

DOMINICANS AT THE UN



Dominican Leadership Conference

Spring 2016

"Cry out as if you have a million voices, for it is silence which kills the world." - Catherine of Siena

In the Company of Women



<https://eukleria.wordpress.com/2013/03/27/las-mirroforas/>

"It is no secret that we live in dark times and that we often feel perplexed and discouraged. When we reflect on the story of the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning, carrying their perfumes, perhaps we can learn something from their ability to deal with events with both wisdom and boldness. We see these women, carriers of perfumes, rising early on the "first day of the week", "when the sun had risen," to anoint the body of Jesus. The reference to the "first day" and "sunrise," accompany their vision of a scene submerged in a universe of new meaning. We are at the beginning of the new creation and the light of the Risen One enfolds them in its splendor. They are aware of the size of the stone and of their inability to move it; but this is not an obstacle to them in their determination to go and anoint the body of Jesus " (Cf. Dolores Aleixandre RSCJ).

In preparation for their experience during the Commission on the Status of Women, our Dominican Sisters from DSI reflected on this meditation on the women at the tomb. The past two weeks have been an experience of great paradox. On the one hand, we have listened to the sobering live reality of women and girls worldwide, who contend with crushing poverty; lack of access to appropriate health care, education, land, credit, employment and remuneration for employment equivalent to that of men; rape; early / forced marriage; trafficking and sexual exploitation; female genital mutilation; discrimination of all kinds; lack of opportunities to participate in making the decisions that impact their lives and the lives of their children. Yet, and incredibly so, there have been glimmers of hope. In panel after panel, we witnessed women who would not cave-in in the face of darkness. Their resiliency, their commitment to life, and their belief in their capacity to shape a future of hope for their children was palpable. Like the women who went to the tomb, they have experienced life – even in the midst of death.

What follows are some brief reflections from our Dominican Sisters who participated in the Commission and its events.

The feminine face of hope

This experience has been very enriching and has opened my heart to a new perspective. A highlight has been the companionship that we have shared as Dominican Sisters and a deeper understanding of the work of our Sisters in education and accompanying women who have experienced violations of their human rights. Violence against women continues and the official position of countries on this is politically correct. However, there has been little action. The women from Africa were especially forceful about this, demanding concrete action, rather than more talk. Besides listening to the official positions of governments, many civil society organizations were also present, questioning and pressuring the UN to do more to create a world of greater mutuality and respect between women and men. These have been days of listening; of dialogue; reflection and deeper awareness of the magnitude of the problems. But they have also been days of hope; hope forged through the experience, the love and the dreams of women from around the world. Yes, hope is feminine, and it has a woman's face.

- Ana Belen Verisimo, OP – Brazil



Gratitude is the memory of the heart

The issues addressed at the Commission on the Status of Women were not strange to me. My country (Philippines) has been known for many issues regarding the exploitation of women and girls. But at the Commission there was an in-depth discussion of these issues, with survivors giving testimony to the horrors that they went through. This gave me a wider, clearer view of the painful reality of women on all continents, and this has left an indelible impact on me. I was moved by the words of one of the commentators: "We are not truly women feminists unless we have helped to liberate women from their oppressive situations." After each session I would ponder – what contribution can I concretely offer to help those within my reach? Throughout the course of the sessions, I had the privilege to meet great women with passion for advocacy. Now I must consider how I will work to make this world a safe place for girls and women – and even young boys. It was indeed a good and meaningful experience and I will always cherish it in my heart.

- Elsie Bagaypo, OP (East Timor)



Viviana, Ana Belen, Else-Britt, Anjana, Julienne

A life changing event

The Commission on the Status of Women was a life changing event of my life. It changed my perspectives and broadened my vision towards gender equality. The slogan at the United Nations “No one should be left behind” kept on ringing in my ears and made me reflect deeply on the statement. No one should be left behind when it comes to development and gender equality. I recall the words of Gandhi, who said, “Nobody should rest until the tears from the last person are wiped out.” His words resonated with the said slogan. I attended various events which brought out the different issues affecting women and girls. One of the events titled “Women, water and well-being” made me examine the link between women and water. There is widespread recognition that the world is facing a growing water crisis, affecting the well-being of millions of the poorest people especially women. Women are home makers, nurturers and carers of natural resources and hence they should be seen in those very roles in the water sector. It also gave me an opportunity to raise a question regarding the commodification and privatization of water. Many of the events focused on the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This enlightened me on the need to conscientize society about FGM and its adverse effects on women. The living testimonies of the survivors of FGM made me realize the gravity of the issue affecting the women across the world. It made me resolve firmly to raise awareness on this issue. I thank all the Dominican sisters who have been a part of my journey in CSW 60. I thank them for the great company which I shall cherish always. It was a wonderful feeling of being together and strengthening the sisterly bond as envisaged by St. Dominic in our community life.

—Anjana Parmar, OP (India)



If there is no struggle, there is no progress



The Commission on the Status of Women is a unique couple weeks at the UN when all things are focused entirely on women and girls! Personally, the experience of the commission was a time of inspiration, hope and passion; while I also experienced a deep sadness, disconnection and anger at the uneven progress for women and girls worldwide. This tension gives CSW a particular power. Fredrick Douglas once said “if there is no struggle, then there is no progress.” We are at that moment, a time in history when hope

and anger seem to converge. It is in this tension that change happens.

I began the week watching a film documenting the life of a woman whose family attempted to kill her. Honor killings are still happening around the world today. What I took from the film, was not only the injustice of how women are treated and the severe human rights violations occurring, but more importantly the strength of that woman in the face such unimaginable pain.

The women, girls and the Dominican Sisters I have met and learned about these past two weeks have inspired me in my journey of becoming a better woman and given me new courage to stand with and for women and girls everywhere. I think one of the most important messages imparted on me, was the reawakening to the reality that standing up, for and with women and girls around the world begins right now, in the midst of our busy lives. The Dominican Sisters I was lucky to meet during the CSW once again confirmed the principal reason I decided to become a Dominican volunteer! These women, each one totally and completely unique, are some of the most powerful, dedicated and hopeful women I have met in my life. I am so proud to have a small part in representing the work these women do here at the United Nations. I am proud to be a woman and to be an activist for women and girls around the world.

-- Alandra Scott (Dominican Volunteer)

The great language of love accomplished everything

The icon shows the determination of the women to move in the dark for the truth they know, which is typical of African women. They seem worried and troubled, as are women in most parts of Africa today; worried and troubled about their daily existence; about feeding and educating their children. The heavy tomb stone is there for the women who come to anoint the body of Jesus. For African women it is present too – in the daily struggle for survival; the grinding poverty, abuse and violence. But it is togetherness that helps us move on and face another day, to see the sunrise of a new dawn.

As DSI participants, we quickly interacted with each other, and despite the language barrier, the great language of love accomplished everything. Those of us from Africa and Asia Pacific benefited greatly from the generosity, flexibility and understanding of our Sisters from Norway, USA and Latin America. Our evenings together were life-giving as we shared the experiences of the day and also about ourselves. I felt at home.

The women at the UN spoke with one language saying that this fight against violence and abuse cannot be done by individuals. It is possible only in togetherness with others. I felt the call to active involvement in matters concerning women. I salute the CSW as Oduyoye says: “without women’s participation the transformation of human society towards justice, peace and compassion will not happen, because it takes women to insist that hierarchical and periphery/center paradigms should give way to caring community.”

- Bernadette Mwita, OP (Kenya)



Christ restores all people

Gathered around the icon of the myrrh-bearing women and illuminated by the Gospel texts of the Resurrection of Jesus,

Anjana of India, Elsie of East Timor, Bernadette of Kenya, Julienne of Ivory Coast, Else-Britt of Norway, Marceline, Mary Alice, Cassie and Margaret of USA, Belen of Brazil and I from Argentina tried to build our multicultural sisterhood sharing moments of reflection and prayer, impressions, experiences in our ministry with women and girls, and the challenges that our realities present us daily. We never imagined meeting thousands of women, like us, coming from the most diverse and distant countries belonging to diverse ethnic groups and religions with a single goal: to advocate in defense of the rights of women and to achieve gender equality.

While governments of all member countries recognize that the progress of societies is linked to the development of the skills and potential of women, we are still far from the goal: that human rights be a reality that all women and girls can

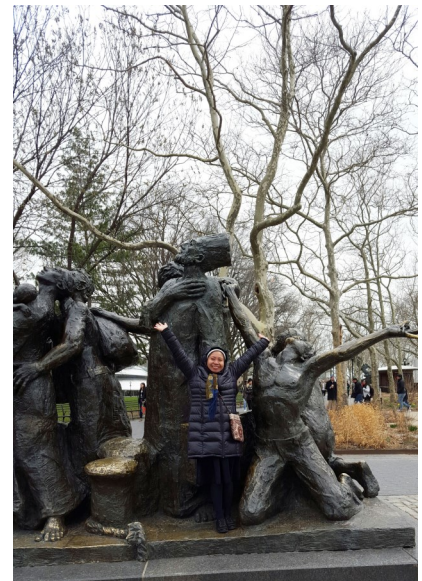
enjoy. Hence the importance of civil society, who through NGOs (like ours!), universities, churches, unions and other agencies can promote the creation of laws, promote better living conditions for women and girls, pressuring that such rules are implemented, concretized by governments through programs and services, economic and social policies designed and constructed by placing the rights of women between its priorities. However, legal reform is not enough, because even in countries (like mine) in which laws have been adopted gender equality remains deeply rooted in inequalities and discriminatory social practices. Once again, I look to the icon and to the women who defied the darkness to reach the tomb. They represent the comings and goings of so many women here at the UN during the Commission, who told their stories of life and death and proposed strategies to break the barriers that limit, condition, prevent women and girls from being treated with the full dignity. Many have wondered why the risen Christ appeared first to women and trusted them with the most important announcement of history! Many answers have been given...and I would like to offer one more. If in the first Creation, man and woman were equal in nature and dignity, would not Jesus, the New Creation, have wanted to return woman to her original dignity? Women, who received from the Creator the mission to be bearers of human life, but who have been reduced throughout history to their biological function. Would not Christ have desired to restore her original dignity, confirming her now in the ministry of preaching the Good News of the New Creation?

- Viviana Sisack, OP (Argentina)





The Sisters at the 9/11 Memorial



Elsie

Brave, Determined and Committed Women

Contemplating on the icon of the “mirroforas” was a good way of preparing myself for the session on the sixtieth UN Commission on the Status of Women. As I meditated on the story of the women in the Resurrection narrative texts, I, too, cannot help but ask the same question: “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (Mark 16: 3) Listening to current realities of women and children around the world who experience human rights violations evoked in me anger, sadness and a feeling of helplessness. When would the evils of human trafficking, violence, rape, deprivation of life’s basic necessities (food, shelter, education, health care) come to an end?

Yet I remain hopeful amidst these seemingly insurmountable challenges. What gives me hope is the knowledge that there are brave, determined and committed women who persevere to fight against inequality and injustice. Empowered by love, they continue to contribute in building a better world for their children and future generations.

Our Dominican presence in the UN witness to the firm hope that the world could be a better place than it is and through our small steps, we help make this happen. We cast a flicker of light in the darkness. It was enriching to have met and share with fellow Dominican sisters in this journey. I am grateful for the opportunity of representing Europe to the CSW 60! - Elsie-Britt

Nilsen, OP (Norway)



Dinner at Mariandale

The invitation for us is to share our gifts, our anxieties and our hopes – just as the women who went to anoint the body of Jesus. These women, sharing the little they had, expected to find death; but instead, they encountered new life. During our days together, we learned of the harsh reality faced by women and girls throughout our world. But we also heard stories of hope and of great courage. We did, in some way, experience a sense of resurrection, in the midst of darkness. And we will also experience a great sense of solidarity with women throughout the world – because in some way, we all share the same reality, and we are truly sisters.

Our Dominican Sisters who participated in the Commission and its events:

Elsie Bagaypo, OP (East Timor), Mary Alice Hannon, OP (Hope– USA), Marcelline Koch, OP (Springfield– USA), Bernadette Mwita, OP (Kenya), Julienne Nikiema, OP (Cote d'Ivoire), Else-Britt Nilsen, OP (Norway), Anjana Parmar, OP (India), Alandra Scott (Dominican Volunteer), Viviana Sisack, OP (Argentina), Cassie Vazquez (Editor of DomLife), Ana Belen Verisimo, OP (Brazil)



Coming up at the United Nations: April-May 2016

11 - 15 April	<u>Commission on Population and Development, Forty-ninth session</u>	9 - 20 May	<u>Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Fifteenth session</u>
19 - 20 April	<u>Economic and Social Council, Annual Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up</u>	15 May	<u>International Day of Families (A/RES/47/237)</u>
19 - 21 April	<u>General Assembly, Special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem</u>	20 May	<u>"Vesak", the Day of the Full Moon</u>
22 April	<u>International Mother Earth Day (A/RES/63/278)</u>	21 May	<u>World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (A/RES/57/249)</u>
28 April	<u>World Day for Safety and Health at Work</u>	29 May	<u>International Day of UN Peacekeepers (A/RES/57/129)</u>
29 April	<u>Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare</u>	31 May	<u>World No-Tobacco Day [WHO] (Resolution 42.19 of the 42nd session of WHO)</u>
		23 May - 1 June	<u>Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, Resumed session</u>

The Dominican Leadership Conference

Margaret Mayce, OP, DLC/NGO Representative to the United Nations

Alandra Scott, Dominican Volunteer

246 East 46th Street, #1F
New York, NY 0023

Visit us on the web at <http://dominicanleadershipconference.org>