Happy International Women’s Day!

Molly Gerke and I, IPA Volunteers, were privileged to attend the United Nation’s observance of International Women’s Day 2018, held in the General Assembly Hall. The theme, “The Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women’s lives”, is an echo of the theme of this week’s 62nd Commission on the Status of Women.

There were many speakers including the UN’s Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Hollywood star Reece Witherspoon and key note speaker Monica Ramirez of World Without Exploitation - together demanding equal rights for women around the globe.

A particular highlight was hearing the first female Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop address the room, showcasing her three-pillared approach for implementing change in her role:

1. Providing programs that enable more women to take part in the economy of their nation (particularly referring to Australia’s relationship with the Pacific Island nations);
2. Engage more women in leadership positions (the current global statistic of women in politics sits at 23%); and
3. Providing programs to tackle domestic and gender-based violence.

As a fellow Australian, I was inspired to see one of our leader’s transforming energy into action through her commitment to change and reflecting on this progress is another purpose of International Women’s Day.

H.E. Ms. Geraldine Byrne Nanson (Ireland), Chair of CSW62, advocated that the impending Commission will not accept the status quo, and “as policy makers, we should capitalize on this moment and realize transformational changes.”

The keynote speech from Monica Ramirez, aimed to shine a light on the farm worker women – vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and violence in the
agriculture industry. Monica wants this group of women to remain a focus, as rural women continue to lag behind every gender and development indicator. Similarly, Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, stressed that rural women must not be invisible and we must ensure that the pendulum swings only one way, and never back.

The message for the day was simple and to the heart of Sustainable Development Goal number 5: Gender Equality. We cannot expect to achieve the SDGs and transform our world if half of the population is denied both rights and opportunities. Investing in and empowering women is the most effective way to lift communities, companies and countries. It’s a cause that is bigger than any one of us, and for the benefit of every one of us.

We must continue to accelerate the end to all forms of discrimination against women because the #TimeIsNow for universal gender equality.

Submitted by Amber Atkinson