

On November 27th of last year, just before the final exams of last semester, BALAC, in cooperation with the United Nations, held an event to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The event consisted of a workshop with young UN Changemakers (activists) from Vietnam, and a more academic seminar in the afternoon and early evening, which included talks and panel discussions by academic and UN researchers.

Over fifty BALAC students attended the morning workshops, which was impressive, given that exams were looming. While we run academic classes on gender, such as Gender and Cultural Representation, these are quite often theoretical and challenging. The workshops gave our students an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a more practical way and to learn about issues such as consent, and bystander violence prevention, through interactive exercises. The activists running the workshops were experienced in challenging and changing attitudes toward gendered violence in their communities, and in involving both local women and men in efforts to reduce violence.

Violence against women is a worldwide problem. It happens everywhere; however, rates vary from country to country. In order to begin to redress this issue, we must look at the particular myths underpinning violence in each area. Every country has their own myths and cultural norms that work to ingrain gendered violence. It is therefore important to explore the factors that drive gendered violence in particular areas, rather than promoting one-size-fits-all solutions. This is why our afternoon panels focused on violence in the Southeast Asian region. In the final panel session, Henriette Jansen, a veteran UN researcher, presented compelling information and graphics about the rates of violence in the region, based on her own very recent research undertaken in the area.

While understanding the extent of the problem is sobering, the event ended on a hopeful note. The recent #metoo campaign, which exposed the extent of sexual harassment and assault in Hollywood has become a major social movement. There has been an increasing awareness of issues such as sexual consent and a revival of feminist ideas in recent years. The United Nations staff and other guests remarked at how impressed they were by our very well-informed students and their thoughtful questions and contributions. The researchers and guests were able to learn a lot about young people's experiences of gender in Thailand from our students, and they commented on how this was a real highlight for them. It was also very encouraging to hear that some of our students were setting up their own voluntary initiatives to combat gendered violence.

UN Women regularly seek interns and I would encourage our students to apply. An internship can be a great way to gain additional experience and add to your CV. Follow <https://www.facebook.com/unwomenasia/> to find out about internship opportunities.







