

8th International Women and Girls in Science Assembly at the UN

On Friday, February 10th (in celebration of International Women and Girls in Science Day on Sat Feb 11th), the Empowering Women in STEM club went to New York to attend the 8th International Women and Girls in Science Assembly at the UN. We left Phoenixville at 5:00 AM to arrive in NY with time to get some morning coffee and donuts (and, as it turns out, before the flags were even up!)

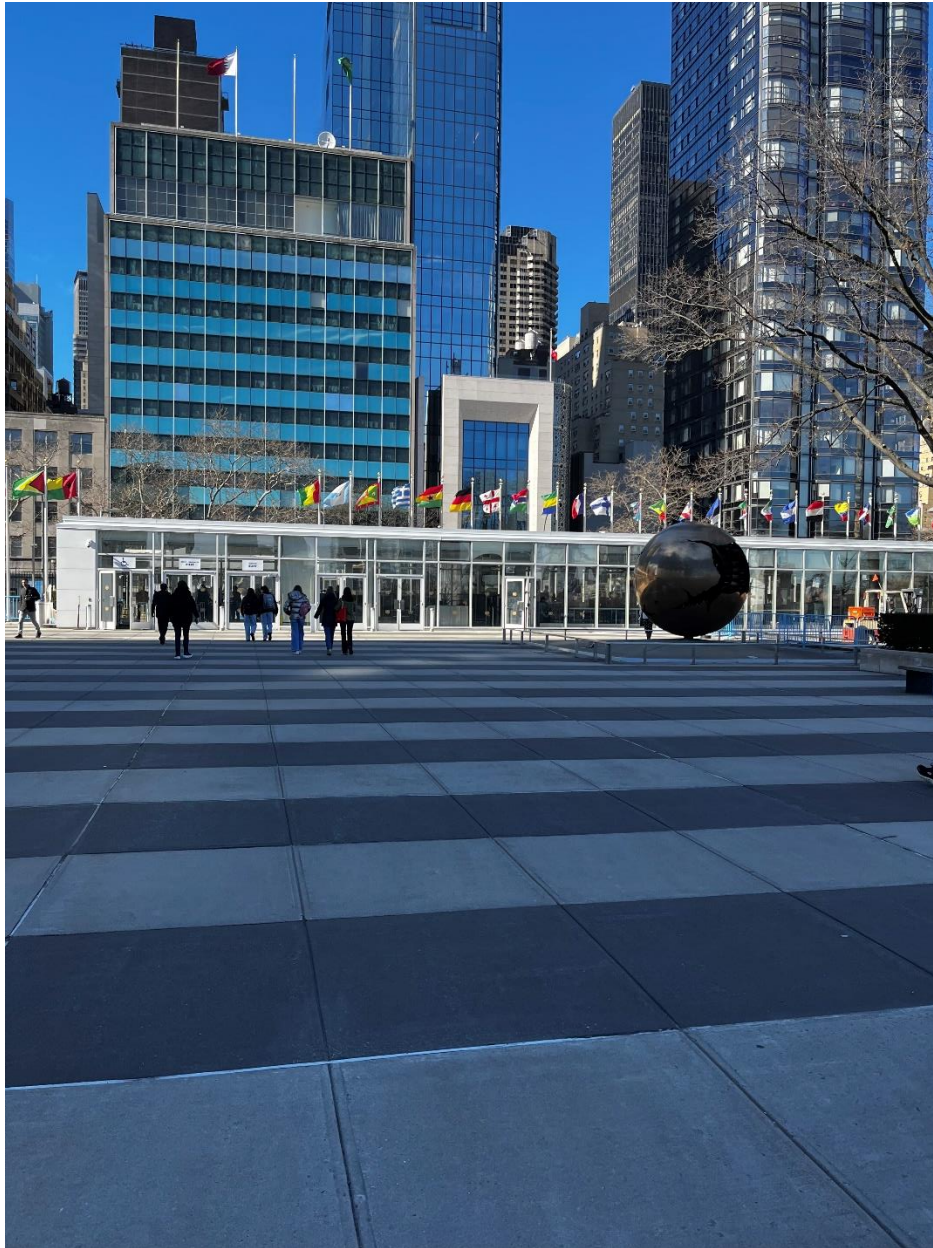


L to R: Ashni, Jen, Patience, Maddie, Courtney, Caroline, Vivona, Evie, Shelby, Amanda, Ilsa, Kelsey, Kayla, Audrey, Celeste, Victoria, Ella, Eleanor, Jacob, Zoe, Hanna, Chloe, Emma, Nihal, Christine, Kendall, Vedika, Barb, Olivia, Ingrid and Sophia.

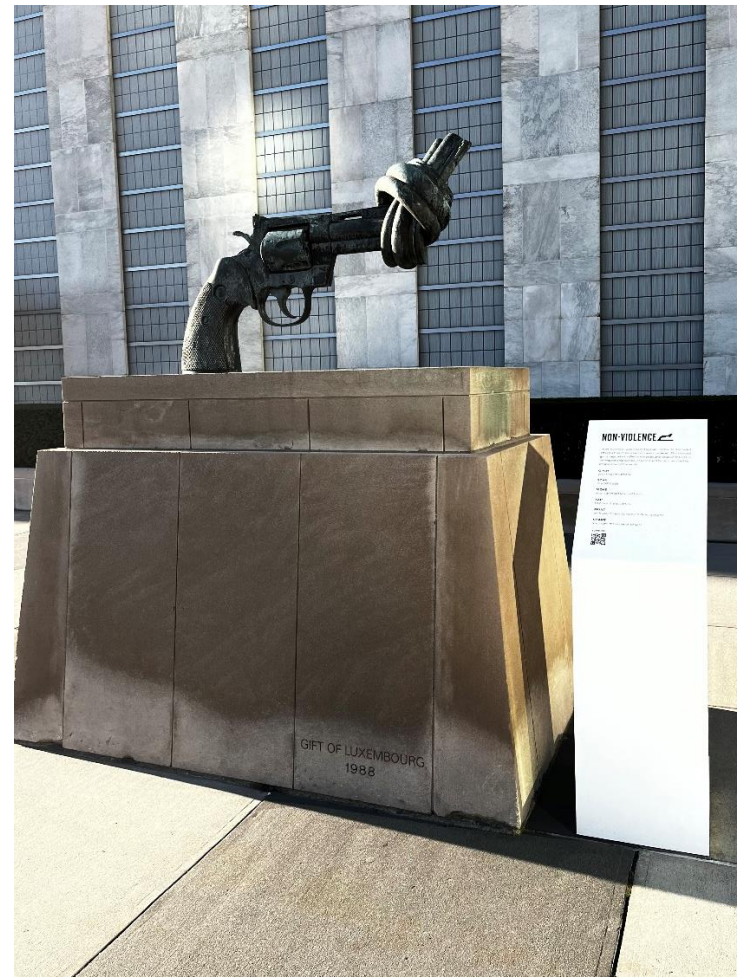


Students milling around near the security gates

We (mostly) made it through security without a hitch. One student did not receive a Grounds Pass due to a clerical error, so some diplomats from the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the UN had to vouch for her. Once past the gate, the courtyard of the UN spread before us.



The courtyard offered an excellent backdrop of the NY skyline and greenspace against which the various sculptures of the UN were displayed. This made it a perfect spot to take some small group pictures while enjoying the unusually beautiful February morning.





L to R: Hanna Moghanaki, Sophie Axten, Kendall Nowak, Emma Tomon, Barbara Nieves-Brito



L to R: Ashni Kumar, Patience O'Reilly, Shelby Collins, Elizabeth Spong, Jen Huynh



L to R: Celeste Lennon, Audrey Tresnan, Ella Pietrzykowski, Zoe Cimo, Victoria Ciruelos, Kayla Zimmerman, Eleanor Hamid



As the starting time for the assembly approached, we headed inside to the UN Visitor Center and the Holocaust Memorial exhibit.

To get to the Assembly, we had to pass through another security check. For our student without a Grounds Pass, a diplomat from the Philippines Permanent Mission to the UN had to vouch for her and escort her. With the many high-ranking officials at the Assembly, security was very high!

While approximately 800 people attended the Assembly, most of our students were able to get great seats toward the middle.





L to R: Hanna, Sophie and Emma



L to R: Ashni, Patience, Jen and Evie just before the Assembly begins

Her Royal Highness Princess Dr. Nisreen El-Hashemite, Executive Director of the Royal Academy of Science International Trust (RASIT) and the driving force behind the annual Assembly, opened the event with a statement about the importance of including women in science to help solve the sustainability problems of the world. Other dignitaries made opening statements, as well, including His Eminence Mr. Csaba Korosi of Hungary, President of the UN General Assembly, and Her Eminence Ms. Rabab Fatina, Under Secretary-General, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries and other developing states.



L to R at Front Table: H.E. Mr. Csaba Korosi, H.R.H. Princess Dr. Nisreen El-Hashemite, H.E. Ms. Rabab Fatina, and H.E. Ambassador Michal Mlynar of the Slovak Republic



Over the next three hours, we heard from a wide range of diplomats, business leaders and innovators regarding three major topics:

1. Transforming Cities and Infrastructure for Sustainable Future
2. The Road to Sustainable Transport
3. Food Business & Industry Communities: Securing Sustainability

The speakers represented numerous countries, such as Rwanda, India, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, Lebanon, Poland, San Marino and the US. It was a truly international event, reflecting the need for global solutions to sustainability issues as well as to promote women in STEM. From amongst all the luminaries, however, our students' favorite presenter was Ms. Yasmina Chahine from Lebanon. She is a 14 year old student who invented a cheap and sustainable approach to preventing the outbreak and spread of cholera. She studied how much UV light – produced by UV tubes like you might find in a classroom – was necessary to kill cholera depending on the size of the container of water being treated. She then linked the UV tubes to solar panels of the appropriate size to provide sufficient power for the task and is seeking to make her invention more widely available.

While there were some highlights, the event was not quite what we had expected. Rather than an interactive discussion, it consisted mostly of speeches by diplomats staking out positions, and business leaders and researchers expressing their expertise. For those who actively participated, it was a high-level networking opportunity. For us, it was a great learning experience to see what international diplomacy and conferences can look like.

When the Assembly stopped for lunch, we headed out, passing through the gate with the flags now up.



We broke into smaller groups for lunch. Some went to Grand Central Station, and others ran into someone claiming to be Miss USA.



Right Picture, L to R: Sophia Pratt, Caroline Copeland, Vedika Agnihotri, Miss USA???, Maddie Witcoski

And of course, no trip to NYC would be complete without spotting Elmo and Minnie Mouse walking through Times Square.



We would like to thank the parents who chaperoned and helped support the trip and PCEF for providing a mini grant to help fund the trip. And most importantly, we would like to thank the students for being wonderful representatives of Phoenixville to the 8th International Women and Girls in Science Assembly!