

U.N. Commission on the Status of Women

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Last month, I was privileged to yet again spend ten days with my global sisters in the Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF) program. Following our immersion in Cambodia in the fall, we reconvened in New York for the United Nations 70th Commission on the Status of Women.



The contrast between the two experiences was stark: in Siem Reap, we were in close conversation with local people still working through the repercussions of a long civil war and genocide and taking action to deal with climate change and address communal needs. In Manhattan and at the UN, we experienced the frenetic pace of both urban life and the global scale of politics and changemaking with its possibilities and challenges. I attended sessions that included grassroots activists from Taiwan; students from North Carolina, Ukraine, and Iran; business owners in the Dominican Republic; and intergenerational leaders advancing solidarity for women and girls to name just a few. We also attended and took note of several religious congregations, such as the Loretto Community, Sisters of St. Joseph, and Good Shepherd sisters, who brought students to the commission and hosted side events featuring the crucial work of faith-based communities on women's issues, particularly around migration.

One liminal moment for me as an American happened on the second day of the commission. We learned that United States had been the only "No" vote on adopting the "agreed conclusions" of the commission, a document that sets global standards for

gender equity with recommendations for governments and NGOs as an outcome of the annual gathering. Attending a briefing to better understand what that meant, I learned that typically these conclusions are adopted by consensus by all the member nations, and to even force a vote was a signal that the U.S. saw issues in the document they could in no way condone. Those issues, it turns out, were “ambiguous language promoting gender ideology,” sexual and reproductive health commitments, and “censorship language on regulating artificial intelligence.” It wasn’t the first time I felt embarrassed on behalf of my citizenship or witnessed U.S. officials acting against gender equality and access to justice, but it was a stark reminder of how important our Mercy voices are in this moment as we speak out for women and all our Critical Concerns.

I continue to learn so much from participating in this fellowship with women from across the Mercy world, including our own Sister Aura Matalines of the Philippines, Tatiana Diaz of Gwynedd Mercy University, and Dr. Saska Sertimer of Guyana. I’m inspired by the ministries in Aotearoa (i.e., New Zealand) and Tonga, in Ireland and Kenya, and across the Philippines. And thanks to these experiences and relationships, I am more committed than ever to a truly global Mercy perspective serving those made poor and addressing the root causes of what New Yorker Dorothy Day coined “our filthy rotten system.” From the global to the grassroots, it’s so clear that Mercy is everywhere, infusing values of justice and community towards a better world for all.

