

UN Human Rights Council

NAWO Young Women's Alliance



NAWO YWA

Meeting with UK Mission UN Geneva

On the first day of arriving at the United Nations in Geneva, we attended a private meeting with the UK Permanent Mission. We met four members including Matt Forman, Michaela Throupe, Bob Last and Aaron Holtz who are official representatives of the British Government that work with the UN in Geneva, and Aaron in New York, to ensure the UK's views and opinions are conveyed to UN bodies and other member states. There are 5 key teams within the UK Permanent Mission; disarmament, health, humanitarian (including migration and International Labour Organisation), trade and human rights.

The UK is currently a member of the Human Rights Council, where they make statements to represent the position/view of the UK on particular issues and express what they believe they and other countries can do to help improve these situations. Whilst we were there, some of the issues discussed included; Human Rights in Burundi, a general debate on racism, the Rohingya Crisis, Human Rights in Haiti and Human Rights in Cambodia, Colombia, Georgia and Sri Lanka. Some of the comments made by the UK Permanent Mission included; there is a need to review outdated legislation, the quality of human rights reporting must be improved, the UK called for other countries to follow them in providing humanitarian aid, the UK supports efforts in holding human rights perpetrators accountable and the British Government reaffirms its commitment to the elimination of all forms of racism. However, resolutions passed by the Human Rights Council don't have legal power, meaning they compel action, or make or change laws, but they do contribute to the development of norms and laws, and help in the work to protect human rights in specific countries and situations.

They provided us with an insight into how the Human Rights Council works and how countries work to persuade others to vote for or against resolutions on certain issues. They highlighted the role of bargaining between countries, for example, a country might promise that if another country votes the same way as them, they will provide them with much needed resources e.g. oil, food etc. However, the UK don't take this approach but instead may use tactics like lobbying or campaigning to attract support to pass a resolution in their favour, they describe this as "disagree without being disagreeable".

We felt extremely privileged to have been able to meet four members of the UK Permanent Mission despite their high profile and extremely busy timetables. It was overwhelming to see how open they were in answering our questions and to know how greatly they value the opinions and views of young people.