

Access, Knowledge, and Culture: Dignity Kits

By: Camden Ross

"It's important to make it easy for women to be successful. We fight for equal rights, and feminine products are not a luxury. They are a necessity." These words spoken from the delegate of Germany had the rest of the delegates pondering their next move during the UN Women committee meeting at the 24th annual Model United Nations in San Antonio. During this meeting, the topic of feminine hygiene was discussed. Delegates representing various countries spoke out on their culture, struggles, and ideas regarding the state of menstruation products in underdeveloped countries.

Throughout the meeting, many viewpoints were discussed thoroughly and heard around the room. Cuba started off saying that their citizens who deal with menstrual cycles are often left resorting to whatever they can find. "Our government supplies poor quality products," they explained, "We have to supply them with reusable items."

The topic of supplying reusable feminine products to undeveloped countries was very popular in this discussion. Women would have items at their request, and not only were they free, but they were also reusable. The only problem was that the delegates could not seem to agree on how to send them, where to send them, and which products to begin with.

Many delegates questioned how having access to feminine hygiene products would change the crisis at all. How could these women benefit from menstrual products when they know nothing about them? The delegate of Iran suggested, "[Undeveloped countries] should partner with UN Women to not only provide products but to educate about these products as well."

The discussion then turned to educate women and children on feminine biology, hygiene, etc. With this idea comes many complications. Egypt expressed much frustration, explaining that its tight, restrictive religion prohibits any kind of sexual education. This argument brought yet another plate to the table, mixing in availability and accessibility, poor knowledge, and rich culture.

The committee had laid out their plans and problems: they had to find a consensus solution in which women in undeveloped countries had access to reusable hygiene products, free menstruation education, and stayed safe from religious shaming and prosecution. With this, the delegates formed a plan of action. After some suggestions being thrown around, the Delegate of Yemen brought up the idea of a dignity kit. The kit is a small package sent to women in these underdeveloped countries and would include items such as comfortable, culturally appropriate

clothing, different feminine products, and purified water tablets. The committee generally liked this idea, with many delegates stating that it was a great solution to the original problem. Cuba, as well as the UK, disagreed. How could this kit provide education to these women, and how could they stay away from religious humiliation? Cuba's Delegate said, "We have to tailor each kit to fit the religious stigma of each country. Not focusing exactly on types of feminine hygiene products, but focusing on things that the country will accept."

Taking this perspective into account, the rest of the committee reformed the initial idea behind the dignity kit. Once again, the Delegate of Yemen proposed an idea: the kits would include information on how to deal with menstruation based on the country's religion and resources. "The idea we're trying to implement is that there will be information on how to make homemade items," Yemen said.

The delegates had reached their final idea. The manufacturing of a dignity kit was proposed, which included various items tailored to each specific country's culture and region. Taking such things into factor-like religious ideals, on-hand resources, and comfortability, the delegates' message can be summarized by a quote from the Delegate of Yemen, "We're hoping that this information can help be a step towards a long-term solution on how to be self-reliant when it comes to menstruation."