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Speaking for human rights at U.N.

Posted by [Guest Columnist](#) on October 14, 2013 in [Opinion](#) | [View Comments](#)



Meghan Harney

Back in July, I applied to a program that allows students studying abroad to discuss human rights issues at the U.N. in Geneva, Switzerland.

This program was created by Dr. Ariel King from the Ariel King Foundation and promoted by Semester at Sea. I applied because I had an interest in global relations and wanted to learn how the U.N. works to improve human rights violations.

Fortunately, in August I received the news that I was accepted, along with 17 other students, to be a part of this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Each represented country was allowed to have one speaking delegate and an alternative delegate to sit directly behind them.

All of the signs were in alphabetical order, but each meeting was called to order with a new letter of the alphabet so that different countries were awarded to sit in the front. Each seat was equipped with a microphone for speaking and an earpiece for listening to translators.

Accordingly, six languages were translated: Russian, French, Arabic, English, Spanish and Mandarin.

As the agenda stated, 10 countries had five minutes to discuss how their particular country contributes to the protection of human rights. Among the countries that presented were Ireland, Malaysia, Australia, Algeria, Albania, Spain, Qatar, Romania, the Maldives and Rwanda.

In addition, time was allotted for the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to express their concerns regarding specific human rights violations.

Later in the day, we had a side event in which my Semester at Sea colleagues, and other student representatives from NGOs, discussed different human rights issues. Seven students discussed the injustices of women in African and Middle Eastern countries, global education and the war on drugs in Mexico. Overall, we all felt fortunate to be the first students to have our voices heard at the U.N.

Article 1 of the Declaration on the Right to Development states: “The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue...in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.”


To me, the right to development means the right to have access to education. Many nations do not provide substantial schools for their youth, if any at all. I view this as a violation to human rights. An example of an NGO that promotes the improvement of education is Pencils of Promise, which helps to provide educational opportunities and works to build schools in developing nations.

My favorite part about exploring the U.N. was realizing how Chapman is preparing its students to become aware of the worldwide problems that exist today and the problems we face as an interconnected world in the future. From the community strand in the integrated educational studies major to human rights-conscious campus organizations, Chapman students are truly guided to become global citizens.



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