



Update

March 2017

NGO Mining Working Group Raises the Issue of Land- and Water-Grabbing



As always, there were a number of stellar side-events sponsored by the NGO community at this year's Commission on Social Development (CSocD). As a member of the NGO Mining Working Group, UNANIMA was connected to one such side-event, which framed protection of land and water as a strategy for poverty eradication.

Much of the discussion focused on the negative impact of mining and other profit-driven land-grabbing on indigenous communities, the same topic of the written intervention UNANIMA submitted to this CSocD.

The first speaker, Father Nicolas Barla (right), spoke of his experiences in ministry as a community activist and organizer in rural areas of India that are mined for bauxite and other minerals. According to Fr. Barla, these populations are often displaced en masse by mining activities that destroy their property. The majority of persons affected are not provided with any aid or recompense from the corporations performing the mining or from the government who provided the corporations with a permit to mine.



They are thus left with little or no monetary or natural resources with which to support themselves. In addition, they lose their dignity, language, and identity when they are forced to move to a new region. In this way, the "indigenous people are victims of 'development.'" In a meeting with Religious representatives at the UN the following week, Fr. Barla offered an additional insight gained from his experience of organizing in indigenous communities. It is critical, he said, for Religious to not only follow and sympathize with the plight of the people they serve, but to *join* their movements.



The event also provided attendees with an opportunity to understand why devastating industrial activities like those Fr. Barla described are allowed to continue, and why they so often do the most harm in the world's poorest regions. Expert panelist Christina Hioureas (left), who serves as legal counsel for UN Member States, private entities, individuals in international disputes, explained that investment treaties between nations often inhibit national governments from protecting natural resources because the treaties bar governments from regulating corporations in the interest of the common good. Most of the international investment treaties active today were

developed in the 1990s. They were typically drafted by wealthy nations and signed by low-income nations who were seeking to promote economic development and job creation in their country. These leaders of low-income nations did not comprehend or anticipate the language of these treaties would be expanded and manipulated to draw them into costly legal battles with multinational corporations who would sue them for millions or billions of dollars. Ms. Hioureas explained that there are several claims corporations can make against a government that attempts to prioritize its own resources or people over the financial interests of the corporation. Corporations can sue a government that decides to impose new industry regulations or refuses to renew a corporation's permit to operate after becoming aware of damaging effects that corporation's project is having on an ecosystem or community. They can also sue a government for failure to diffuse any public demonstration that inhibits their operations. In this manner, foreign investment has often perpetuated or deepened poverty in low-income nations rather than alleviating it. Fortunately, Ms. Hioureas also offered a few solutions to this international predicament. States are able to conduct a legal review of any treaty to which they are a party and can seek to terminate it or renegotiate it. They can also rework their national laws and future contracts with investors in a manner that lessens their vulnerability to investor lawsuits. She also encouraged citizens to get involved in the process by encouraging their own governments to sign on to the Mauritius Treaty (explained here in any of 6 UN languages:

http://www.uncitral.org/uncitral/en/uncitral_texts/arbitration/2014Transparency_Convention.html), which allows for greater transparency in investor-State dispute settlements by allowing them to be recorded and publicized. Anyone interested in following pending disputes, or possibly getting involved by submitting an "amicus brief," can learn about open cases by searching the World Bank's Investor-State Dispute Settlement Database (available in English, Spanish, and French):

<https://icsid.worldbank.org/en/Pages/cases/AdvancedSearch.aspx>

A video recording of the full event is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9kWPxQtBsQ>.

CSD 2017: A Veteran's Overview

By Renaude Grégoire, Social Justice Office – Sisters of Saint Anne



Every year in February, since 2011, I have participated in the Commission for Social Development. The Commission brings together State members, UN agencies, and civil society organizations to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development.

The Commission is preceded by the Civil Society Forum, which allows delegates from NGOs to exchange views on a main theme, and to adopt the Declaration to be presented at

the first session of the Commission for Social Development.

Here is one key element of the 2017 Declaration:

Social protection is a proven, successful strategy to reduce all forms of poverty. Studies in Africa and Asia, for example, have indicated that cash transfer schemes show much faster results in poverty reduction than those expected from “trickle-down” effects of economic policies. Conversely, studies show that the risk of falling into poverty is very high where social protection floors do not exist. This illustrates the capacity of social protection policies as a tool of poverty prevention. It also holds promise to draw upon the wide range of talents and skillsets from all people, especially those who experience marginalization. As people are provided with opportunity, capacity for development is raised within a society, creating new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

Why is it important to be at this Commission? As the delegate put it so well, "We come here to tell our governments what we are doing [for social protection and poverty eradication] and to ask them to do more."

As its main theme, the 55th Commission for Social Development had: Strategies for Eradicating Poverty to Achieve Sustainable Development for All. The Commission's agenda included reviewing programs and plans for youth, people with disabilities, seniors, and families. An emerging issue was also addressed: the eradication of poverty and youth in the Agenda 2030.

In addition, there were at least 57 side events, including the Morning Briefing for Civil Society. Examples of good practices, innovations, and promising programs fueled our exchanges and dialogue to develop policies in line with Agenda 2030.

This year, I was struck by the participation of young people, either in the delegations of the Member States of the Commission for Social Development, or in civil society organizations. One youth pointed out that prosperity (as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals) is different from economic growth.

If a major aspect of advocacy is adopted, I would propose that social protections should be ensured at all stages of life, since all citizens need to be guaranteed that social protections will be effective throughout their entire lives.

My First Visit to the UN

By Regina O'Connor, Social Concerns Office - Sisters of St. Anne, St. Marie Province

I am new to my position as Coordinator for Social Concerns for the St. Marie Province of the Sisters of St. Anne. I have had to learn about many new areas in this position or at least to look at areas from a new perspective. At the end of January I spent a week at the United Nations as a representative for UNANIMA International during the 55th Session of the Commission for Social Development. Attending the two-day Civil Society Forum with the emphasis on Social Protection, Including Floors: A preeminent strategy to eradicate poverty and achieve social development for all, followed by three days of General Assembly and Side Events was energizing, overwhelming, and eye opening all at once. I had the good fortune to have several representatives of UNANIMA to guide me through the experience, beginning with Renaude Grégoire, the Coordinator of the SSA Social Justice Network. Monday began with very helpful introduction by the Forum coordinators and then we were off and running.



The past six months I have been learning about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but the experience at the UN gave me a much more in-depth understanding of their importance to our work on the social development front. Slowly throughout the week I began to grasp the magnitude and significance the SDGs have, beginning from the top down and from the bottom up. The work of the policy makers in the Member States directly impacts the work done by the NGOs on the ground with the people and the experiences of those in the NGOs must

give guidance to those setting policies in our villages, towns, cities and national government agencies. The forum and commission works to create a space for dialogue and cooperation between Civil Society, Member States and the United Nations. While this discourse is not perfect it was remarkable to see it in action. There was a silent protest of the NGOs during the first General Assembly because they felt they were not being given enough space to share their opinions and questions. The General Assembly responded by trying to carve out more space for such dialogue. This give and take continues to develop.

The Civil Society forum presented policy recommendations to be included in a Declaration that would be clear and strong in presenting their voice to the General Assembly for next year's Commission. The Commission this year looked at Resolutions moving toward the eradication of poverty for African Development, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. There were lively and informative high level panel discussions on the work by Member States in each of these areas. Probably for me however, the most meaningful part of the week beyond the Civil Society Forum were the Side Events. These are workshops sponsored by various NGOs and Member States on very specific areas for eradicating poverty. In these meetings, we heard directly from experts in the area being discussed, for example Promoting Equal Access to Mental Health Resources for All Ages. There was genuine discussion of what was and was not working in Member States and the challenges of moving forward to better understand the issue and its impact on eradicating poverty, the costs of such programs from financial, time and talent stand points and strategies of what can be accomplished now.

Overall I came away from the week with a much better understanding of the SDGs and the impact they should be having on our government's policy making from the local to the national stage. There were stories of success that gives hope to the process and gave me the momentum to look at how my local government is responding to these goals. I also came away with a much better understanding of how important taking all the steps, from a policy point, is necessary when asking for global participation. There was a great deal of discussion of what Global Citizenship means today and personally the challenge of being a citizen of the Kingdom of God on our earth. The experience has already impacted my work in the province in small intentional ways. I look forward to following this particular commission in the future.

From Grassroots Mission to UN Headquarters

By Marita Nolasco Capili, SP



My name is Marita Nolasco Capili, SP, and I am a member of Congregation of the Sisters of Providence. I have been on mission in El Salvador for the last two years and serving as the President and Administrator of the Providence Beca (Scholarship) Program in the Bajo Lempa region of the department of Usulután. The primary mission/ministry of the Association of the Sisters of Providence in El Salvador is to support and facilitate the education and formation of youth and young adults through the Providence Scholarship Program.

It was very Providential for me to attend, as an observer, the 55th Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development, which took place in New York City on February 1-10, 2017. My gratitude to the leadership team of the Mother Joseph Province of the Sisters of Providence. I

was captivated with the theme; “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all” and intrigued as well as inspired learning about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The big question mark in my mind was: “How could it be possible to achieve the 17 goals to eradicate of all forms of poverty by 2030, especially the immense challenges that our world is facing today?”

I came to New York with a lot of questions and with curiosity and openness to learn something new. Stepping in to the United Nation building for the first time, I felt privileged to be surrounded with people from different countries and cultures. The UN is a home for all Nations and a place of dreams and hopes and global solidarity. I listened to the open exchange and the dialogue of ideas expressed by representatives from different countries, all of them speaking about their progress and their challenges, the root causes of their poverty and their action plans. As I listened, I saw and experienced a global hope, especially for those people who are “on the ground,” face to face with the reality of different forms of poverty.

So, what did I take home from this experience? I brought home with me the “Good News”; the manifestation of the body of Christ. I also shared my experience with those around me and I acknowledged and encouraged them in their vital contribution to the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda.

At our monthly Beca (Scholarship) meeting, I shared my experience from the United Nations with our 80 students and facilitated a dialogue with them on the theme of the

UN Session I attended. I found a video on YOUTUBE in Spanish about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which helped me to convey the message and urgency of this global movement to these Salvadoran youth.

In our Scholarship Program, each student participates in a community service project such as protecting the environment, pastoral ministry, sports activities with the children, tutoring children with their reading and writing and giving service alphabetization classes to the elderly as well as offering them other services.

As we looked together at the United Nations strategies for eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development, we could recognize our sharing in this UN agenda with our “Amor Solidario” (Love in Solidarity) projects of the Providence Beca Program

My time at the United Nations also helped me to become more aware of the importance of collecting, evaluating and sharing data on our social and economic realities. This data enables us to interpret the signs of our times and the needs of our brother and sisters. Good data collection, evaluation and sharing of the evaluated data is an important tool that can help us to identify who and why some are being left behind and then strategize how to reach those left furthest behind. In the beginning, I commented that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are very ambitious but at the end of my time in New York, I realized that we can be very ambitious in collaborating with God’s vision for humanity and all of creation. We can do all the possible and let our Provident God do the impossible.

What’s the next step for me? With the help of my Providence community, I would like to continue to be involved with Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and UNANIMA. First, I would apply for Internship with UNANIMA. I believe it will help me broaden my knowledge and expand my world view. Second, to begin to get to know the three Religious Congregations who are members of UNANIMA that are based in El Salvador.

After Brief Success for Water Defenders, Dakota Access Pipeline Proceeds

A prime example of the land- and water-grabbing discussed in the Mining Working Group’s event at CSocD55 (article above), is currently playing out in the United States. For nearly a year, indigenous water defenders and their allies had maintained a campsite that served as a physical

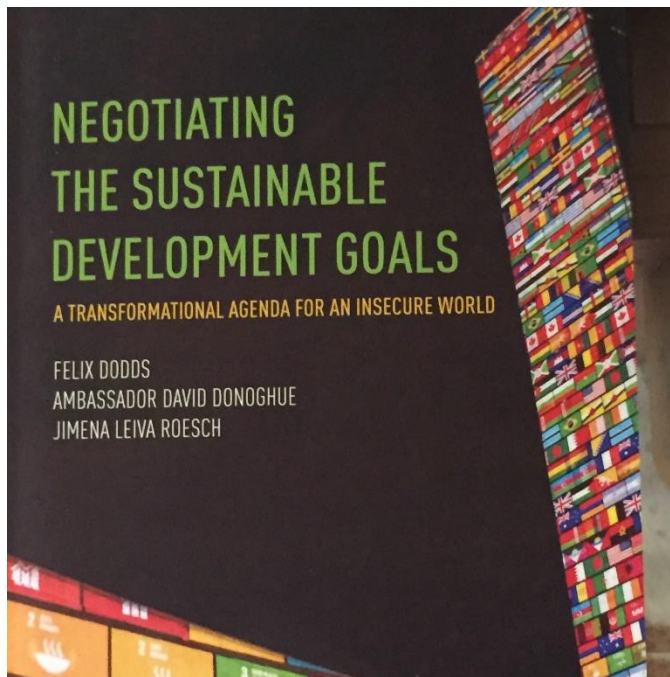


obstruction of construction of a natural gas pipeline through sacred burial land

belonging to the Standing Rock Sioux people. After months of camping on the proposed pipeline construction site and weathering several waves of aggression and intimidation from the US military, water defenders enjoyed a moment of victory in December. Then US President Barack Obama ordered that construction of the pipeline be suspended until an environmental impact assessment could be performed. In early February, however, the new federal administration reversed this decision and called for pipeline construction to resume immediately. UNANIMA mourns and stands in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux in the wake of this devastating outcome. We also celebrate the courageous spirit of this demonstration and pledge to carry it with us to the many corners of the world in which our members are standing up for the rights of the planet. Those looking for inspiration or a way to understand the spirit of the Standing Rock movement, which was led by the indigenous youth, might find it in this music video: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Onyk7guvHK8&ebc=ANyPxKpub-059e4djdWtEojk8IOI8n4pBrEgqDSJbjoZ6T5jwcHd_83tpRtbrj36THD2bmjHx5tC1nG-F8eWaFfL37Ei305QRw.

A Time for Change

By Colleen Jackson, RSC (UNANIMA International Intern)



These last weeks at UNANIMA and the UN have highlighted increasing contrasts for me, between the aspirations of the UN towards a more inclusive, cooperative and just world, and the rise of xenophobic, non-participatory and exclusive politics around our world. The UN 2030 Agenda of 'leaving no one behind' has permeated every Forum, Briefing and NGO event I have attended – on migration, indigenous rights, land, water and oceans, inter-faith partnerships, empowering women, the role of youth in eradicating poverty, global citizenship, to name a few.

Business as usual will pose huge risks to our planet and its people. We have to change our ways. It is often said here that 'there can be no Plan B – just as there is no Planet B'. Confronting change is a daunting challenge to faith and action - to take tangible steps towards creating a credible, robust and realistic vision of what it means to be human ... and in our UNANIMA context, women of the Gospel. Whilst the task ahead seems daunting at times, I am inspired by

the grassroots work of the hundreds of NGOs active here at the UN – not least of all UNANIMA and other faith-based groups.

"The past; our cradle, not our prison;
there is danger as well as appeal in its glamour.
The past is for inspiration, not imitation,
for continuation, not repetition." (Israel Zangwill)

“(Some) with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience”. (LS 217)

Committee on Migration Responds to Refugee and Muslim Ban in US

Shortly after instating a refugee resettlement program in 1980, the United States established itself as a leader in refugee resettlement. Though all refugee applicants must




endure an arduous, two-year screening process before being referred for resettlement in the US, the most recent statistics indicate that the US actually accepts two-thirds of the world’s refugees who are referred for resettlement. For this reason, the US government’s late-January Executive Order, which suspended its resettlement program, created a wave of deep concern that quickly spurred advocates across the US and across the globe to protest the decision. At the UN, the NGO Committee on Migration set to work writing a letter of support for migrants and refugees in, or seeking entry to, the US. The letter described the undue

physical, psychological, social, and economic trauma this sudden, major policy shift caused and prolonged against some of the world’s most vulnerable people. It also addressed the fact that the second part of the Executive Order, a call for the suspension of US visas for all holders of passports from seven majority-Muslim nations, was a thinly veiled Muslim Ban and an outrageous violation of the right to religious freedom. The letter was signed by 75 UN-accredited NGOs and sent to the permanent UN representative of every UN Member State, the President of the UN General Assembly, the heads of the UN agencies overseeing refugees and human rights, and the UN Secretary General. It called on them to denounce this policy move and to resist similar initiatives within their respective administrations.

Due to a series of judicial appeals filed by various lower courts in the US, the Executive Order has been suspended for the time being. Since then, however, the US Executive has

issued a new series of orders which are more complex and whose implications are not as easily deflated as the original order. The NGO Committee on Migration has reached out to immigration policy and immigration law professionals to assist our migrant advocate community in understanding these new policies at our next Committee meeting. We will then be better equipped to formulate a plan of action suited to these latest developments in the migration policy landscape.

Flashpoints

- Marie Chiodo, **DW** with AnneMarie Gardiner **SSND** took part along with 550,000 others in the Women's March in Washington to express shared concerns for human rights, and issues about the earth and Immigrants. Also in the photo are 3 women from Bahrain, here for a semester of study and to see how democracy works where people can gather and speak to power. There were people of every ethnicity witnessing to unity and to hope for the world in this movement for the common good.
- Religious working in the Eastern DRC are invited to participate in a six-day workshop in Goma starting 2 April 2017. The workshop will focus on the topic of “Pastoral Prevention and Pastoral, Compassionate and Spiritual Response to the Challenges of Victims Suffering from Sexual Abuse in Conflict Areas.” It is being hosted by the UK Embassy, the Holy See, UISG, USG, and the JPIC Commission. Contact Jean (director@unanima-international.org) for more details.
- A 5-week, online, English-language course on the Sustainable Development Goals will begin in May 2017. The courses will address the three pillars of sustainable development; the connections between climate change, planetary boundaries, social inclusion and human rights; the vision and principles of UN Agenda 2030; the plan for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the SDGs. Interested participants must enroll by 24 April 2017. More details and registration forms are available here:
<http://www.unssc.org/courses/foundational-course-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-o/>