

# World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) Global Symposium

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On the morning train to New York City, I felt exhilarated going to the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) Global Symposium at United Nations (UN). As I watched the fleeting trees and Hudson River from outside the train window they made today greener and clearer. My supervisor, Lisa, explained to me about the people I would meet today at the UN, and we discussed the Center for Excellence in Aging Services' current and potential projects that I might participate in this coming year. (It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of my internship at CEAS. Yahoo!)

At last we arrived in Manhattan! The city welcomed us with faster walking people and sultry weather compared to Albany. Passing through the UN security and walking to the conference room, I observed things slowly and carefully. It was fortunate that there was an exhibit of older adults' pictures from all over the world themed "Earth Elders." I sat down in the conference room with my purple ribbon representing the first annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The message was shown on the wall with the WEAAD theme, "My World... Your World... Our World – Free of Elder Abuse." The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2006 was presented by the World Health Organization, the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, and many international organizations from places like Argentina, Australia, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States and many others. The key objective of WEAAD was to raise awareness of elder abuse (which encompasses neglect and mistreatment) throughout the world.

Admittedly, the core message of the day was to *never ignore elder abuse*. Ageism (age discrimination) may cause some people to hide their elder abuse. This day helped to educate people and raise awareness about elder abuse and also to empower older adults. A group of distinguished speakers discussed a variety of issues related to elder abuse and the risks to vulnerable older adults because of elder abuse.

For example, a representative from AARP raised awareness as to the risks associated with financial exploitation of elders. Most perpetrators of financial exploitation are people who victims may trust or depend on for their care. They are family, friend, neighbor, caregiver, or financial advisor. We also learned that people who commit the financial exploitation could be anywhere in the world using the internet to hide their crime. We have to raise international awareness of elder financial exploitation and reinforce our commitment to keeping these perpetrators away from our parents and grandparents. I also had the opportunity to meet with someone from a financial institution who is developing a senior financial literacy program.

Through this WEAAD symposium I learned that many and various organizations are concerned about elder abuse issues and strive for close collaboration to combat and to prevent growing problems. Moreover, I hope to see continuously increasing awareness of elder abuse through this annual event, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. After the symposium, my supervisor and I were taking a picture in front of the UN building. Someone noticed the purple ribbons we were wearing and asked us what their purpose was. My supervisor immediately explained the importance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to her. I realized that raising elder abuse awareness had already started with us.