Increasing Education and Decreasing Violence," was attending by our entire group. We took our picture with the National President, Patricia Ho. The presenters had all been recipients of an AAUW Fellowship. It was wonderful to see our contributions at work. Claire Thomas, explained her work though the Safe Passage Project of the NY Law School to assist unaccompanied children facing removal from the US. Chiedza Mufunde from Zimbabwe told her personal story of obtaining an education instead of having children at a very early age. Jessie Duncan shared her work at the UN and their efforts to prevent violence against women.

The last session for the day "Protect Our Girls: Sexualization, Exploitation & the Media," was started by a performance from "Girls Be Heard," a group that creates theater to challenge the status quo. It was followed by presentations from UNICEF's End Trafficking and Together For Girls as well as the Executive Director and Artistic Director from Girls Be Heard. The session ended with a lively Q&A.

Part II March 21, 2016

Three of us returned to CSW on March 21, primarily to attend the session organized and moderated by Poughkeepsie Branch member, Geeta Desai.

Prior to that session we attended "Empowering Women and Men to Prevent Violence and Promote Health – Together." This session was presented by EngenderHealth. An organization that presents training workshops to prevent HIV and violence by working with both genders. "True social change only by working with both gender." There were 3 reports given of training sessions. One "Intimate Partner Violence in Ethiopia" offered the workshop at coffee ceremonies and had men and women in separate

groups and men and women together. The outcomes were surprising and seemed to improve the relationship.

The second was in Rwanda “Men Care” and focused on fatherhood and equal care with wives. In an initial survey, 33% experienced physical violence in the last 6 months. They reported changing norms for both men and women.

The last workshop was “Gender Matters” and was presented to adolescent males in the US. The effort was to reduce pregnancy, reduce STI and reduce violence. They have a GenM curriculum.

In these studies the groups were paid to participate. In Ethiopia it was salt, sugar and soap. It was suggested that this training be embedded in health training and professional training so that the cost would not be so high. EngenderHealth has a website www.engenderhealth.org that explores these workshops and gives the results of these and their many other projects.

Our final session we attended was “Our Bodies are not Public Property: End Sexual Harassment of Women and Girls in Public Spaces with Advocacy and Partnerships.” Geeta Desai, member of Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW, was the organizer and moderator of this event for Women Graduates – USA. Also taking part was the Akshara Women’s Center of Mumbai, India; The Permanent Mission of India to the UN, the Mid-Hudson Hindu Samaj and the Girls for Gender Equity – USA. The focus was on street harassment of women and girls in India and other countries. The speakers were all experts in their fields and had much experience in making an effort to improve conditions with cooperation with other groups and organizations.

This was a case of “saving the best for last.” The organization of the event (from visual to speakers) was excellent. It left me with the resolve to attend again next year.