

**FROM: Nia Shima–Franklin, Santa Cruz, CA**

I stepped into the first day of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference with a business card in my pocket, imprinted with a quote by my favorite feminist poet, Audre Lourde, “We’ve been taught that silence would save us, but it won’t”. I held that quote in my pocket like I held hope in my heart that this experience would open doors to a new way of speaking, a new way of learning, and a new way to create change. I believe I found a start, although I can’t pinpoint that revelation from one event or speaker. I understand we live in a time when the “millennial generation”, as they call us, are shuttled off to work in social media forums that older generations shy away from or in internships where we have no voice but the one of our supervisor. However, at the CSW I was inspired to see mutual collaboration take place between the seasoned, venerable activists and the still developing but equally passionate younger generation. Even in my own cohort of the 2013 UN Practicum, I was able to exchange knowledge with women who were in Masters and PH.D programs and, as a group, we were able to meet with inspiring individuals such as Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). It seemed as if our credentials or lack thereof, was far less important than the fact that we were there, at the same time, trying to achieve the same goals with the same passion.

Upon my return home from the CSW conference, I built upon what I learned from groups that specifically try to bridge the generational gap within WILPF, such as Young(Y)WILPF Australia and PeaceWomen. A fellow WILPF member and former mayor of Santa Cruz, Jane Weed–Pomerantz, and I, coproduced a workshop for our local WILPF chapter on the CSW conference and strategies for change. I invited an on–campus organization called “Men Creating Change” to speak at the workshop. I saw bright hope in the faces of veteran WILPF members as the nineteen–year–old cofounder of “Men Creating Change” stated his commitment to ending violence against women. Since our presentation, Jane and I have been condensing our workshop into a succinct PowerPoint presentation that we hope to distribute and workshop with various organizations and schools around Santa Cruz County.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to help facilitate a workshop with an organization called the Inside Out Writing Project (IOWP). IOWP is a local grassroots organization that tries to bridge a connection between those inside

the Prison Industrial Complex and those on the outside by producing weekly writing workshops with the inmates and, later, showcasing their work to the Santa Cruz community. As we started the workshop, my colleague, Dave, opened up the discussion with a Zulu phrase, “Sawubona”, which is used as a greeting but literally means, “I see you”. Dave continued to say the standard response to “Sawubona” is “Ngikhona”, meaning “I am here” or, in a sense, I didn’t exist until you saw me. Thank you for acknowledging my presence and bringing my being into existence. This is what we, at IOWP do with the inmates. We acknowledge their existence and they are able to regain humanity that was taken from them. This is what we do in WILPF, acknowledging the women who do not make it into statistics, greeting them through advocacy work and events like the CSW conference. This is what we do for each other as activists. This is what WILPF does for me. As WILPF enters its 100 year anniversary, I hope to acknowledge the existence of many more young activists, men and women, and bridge a connection with older generations. WILPF has taught me the power of my own voice, and so to WILPF’s acknowledgement of my talents and love for this work I respond, “Ngikhona”.