UN Volunteer experience with IPA

This week marks the end of my time volunteering for IPA at the United Nations (UN). As the goodbyes start to trickle in, I realise how incredible this experience has been and how much I am going to miss volunteering for IPA, the UN and New York City. Having the opportunity to both work and live with Presentation Sisters has truly been a blessing. Being surrounded by such inspirational and strong women has taught me so many things and fostered a personal growth in me that I will forever be grateful for.

The past four months can certainly not be described as monotonous. The have been full to the brim with office activities, NGO committees, UN Commissions and events, learning, networking, advocacy and fun. In fact, one of my favourite things about this volunteer position was that I could be involved in so many different types of tasks and events whilst still having a focus on certain thematic groups. This was great because it allowed me learn about areas I had not previously had much exposure to as well as interact in those areas in which I have.

Highlights

One aspect of IPA’s work at the UN I particularly enjoyed was attending and being part of the NGO committees. Over the four months I had the opportunity to attend and interact with the following committees on a regular basis:

- NGO Committee on Social Development
- NGO Committee on Migration
- NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Religious at the UN (Run)
- NGO Committee on Financing For Development

Although all very different in theme and often programme I found these committee meetings a great place to learn, network and over time have input. Providing a platform where likeminded people gather to analyse and act on various issues was always encouraging to be part of. I can only hope that my small contributions on behalf of IPA were of as much value as I place on the things I learnt at these meetings.

Apart from attending the various NGO committee meetings and office tasks, I had the pleasure of attending three commissions: The 56th Commission on Social Development (CSocD56), the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) and the 51st Commission on Population and Development (CPD51). As well as three forums: The 7th ECOSOC Youth forum, the 17th United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII17) and the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development.

Having the opportunity to present at side events at both the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) and the 56th commission on Social Development (CSocD56) on topics that are very close to my heart, was without a doubt a personal highlight. Being able to tell the stories of the women and their communities that initially sparked my interest in social justice wearing a Vanuatu “mumma dress” was an experience with no comparison. Moreover, being surrounded by such high profiled and influential panellists is something I will treasure forever. Sitting on a panel next to Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (UN Women, executive director) by far one of the most intimidating and surreal experiences of my life. It was a moment I will never forget, a life moment that will be hard to beat.
Among the amazing events I was able to attend was the International Women’s Day event held at UNHQ. I can honestly say this was among the best events I have ever attended. As well as the phenomenal speakers and performers the atmosphere of this event was like nothing I’ve ever experienced. There was such a sense of pride of being a woman. It was truly empowering. It was also here that I got to see two of my idols; Reese Witherspoon, actor and women’s and children’s advocate and Julie Bishop, Australian foreign affairs minister.

As well as the many personal highlights I have also been humbled to part of the various achievements IPA has had during my time here. On Nano’s 300th anniversary, this year has, and continues to be a big one for presentation people globally. IPA’s UN office was no exception to this. As well as contributing to various NGO committees in meaningful ways and producing organisational materials IPA has already this year been involved in side events at CSocD56, CSW62 and the 17th Permeant Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII17). Bring a vast range of grassroots voices and perspectives to the UN, all of whom were well received, IPA at the UN is truly doing a fantastic job of sharing Nano’s charism on an international platform.

Final thoughts

Over the last four months I’ve experienced things I could never have dreamt of. My ideas and perspectives have been challenged and hence evolved. I’ve been invited and pushed to achieve things I might have previously considered out of my reach, and I have been welcomed and inspired by countless fantastic people. My time with IPA and the memories, friends and achievements it has enabled me to make has surely been one of my most enriching experiences so far.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the people that have supported me in both getting here and whilst I’ve been here. It has truly been a joy to work with such a wonderful organisation and all who I have met through it. I would like to especially thank Sisters Noreen, Fran, Elaine and Mary-Catherine, who shared their home and their hearts, never failing to make me feel welcome and at home. Sr Gabrielle Morgan for making this all possible and last but certainly not least Elsa and Amber for their guidance and friendship. Working with such women made coming to work every day a joy and for that I am forever grateful.

Upon reflection, one idea that I have found to be reinforced time and time again during my stay in NYC is the link between community and responsibility. Together they play a paramount role in shaping not only our immediate physical, social and mental environment but that of the whole world. As said so well by Martin Hawes, “Each of us bears a share of responsibility for our communities, and hence for the world as a whole … Everything we do, however small, affects the world around us.”

Going forward I hope to carry this awareness and encourage other to do so as well. By doing this I hope to promote both Nanos charism, and all the positive notions such as the 2030 agenda I have learn so much about during my time here. This experience, along with having Elsa as a passionate mentor has further encouraged me in my mission to give voice to those who may not be currently be heard. I hope to continue being involved in work that translates things happening at the community and grass roots level to places like the UN, as I believe this is integral in changing todays narrative into one based on equality.
It is most certainly with a heavy heart that I move to the next stage of my life. However, it is with an incredibly full one that I enter my “new world” with these experiences, lifelong connections, and a deepened knowledge of what it means to have and spread the charism of Nano. I hope in some way I can continue to give back to the IPA community in a meaningful way as this experience has given me more than I could have ever hoped for.

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