Stephanie McAnany, ACIC Membership and Program Officer, was part of the Youth Delegation to the UN this fall. Read her reflection below.

This past September 25-27th, 2015, the world’s leaders gathered in New York to formally adopt the Sustainable Development Goals and a global development agenda that would help guide our development initiatives over the next 15 years. ACIC’s Membership and Youth Engagement Officer, Stephanie McAnany, had the opportunity to travel to the Summit as part of the Inter-Council Network youth delegation and represent ACIC at this historic event. Here is some of what Stephanie had to say about it:

Traveling to New York for this momentous UN Summit was a very exciting opportunity for me. Not only had I never travelled to NYC, I had never been to the United Nations, and I knew there would be so much learning to come from this amazing opportunity.

Arriving Thursday evening before the Summit, we rushed to our Brooklyn apartment, dropped our bags and headed straight to a social event at the Canadian Mission to the UN, where our delegation would have the opportunity to meet the (now former) Canadian Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Honourable Christian Paradis. This first subway trip into the heart of Manhattan was both thrilling and confusing. In true NY style, our delegation, made up of eight young women from across Canada, scarfed down a pizza and handed out any leftovers to any interested passersbys as we rushed to make it to the Mission on time. This was the first of many interesting and informative events.

Throughout my time in New York, I learned about Canada’s involvement in the negotiations that went into the formulation of the SDGs, its targets and proposed indicators (which continue to be developed). I learned about Canada’s International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy, demonstrating Canada’s commitment to collaborate effectively with civil society to increase development results, reduce poverty and advance democracy and human rights. This empowered us as young people, and as members of the CSO community to make the most out of our meetings in NYC, to take every opportunity to absorb as much as we could, and to bring it back to our local networks with the hope of further engaging with our CSO communities here at home.

The Summit was a truly remarkable event, with many high-profile leaders, celebrities, activists, and philanthropists speaking at the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as contributing to the plenary sessions and interactive dialogues. Our delegation had signed up for as many official UN sessions as we were allowed to attend, and dozens of the 1,500+ side events that were being put on by other organizations in NYC over the course of these three days. We spent our days on subways and in security lines to get into the UN, running from session to session, popping into the General Assembly to hear from our Minister on what Canada had to say in the wake of these new global goals and trying to catch up on what everyone had attended that day. Our side events would take us all over Manhattan; from the Grand Hyatt Hotel, to the Rockefeller Foundation and the New York University campus.

The sessions I enjoyed the most focused on one or more of the global goals, with experienced practitioners, government officials and CSOs in the room, discussing what could be done to achieve these ambitious targets. On ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and
promoting sustainable agriculture, we heard from experts and leaders from around the world, including Jeffrey Sachs, reiterate that our global food systems are broken and that feeding the world isn’t an issue of food quantity, but of distribution. On a session on innovation and infrastructure, Mark Zuckerberg spoke about the “internet.org by Facebook” initiative, which is seeking to provide internet access to all seven billion people on earth. Heading outside of the UN to a session on water and sanitation, we had the honour to hear from Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s, Nobel Peace Prize winner and first elected female head of state in Africa, on the importance of access to safe drinking water and sanitation in Liberia’s struggle to control the Ebola outbreak. There were so many sessions, with so many interesting ideas and discussions, it was hard to keep track of all the highlights we wanted to share with each other at the end of each day.

Going to New York and attending this Summit is something I will always cherish. Since my return, many people have asked if I arrived to the UN “overwhelmed”, and left “underwhelmed”. I don’t feel that was the case. I felt inspired. The overarching sentiment of the Summit was that the hard work begins now (not to take away from the immense amount of work that went into negotiating and finalizing these goals). The interconnectedness of the goals as well as the aspect of universality were underpinned in each of the sessions I attended, and are key parts of this global agenda. The reality of climate change was emphasized throughout. These issues are important and urgent. We have 15 years, or 782 weeks, to achieve some of the most ambitious goals the world has ever set for itself. The time to act is now.