

BROOKE BAUER, MPH
Founder and CEO Nurture Project International
Breastfeeding and Feminism International Conference
2017 Miriam H. Labbok Award for Excellence
Acceptance Speech

To say that I am honored to even be mentioned in the same breath as Miriam is an understatement. I am so humbled to accept this award. Miriam was a champion for women's rights. A champion for human rights. She was someone who heard the voices of women across the globe and amplified their sound. I can only hope that I do half as much as she did for women globally.

Recently my team and I provided a lactation consult in a home in recently liberated Eastern Mosul as ISIS mortar attacks rocketed not far away. The mother we were supporting had a five-month-old baby and was worried, as so many mothers the world over, about her milk supply. It had decreased since they had to flee terrorist areas. She had a line of the baby's clothes up in the house and she had a disposable nappy drying for reuse. It was already full but she left it to dry to be reused again. She didn't have another.

Her sister was returning from a controlled area to give birth. Medical support for the birth wasn't an option. The woman we were with would assist to deliver the baby. Because, as a new mother herself, she was the most qualified. As we were providing information, gunfire was heard outside and our driver motioned for us to leave. As we rushed away I said, "I am so sorry I can't do any more for you right now" and the mother looked at us with pleading eyes saying, "Please don't forget us. Remember us who are trapped here." I said quickly, "Insh'allah we will be back soon. We will not forget."

Sometimes we think more about those we couldn't help than the ones we can.

I want everyone to remember these mothers, the ones who are making impossible choices every day and despite horrific situations they continue to strive for the best care for their children. They are the true receivers of this award. Think of these mothers, they are often the same mothers that our media tells us are oppressed because of what they wear or because their culture is different from ours or because their language is not familiar. Remember these mothers. Know these mothers. They are not weak. They are strong beyond measure.

The time is now to hold space for our fellow woman. To take a step back and say "I might not fully understand what is going on here but I will stand back and give you the platform." In our work, we are not the saviors that go in with all of the answers. The mothers have the answers. We just hold space for their voice.

This award is dedicated to them. To the survivors. The warriors and the activists who don't even know they are activists.

I challenge you to open your minds and hearts. To think about how you can support our fellow women globally. To hear their stories. The women we work with don't need to be saved. They don't need us to come and do their work for them. Instead, they need access to the information that is already available to

those of us with the privilege to access it. We need to make sure that this information available in all languages and across all platforms. We need to open access to our certifications and our trainings and our research. We need to make our information accessible so that it can be adapted and applied so women everywhere can use it to develop their own programs.

And, in turn, we need to open our ears. Women globally need us to hear their experiences and understand their research. They are asking to be heard. Program developers and researchers everywhere need to link up with their fellow advocates so we can all fill in the gaps and stand up for the rights of safe infant feeding globally.

It is time to work together to fill those gaps. It is time to really make our information available to our fellow advocates and to learn about their knowledge and experiences.

It is time to translate our research, our blogs, our exams and make them available to everyone. We need to remove barriers to lactation support globally. We need to work together with our fellow advocates. And not only do we need to make our knowledge accessible we need to LISTEN to global knowledge without judgement and without assumption. We need to hear the advocates speaking up around the world. We need to hold space for their voices.

We need to be able to look mothers like those in Mosul in the eye and say, "We see you. We do not forget. We will fight with you."

Look at us. Look around the room and feel the strength here. Today is our day. The day that we are challenged. We have the ability to look at these challenges and take them head on. Today we look at everything we stand for and everything we believe in and we can say TODAY! Today is the day that we step forward. Today we say that we are true allies. We will stand next to our fellow activists and we will hold space for those whose stories need to be heard globally. Today we stand together and we say, "We hear you. We see you. And we will work harder."

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