

Modupe Oke
Vital Voices- March 19, 2009

Vital Voices is an organization aimed in inspiring women around the world to change their country as well as the world for the better. Vital Voices allows women of all ages to have a voice in their community. Each year, Vital Voices puts together a program that honors women who contributes to the voices of the unheard, from young abused children to uneducated citizens.

When I heard about this opportunity from my mentor and College Summit Coordinator Dr. Malin, I did not know that this would be a lifetime experience. On March 19, 2009, as I walked into The John Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, I was greeted by Vinette Brown, Shana Payne, Mariah, Huya and Simone. As Vinette Brown handed out our tickets to the event, we were introduced to Mary McPherson; she explained the importance of the program and what we were going to experience. Mary McPherson then began to tell us where we were going to be sited for this event, to my surprise; we were given the best seats in the house, which was the Presidential Box. When we opened the doors of the Presidential Box, we were greeted by photographs of president Obama, which we could not resist taking pictures of. As the program started, our group took our seats to listen to the five women who were being honored, including our very own Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. These noble honorees came from Nigeria, Congo, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and America.



The first speaker was Sadidga Basiri Saleem from Afghanistan. Sadidga's story begins when she came home to find 150,000 girls without resources. Sadidga and three other women opened the Oruj Learning Center, which provided uniforms, supplies, support, education and funding for young females. Because of Sadidga's hopes and dreams and achievement, she was awarded the Rising Voice Award.

The next honoree was Temituokpe Esi from Nigeria. Temituokpe started her own tailoring company in 2005. When she discovered that her workers did not have the proper education, she used her profits from her business to provide an education for her workers. For this, Temituokpe was Honored the 10,000 Women Entrepreneurial Achievement Award.

The honorees from Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of Congo both help to eliminate the sexual abuse and rape of young women. They both support women that have been harmed from this brutality and try to embrace these women with a better future by keeping them out of harm's way. Without these two amazing women, many women would not know how their life could be, and have the support needed to speak out to stop what is happening in these countries.

This program helped me to understand how important my voice is in my community. If I don't speak about what is right and what I believe, I lose the best opportunity that may help make the world a better place. Even though, each of these women are from different countries, they all believe in the same thing, which is equality and the right to voice your opinion. Somaly Mam's statement "Once I began to speak, I became free," showed the importance of her voice in her community, and how her voice became a beacon of light to young women. Secretary Clinton's speech opened my mind when she said "women's rights are

human rights," this showed that women are no longer going to sit back and watch the world fall into ruins. When the program came to an end, we were invited along with the honorees to dinner. There we were allowed to network and share our experiences with the honorees. I was also allowed to take pictures to share with friends and my family, and to serve as a reminder that my voice can and will be heard. This program was an opportunity for me to see that hard work pays off and I believe that every child should get the opportunity to have this experience.