



Gender Equality on a global stage

CSW61 - NCOSS Report



CSW61

In March, NCOSS attended the 61st UN Commission on the Status of Women. We were proud to take a strong delegation of our CEO, DCEO and representatives from our Young Women's Advisory Panel thanks to our sponsors [HESTA](#) and [Settlement Services International](#) and our partner [National Association of Community Legal Centres](#).

The Commission on the Status of Women brings together UN member states to address the disadvantage faced by women and girls across the globe. It is a place where thousands of women converge to share ideas, innovative solutions, to network and connect across nations. Importantly it also produces a set of [Agreed Conclusions](#) which nations negotiate and sign on to. These Agreed Conclusions outline commitments to principles to advance gender equality across the globe.

Delegations to CSW include government representative; but also the opportunity for civil society organisations and representatives to engage.

The work of CSW is framed each year by a number of themes to focus and prioritise negotiations and ideas. CSW61 focused on:

- Priority theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work
- Review theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, from the [58th session](#) of the CSW
- Emerging issue /Focus area: The empowerment of Indigenous women

Why is CSW important?

Firstly CSW is an advocacy space. It is a space to progress women and girl's right on a global stage. A space for our government and civil society delegation to lobby other nations to recognise and address the systemic disadvantage that women and girls face across their life cycle. But it is also an opportunity to push these issues with our own government. To encourage them to step up and take a lead; and to acknowledge the areas where we still have a long way to go on the home front.

It is a phenomenal space for networking to connect to government, business, trade unions, academia and of course feminist organisations across the world and share ideas, innovation and best practice. It provides the opportunity to hear about what is working in other nations, how they are tackling the problems we all face in new and different ways and how we can all work better together to deliver the best outcomes for women and girls

NCOSS Delegation

Tracy Howe – NCOSS CEO

Tracy Howe is Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS).

Tracy is a legally trained advocate with a commitment to human rights, addressing community disadvantage and gender inequality. Previously, Tracy has worked in both government and non-government settings, including with Domestic Violence NSW as Chief Executive Officer and as a senior legal advisor in Federal government.



Tracy currently sits on the NSW Government's Social Impact Investment Expert Advisory Group and is appointed to the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Council, the NSW Premier's Council on Homelessness and was the NSW non-government representative on the National Plan Implementation Panel for the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. Previously, Tracy was a delegate with the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the 57th and 58th sessions held at the United Nations in New York.

In February 2015, Tracy won the Agenda Setter Award at the NAB Women's Agenda Leadership Awards. In May 2015, Tracy was appointed to the Prime Minister's COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women. Tracy is also an Ambassador of the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women and in December 2015 completed a Certificate in Making Your Organisation Innovative at the Judge Business School, Cambridge University.

In August 2016, Tracy was appointed to the NSW Council for Women's Economic Opportunity (CWEO).

Tracy holds degrees in Gender Studies and Law.

Melanie Fernandez – NCOSS Deputy CEO

Melanie Fernandez is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS).

Melanie is an advocate and activist who is committed to human rights, gender equality and bringing about long term change to address disadvantage. Grounded in her father's experience as a refugee; Melanie is deeply passionate about challenges facing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, migrant and refugee communities.

Melanie has worked in leadership roles in grassroots, membership-based and NGO organisations. Melanie has previously been the Chair of the Women's Electoral Lobby Australia, co-founding member of F Collective, and Steering Committee member of Equality Rights Alliance.



Melanie currently sits on the Board of Reproductive Choice Australia and the NSW Juvenile Justice Advisory Council. Melanie holds a degree in Gender Studies.

Keira Jenkins – Youth Delegate, NCOSS Young Women’s Advisory Panel

Keira is a young Gamilaroi woman from Moree, north western NSW. She is a journalist and photographer with the Koori Mail newspaper based in Lismore on the north coast. Keira has a passion for storytelling and holds a Bachelor of Communications (Journalism). She is also currently studying a Diploma of Languages and Cultures. Keira is a member of both the NCOSS Seven Sister’s Aboriginal Women’s Panel as well as the Young Women’s Advisory Panel.



Harpreet Dhillon – Youth Delegate, NCOSS Young Women’s Advisory Panel

Harpreet Dhillon is from a CALD family and as well as being a panel member on the NCOSS Young Women’s Advisory Panel she is also an ambassador for Girl Guides Australia, and was a member of their 2016 Advisory Panel. She is currently completing her year twelve studies and plans to attend university in 2018.

At 17, Harpreet was the youngest Australian delegate to attend CSW61.

Settlement Services sponsored delegate.



Lauren Nicholls – Youth Delegate, NCOSS Young Women’s Advisory Panel

Lauren is a Women's Officer for the Women's Collective at Western Sydney University where she is studying a double Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work and Applied Leadership and Critical Thinking, while also holding a part time role as Youth Worker at LEAP Social Services in Western Sydney. She holds multiple volunteer positions including Student Representative at Parramatta Student Campus Council and Events and Communications Coordinator at the Social and Community Workers Western Sydney.

HESTA sponsored delegate



The role of NCOSS

Though new to this space, NCOSS punched well above our weight and played a key role in the Australian delegation.

Co-hosted Side event

NCOSS co-hosted a side event with the Australian Minister for Women and the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian governments – focusing on Indigenous women’s economic empowerment.

The standing room only event was opened by NCOSS CEO, Tracy Howe and the Minister for Women, Michaelia Cash, delivered an opening address.

The inspiring panel of Indigenous women included Canada’s Minister for Tourism and Culture, the Hon. Jeanie Dendys, MLA; Ms Helen Potiki, Director of Policy, New Zealand’s Ministry for Women; Ms Leann Wilson, Bidjara and Kara/Kara women, Executive Director Regional Economic Solutions, Indigenous Fellow of Bond University and member of the Australian Government’s official delegation to CSW61; and Keira Jenkins, Gamillaroi woman and NCOSS Youth Delegate.

The panel shared their stories, experience and expertise focusing on the importance of self-determination and self-governing communities.



Negotiations of Agreed Conclusions

The NCOSS team supported negotiations, providing the government Civil Society representatives with draft language for the Agreed Conclusions and working with the National Women's Alliances representatives to coordinate the civil society position, red line issues and supporting arguments. Along with the [National Women's Alliances](#) and [International Women's Development Agency](#) members, we represented Australia in the Women's Rights Caucus, a network of leading feminist organisation who coordinate civil society support and responses for the negotiations.



Key issues

Regressive negotiating environment and shrinking civil society space

- The final text of the Agreed Conclusions highlights the increasingly restrictive and regressive space that CSW and the negotiations environment have become. Increasingly the negotiations and the document itself do not make progress; but rather the contest is to hold the line and not slide backwards in the finally agreed language.
- Language of human rights was a point of contention during the negotiations. Positively, the final text draws links to human rights instruments. However, language and States obligations for compliance have been watered down to considering implementation rather than obligations. The final text also does not go far enough in the framing of the relationship to strong previous commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.
- This year's negotiations saw not only the challenge to hold the line on essential human rights issues; but also significantly we witnessed the shrinking space for civil society. Not only in the document, but also in the space and engagement of these vital voices. This included attempts to limit Civil Society Organisations access to the UN building after hours and to negotiation spaces - something that has not occurred in previous years.
- References to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) were not secured in the final text, despite the key role these institutions play in championing gender equality and progressing women's economic empowerment. It was positive to see Australia take a lead to progress this issue, despite the end result.

Intersectionality

- Securing additional text recognising the 'multiple' and 'intersecting' forms of discrimination that different groups of women experience was vital; as was text referencing different groups of marginalised women. The recognition that all women do not start on an equal footing and that many women may experience, not only multiple types of discrimination, but that these intersect and compound is crucial to ensure no women and girls are left behind.



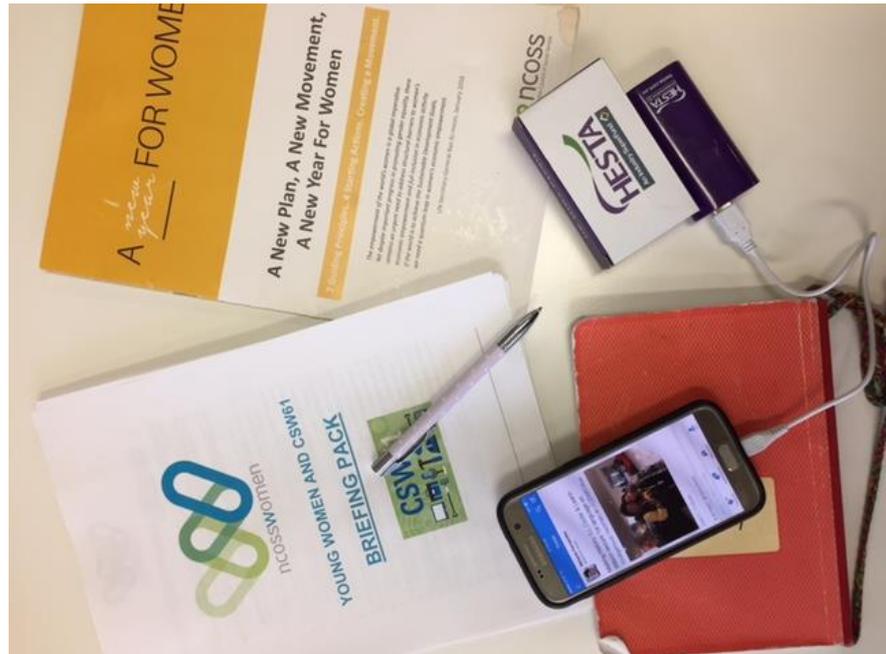
- A big win was securing the most substantial Indigenous language seen in a CSW document, including acknowledging the importance of ancestral knowledge and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The shaping of the draft text that Australia proposed was contributed to by NCOSS team, including youth delegate Keira Jenkins. However, it was disappointing to see the strong language Australia proposed of 'prior, free and informed consent' and strong references to 'leadership' removed in the final draft.
- It was disappointing that recognition of diversity was limited in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) as this language was not included.
- Recognising the cultural and linguistic diversity of women and girls and particularly the experience of migrant and refugee women and their vulnerability as workers was central in progressing the economic empowerment of women.

Economic empowerment

- It was positive to secure recognition of the vital role of the International Labour Organization, which was a contentious and highly negotiated issue; but is crucial in progressing women's economic empowerment.
- Securing references to 'decent work' was a significant step; but disappointing to see 'living wage' missing from the text. This is a significant concern when recognising the gendered nature of poverty and the widening gap between set 'minimum' wages and the reality of what constitutes a living wage today.
- The text does not adequately address issues of unpaid care and continues to fall into a traditional and binary understanding of gender roles and families, which was a highly contested site.
- Language addressing gender-based occupational segregation was secured calling on governments to eliminate this segregation and recognising both the need to create

pathways for women into male dominated industries and to value work that is predominantly undertaken by women.

- It was significant to see inclusion of language on gender responsive budgeting, though this was highly contested in negotiations.
- It is questionable whether the text deals adequately with the theme of women's economic empowerment in the changing nature of work as key topics such as technology, the care economy and work/life balance are not dealt with sufficiently.



- The link of gender-based violence to economic empowerment was a key connection.

Sexual and reproductive health rights

- One of the most highly contested areas was wording to provide for women and girls sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Disappointingly the agreed conclusions had extremely weak language on SRHR and these rights were not recognised as intrinsically linked to women's economic empowerment, their economic and work opportunities and outcomes.

Climate Change

- For the first time language on Climate Change included a 'just transition' recognising the equality lens that needs to be brought to this area.

Hosted Parallel events

NCOSS hosted two parallel events as part of the NGO CSW Forum.

A New Plan, A New Movement- Towards national action on women's economic empowerment in Australia

This dynamic in conversation, brought together leaders of the Australian women's movement. Facilitated by our partner [apolitical](#), it explored the cross-sector movement for change created by the New Year for Women project. The panel unpacked the New Year for Women roadmap for change to ensure women and girls' economic empowerment throughout their life cycle.

The panel included apolitical co-founder and Chairperson, Lisa Witter, NCOSS CEO, Tracy Howe, NCOSS Youth Delegate, Keira Jenkins, and National Women's Alliance representative, Hannah Gissane.

Discussion focused on: learning from Indigenous communities and leaders, finding common ground with business and government, voices of young leaders, and targeted and innovative solution for marginalised women and girls.

Economic Empowerment Campaign Strategy Workshop & Skill Share

NCOSS ran an interactive skill share on campaigning – sharing case studies and learnings on how to win and campaign effectively. It explored case studies of the *Pay Up!* – Equal Work, Equal Pay campaign, tools and strategies for building alliances with non-traditional partners, developing campaign strategy and participants sharing insights, experience and testing ideas.



Future Leaders: Youth Delegates

NCOSS lead a strong delegation with powerful and inspiring voices of young women and future leaders. Our incredible NCOSS youth delegates included: Keira Jenkins, a young Gamilaroi woman from regional NSW; Harpreet Dhillon, a 17 year old Indian woman who is the first of her family to have the opportunity to go on to University and who was the youngest Australian delegate at CSW; and Lauren Nicholls, from Western Sydney who is the Convenor of Western Sydney University Women's Collective.

These women participated in the Youth Forum, side and parallel events, daily Australian government briefings, wrote daily blogs and ensured that young women and girls issues were raised and on the agenda.

Key learnings and reflections from future leaders:

Kiera Jenkins

The best way to describe the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is with a blizzard. From the literal blizzard that hit New York, keeping us shut in our rooms for a day, to the flurry of excitement, people and ideas that was the CSW.

In all honesty, turning up to the United Nations (UN) on the first day, I was lost, there was a whirring in my stomach of 'oh, we're here' after all those weeks of preparation. But just like experiencing your first blizzard, I don't think any amount of research, preparation or briefings could have helped me brace for what was coming next. I was swept into room after room, bouncing from panel to panel, swimming in a sea of faces that I did not recognise, and speaking a multitude of languages that I could not understand.



Even when I stood still, there was so much going on around me that I felt fidgety. Then it was my turn to speak on the first panel that NCOSS ran with the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian delegations, about the empowerment of Indigenous women. I was in the eye of the storm, I could feel eyes on me, and I could hear the murmur of voices as I sat at the front, preparing myself for what was to come next. I looked at the women I was sitting with. My fellow Australian, Leann Wilson who is wise, incredible, and, I think, one of the most inspiring and influential women I have ever met. To my other side was the Australian Minister for Women, the Canadian Minister for Culture and Tourism, the New Zealand Minister for Women, and the chief executive of New Zealand's refugee network.

I felt so small next to all these powerful, influential women. This was the biggest opportunity I had ever had in my life. I heard my name, and not much else, and when I started to speak, the words were

ringing in my ears and I couldn't understand them. When I stopped speaking, I had the sinking feeling that I had done something wrong. I sat in fear of what was to come.

But when the noise started I realised people were congratulating me, the eye had passed and it wasn't so bad.

Returning home, things were quiet. I had just done this amazing thing that had changed my life, and while obviously my family and friends held pride in their heart for me, nothing had really changed.

It's a strange feeling, after a storm, when things have suddenly gone quiet and things are relatively back to normal, but you know that your life has changed.

Even reading the document at the end of it all, I realised the room where Government representatives do their negotiating, it's like a bunker, a bit sheltered from all the bustling in the halls. While the conclusions at the end do reflect what was talked about, I feel that they are just the tip of the iceberg of all the incredible ideas that were floating around that building, and perhaps one day that will be reflected in the document that comes out at the end of the blizzard that is CSW.

Lauren Stanley

My number one take away from attending the 61st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) was realizing the important role of civil society, and women supporting women in change making.

CSW61 held both side events (official events that were run inside the UN building, with government collaboration) and parallel events (civil society based events that were affiliated with the CSW, run in venues close to, but outside the UN building).



The side events that I attended, whilst interesting, were not ground breaking; often speaking to government processes or programs promoting gender equity. The parallel events however, spoke of women all over the world, working together and creating real grass roots change.

For me, experiencing those sessions really drove home the importance of lived experience, people working together to create their own change, and that real social change doesn't have to be pushed by governments for it to work. I see this as important because so many people, including myself speak of feeling too small, and having too little influence to create a positive impact on the world around them, but there were so many stories told at these side events that showed how 'ordinary' women could band together to create extraordinary change.

I would like to thank a few people for providing me with this incredible opportunity. Firstly to all the wonderful people at NCOSS who gave me the opportunity to attend, made sure that we were prepared, and supported us throughout the experience. Secondly to HESTA, who generously sponsored me to attend the CSW61, without which I likely would not have been able to attend. Lastly, I would like to thank Keira and Harpreet for being continual sources of inspiration, enthusiasm, and laughter.

Harpreet Dhillon

I'm so thankful to Settlement Services International (SSI) for giving me the opportunity to attend the 61st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61). A two-week long summit where both women and men came from all over the world, from all kinds of organisations. To work together as one, so that we can be a step closer to achieving gender equality.



I was the youngest member of the Australian delegation and the only the one from a Cultural and Linguistic Diverse (CALD) background. I didn't let this scare or stop me from rising my voice and to bringing to attention the issues faced by the youth and CALD communities in Australia.

During my experience at CSW I heard from inspiring speakers including the UN Secretary General, the UN Deputy Secretary General, a number of United Nation's Executive Directors, as well as from people from all over the world. It was an amazing experience. However, I was also alarmed when hearing of the troubling statistics - such as it'll take 170 years to achieve gender equality internationally, and that there are around 100 million girls missing in the world. I heard the personal stories of these statistics, and listened to survivor stories of human trafficking and refugee survivors from Syria, Lebanon, Greece and North Korea as well as the issues faced by indigenous women around the world. There wasn't a moment where I didn't feel emotional and inspired by the women at CSW.

On a daily basis I brought these stories, statistics and experiences to the Australian government and civil society and made sure they were included in discussions. Along with Keira and Lauren we also worked to include these issues as part of the Australian Youth Forum Declaration.

Attending CSW, as well as all my roles as an advocate and youth representative have helped me realise the power that having a voice, and sharing it with people, can have. By gathering a group of people from all different places, with all different experiences we can make real change. We all share a similar passion; a passion for change, gender equity and intergenerational equity.

I myself believe that going forward Australia is one of the leading countries for multiculturalism. While this is positive, it also scares me as issues such as racism and discrimination occur every day. Often I've been the youngest or the only non-white girl in a room. This upsets me as we need to have more representatives from every culture. We need to work together and ensure that we have every voice of Australia represented so we all can share in shaping decisions that affect our world.

The world truly needs more youth aged speakers. Thank you to SSI for sponsoring me to have this incredible opportunity, to share my voice with the world and to share it with Australia.



Youth Forum

Youth Forum Day 1

As part of CSW61 the Young Women attended the 2 day CSW Youth Forum - along with 750 other activists and advocates from around the world.

The Youth Forum is an opportunity for young people to contribute to the work areas of CSW. This includes interactive sessions and collaborative discussions on a number of areas to develop recommendations to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The outcomes are presented by Youth representatives to UN bodies, governments and civil society.

Here are the reflections of the young women from these two days:

Keira Jenkins

Why do people have to lose their identity to be economically empowered? That was the question asked at the CSW61 youth forum Indigenous women's empowerment breakout session. To me, that question was absolutely ground-breaking, and while I can't speak for the other women in the room I felt an air of agreement amongst us all. Many of the women, including myself no longer live in our traditional lands, mostly we were following education and opportunities. Many of us had lost language and traditions and some like myself felt the disconnect that comes with growing up away from the lands of your ancestors. But why is it that we must either fall behind socially and economically or leave our culture behind? That, we agreed, was not fair and opportunities for women in Indigenous communities need to be more prevalent. That discussion and meeting the wonderful Indigenous women from around the world was definitely the highlight of day one of the youth forum. Very inspiring.

Lauren Stanley

I feel as though for a Youth Forum, today I listened to a lot of people over 25. As a young person, I am far too used to being talked at, and being told by older people about my own experiences. About how we as Youth are largely voiceless, and how innovators in many different spaces are so kind as to give us hapless Youth a platform, upon which we may vocalise our tiny voices.

I have an issue with the word voiceless - nobody is voiceless, however many people are unheard, and their opinions not given credence. The Youth, and in particular, young women are not voiceless, we are unheard. Young women are doing a lot of amazing things in this world at present - and while it was interesting to hear from older people, this is a youth conference, and I want to hear young women talking about themselves and their lives, rather than older people talking about their contribution to the plight of the youth.

I attended the breakout session which pertained to addressing violence against women. It was facilitated largely by delegates from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. During such, WAGGGS delegates from Uganda and Argentina ran an activity together, in a fabulous display of how conferences such as these encourage the collaboration of people across continents. Within this session we were encouraged to collaborate and agree on two issues which would be combined into the collaborations of other breakout groups and eventually presented to

be negotiated into the CSW gender equity document. An interesting part of this process was that each group within our breakout session was largely on the same page in terms of the big issues, despite hailing from all proverbial corners of the globe. Gender/sex education and law reform - every group suggested the former, and many the latter, and the diverse views and experiences really added to the suggestions of wording and foci; showing how working together across 1 intersections covers so many more aspects of an issue than a homogenous group could.

Harpreet Dhillon

On the first day of the United Nations Youth Forum, I attended the Refugee and Migration thematic session. There, thanks to my sponsorship from Settlement Services International, I brought the topic of discrimination to the panel discussion and encouraged the outcomes of the discussion to be included in recommendations for CSW61.

There were also discussions around mental health and how refugees don't have a voice. Those who were part of the panel talked about their experiences as an activist / volunteer for human rights initiatives in countries of conflict. But issues of discrimination that occur when refugees migrate to another country weren't being addressed. As an advocate for both Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people and Youth, I have had opportunities to meet and work with young refugees from both Syria and Iran - learning about their stories in their home country but also their experiences in Australia. I was disheartened not only to hear the trauma they face but also how people didn't treat them as humans. I heard how people in Australia were telling them to go back to where they came from, especially when wearing a hijab.

This isn't right, these people, like us, have a journey and a story.

For us to be bystanders, we make it worse, as it makes refugees feel they are alone and that they aren't allowed into our 'multicultural Australia'. Yet as a 17-year-old Australian born girl but with brown Indian skin I care very much for their wellbeing as well as about empowering them to have the best future possible.

If we show them that we care, not so much through charity but by listening to them, we can create a bond / friendship with them, we can empower them to make a difference as well as assisting them to aid others and creating both an intergenerational and butterfly effect. This can use their stories to empower others. We need to stop telling ourselves they don't have a voice, they do have a voice, it's just that many of us don't listen. These people are not a statistic, each and every one of them is a human being. At the end of the day we are all part of one race and that is the human race. Thank you for taking the time to read.

Youth Forum Day 2

Keira Jenkins

I feel like an 11 year old showed up the whole UN today. Eleven year old Elizabeth is part of a delegation of young people working to end child marriage. The leader of her delegation (who is an adult) was speaking on a panel on working intergenerationally within the gender equality movement, this afternoon when she asked the young girl to sit at the panel with her. This was, she said, a goal for young Elizabeth. And when she did take up the microphone, that young girl excelled! She spoke the wisest words I think I heard all day!

"Love is like a donut," she said. "It is only valid if you share it. If you don't want to eat it or share it, what's the point of having it in your hands?"

Gorgeous. Wise. And most importantly she embodied the need to involve young people in the gender equality movement.

On intersectionality Elizabeth said something that has resonated with me:

"Race, culture, gender, age, traditions - all those words that describe human beings - you can look them up in a dictionary but in reality they don't mean one single thing."

Wow. Just wow. Elizabeth, I'm sure we'll be hearing some great things from you in the future.

Lauren Stanley

From the second day of the CSW Youth Forum what stood out to me most was the second breakout session which was about using photography for social justice. I was less struck by the content (which was actually very interesting) and more so by the manner of the presenter Carlos Saavedra. This weekend we heard a lot of talk about 'holding space for women' or 'making space for young women' like it is that person's space to occupy. This sort of discourse, I think, just reinforces the status quo, its lip service from those which hold the power, without ever actually giving up the space that you shouldn't have been in, in the first place. This also cuts across all intersections, not just gender; you see it in older people talking about including younger generations, and state bodies touting their plans for achieving more equitable distribution of wealth and advantage across socio-economic, and cultural divisions.

The reason that Saavedra was so memorable was because he appeared to genuinely accept, and explain what was and what was not his space, with no pretence and expecting no congratulations for stepping away. The entire presentation appeared to be held together by a genuine respect for the strength of women in adverse conditions; and was devoid of exclamations which would make one find the artist's thoughts and feelings instead of those of the women's in his work. I think that a great deal of women would agree that dialogue about sharing space, from those who occupy it rarely seems to be genuine. And in this presentation it made all the difference.

Harpreet Dhillon

On the second day of the United Nations Youth Forum, what stood out for me were both the CSW workshops; 'HERSTORY – Her Voice. Our Future' and a workshop on the importance of young women in business/ as entrepreneurs creating businesses.

The first workshop, HERSTORY affected me personally as the main message they communicated is to 'use your story to ignite global change'. For me my journey of advocating began after fully overcoming the difficulties I faced growing up - including challenges I've faced and conquered.

I felt instead of staying in my bedroom and crying about it, I needed to get up and protect anyone who may experience similar experiences or those who have been affected. I wanted to make sure they had as much of a support base as I did and hopefully be able to inspire them to turn the dark experience into something that they could look upon and instead say that they're strong and that they're a survivor.

During the workshop I learnt how powerful a personal narrative can be, starting with focusing on your strengths followed by how much your story can reflect upon others, the mirror and window effect, where your story can be a 'mirror' that reflects in other stories. The story can be a 'window' where others or even yourself can learn from the experiences and can create a mentorship, which is important as it can allow you to grow and share the story for others to pass on the effect.

They then ask us to draw a Heart Map. A Heart Map can be the foundation to your story or can help you to think about how roles and relationships tie us to others as well as to realise what can make you unique as an individual.

For my heart I included:

"I'm a survivor, I'm a representative for the CALD community, I am 17, I am the first woman in my family to finish school and be able to go to university, I am an Australian, I am an Indian, I can help to economically empower women, I care about those who live in poverty and are going through life's toughest challenges, I am a paradigm breaker, I can inspire."

At the end of the Heart Activity they asked for people to comment on their heart or to talk about their personal story. As I felt it was a safe place and as I felt it was a place where I might be able to help at least someone in the space, I spoke about one of the hardest challenges I faced. I had my hand up but then freaked out a little, but realising it was too late to put it back down I said it and the words just poured out of my mouth and without realising it I accidentally made someone cry. When I finished I sat back down and everyone was clapping.

As someone who has always had difficulties with self-esteem and confidence I couldn't hear the words that were spoken around me but then afterwards so many people came up to me and told me how powerful and inspiring it was for them to hear it and thanked me for being brave and talking about it. This included a few who told me how similar experiences have happened to them and we ended up hugging each other. It was all just a very beautiful moment looking back and I remember leaving the session feeling like wow I can actually make a difference and help someone even though they are from another country.

The second one was about empowering women as entrepreneurs. It was interesting as we did a poll to put forward our ideas and then got into groups to produce a business from one idea. My idea was to give young women volunteer/work experience to enable them to have a better future job. There was also another idea of giving young girls access to tampons/condoms/pads and teaching them sexual education (how to use the products listed) which is taboo to talk about in many developing countries. The group I was in loved both ideas and decided to combine them. At the end we were asked to nominate ambassadors to speak about the product, they nominated me and another lady and it was our job to truly sell the business to the other group, so we went round to sell the idea and everyone really liked it and out of it we received questions to think about. It was an amazing session and probably helped me if I was ever to be interested with business. At the end of it the lady I was with selling the product told me how impressed she was that I was 17 and told me to keep it up.

It was a really good day overall.