

# ISAK LARSEN: MY CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN ADVOCACY AT CSW62

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***Isak Larsen, Dr. Eddy Cadet, Carol Bejar Orellana and Christopher Cardenas at the United Nations***

As part of my participation at the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW62) in New York on March 19-21, 2018, I put a lot of effort into preparing my presentation during a side event about empowering rural and mountain women at the United Nations (UN) headquarters. Not including the field work and research that had

already been done, the PowerPoint presentation that I gave took a lot of fine tuning and practice. I had to cover the research, along with how it applied to the status of women in Senegal and about engaged learning at Utah Valley University (UVU). Before preparing this presentation, I had never heard anyone talk about UVU's engaged learning model before, but now I realize that I have been benefiting from that model ever since I got to UVU. Ever since I got here, I have been invited to work with professors on research projects, have gone on field trips, and know each of my professors personally. It is easy to see that they are engaged in me and my progress in school.

When we went to New York, everything was a new experience for me. One thing that stood out to me was that even though I am an unknown, unimportant young guy from a small town in Arizona, nobody there knew that. I was treated, not like a student, but like what I was doing and what I was presenting was important outside of academia. It is, and was that important but telling others about it in New York reiterated to me the importance of my research, engaged learning in schools, and thinking about women's rights.



***Isak Larsen (first from the right) presents during a side event at CSW62***

The worldwide status of women became so much more important to me. Being a man in the United States of America, I don't think about women's rights, and if I do, I see that they have equal opportunity and ability in the vast majority of arenas in our country. In New York I learned of the struggles of women in other countries. For example, I befriended a group of female college students from the Chechen Republic in Russia. There, it is the "norm" for men to abuse women however they please with no repercussions in informal settings, but in formal dating, men and women are not allowed to touch each other. Meanwhile, in

Chechnya, marriages are typically totally dominated by the man, and if a man openly treats his wife with love and respect, he is publicly mocked. We met with the Ambassador from Botswana, who recounted the progress that has been made in that country in empowering women and giving them equal rights with men. Still, many women in Botswana are not allowed to sit in the main body on a chair in village meetings: they are allowed to sit on skins over on the side. Women are still not really permitted to wear pants in parts of that country. Attending the CSW62, and speaking with women from other cultures really brought new issues to my eyes.

As for what we did, my first afternoon in New York was amazing as I had never been in a dense metropolitan area like this, though I had seen Manhattan depicted in so many movies and TV shows. I was astounded by the tall buildings, narrow streets, and lack of space between the buildings. Also, I found that for the most part New Yorkers were far nicer than their reputation suggests. That night, I enjoyed a little bit of the food and culture of Korea Town. The next morning, we went to the UN, got our id cards, and went through security. I met the owner of the gift shop there who told me she was from Egypt, and that she kept the store stocked with souvenirs from almost every country in the world. I met another woman who worked at the UN and surprisingly seemed bored with her job even though she was in charge of international relations between all the countries of the world and had lived in Cambodia and other places for her job. My presentation during a side event went well. The setting was not exactly what I expected, and I had not heard many of the other speeches that were given: they were all superb. In the afternoon, we learned a lot about the UN when we visited the UN Department of Public Information, then we went and learned about feeding the world at the liaison office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.

On Tuesday the 20th, it was my birthday! It was so great to experience so many new things and places on my birthday. My fellow student Carol presented at the parallel event that day and she did a great job. I was glad to hear from Mr. Poole from the non-governmental organization "Fatherhood and Motherhood are Sacred" who was also a part of our event. The speeches he gave on both days were fantastic. That afternoon, we learned a lot from the Ambassador of Botswana.

Even with all the important meetings on this trip, I was still able to go see Time Square, The Empire State Building, Central Park, Trump Tower, and Cathedrals. Though short, it was an amazing and educational trip.

***Isak Larsen, Utah Valley University student***