



# NGO NEWS

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN NOVEMBER

## 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly, September 2018



**M**aria Fernanda Espinosa Graces of Ecuador, president of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, stated in her opening remarks that the work of the UN is relevant, and multilateralism is the only answer to the global challenges we face today. And no one can remain “indifferent to human suffering. Wars, conflicts, economic crises and environmental degradation affect us all equally.” What is required is global leadership, shared responsibilities and collective action to find joint solutions for pressing problems.

She has identified the following priorities that will shape the year-long session: gender equality and women’s empowerment; implementation of the global compacts on migration and refugees; creation of decent work opportunities for all; environmental protection and compliance with climate change agreements; focus on rights of persons with disabilities; support for UN reform process and facilitating dialogue. She invited the Assembly members to be inspired by the Andean millennial principle of minga, which refers to collective

construction and shared work for common good to “build a United Nations that is more relevant to all people.”

At every General Assembly, the Secretary-General presents an annual report on the work of the UN. This year Mr. Antonio Guterres began his address by stating: “Our world is suffering from a bad case of trust deficit disorder. People are feeling troubled and insecure and trust is at the breaking point – trust in national institutions, trust among States and trust in the rules-based global order... polarization is on the rise and populism is on the march... among countries cooperation is less certain and more difficult, divisions in our Security Council is stuck...” These are the stark realities of our time.

He called everyone to repair the broken trust with a commitment to a rules-based order, with the United Nations at its center, with the different institutions and treaties that bring the UN Charter to life. He went on to state: “As guardians of the common good, we also have a duty to promote and



UN General Assembly President  
Maria Fernanda Espinosa Graces

Continued on page 2



## 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly *continued*

support a reformed, reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system.” The Secretary-General has introduced wide-ranging reforms to the way the UN works and delivers on its mandate. To facilitate this process, he has appointed Jens Wandel of Denmark as Special Advisor on Reforms. For the first time in UN history, there is full gender parity in Senior Management Group and among Resident Coordinators leading country teams.

He urged the World leaders to act with greater ambition and urgency on climate change for “climate change is moving faster than we are and its speed has provoked a sonic boom SOS across our world.” He also drew attention to the increasing inequality, “discrimination and demagoguery” faced by migrants and refugees. He stressed the need for solidarity and urged everyone to “reinvigorate our multilateral project and uphold the dignity for one and for all... for despite the chaos and confusion in our world, I see winds of hope blowing around the globe.”

### Implications of President Trump’s Speech at the United Nations on September 25

The United Nations is organized on the sovereign equality of all its members and it symbolizes multilateralism and international cooperation for peace, security, justice, human rights and social progress for all peoples. Every year, the heads of member states gather during the General Assembly of the UN to reinforce their commitment support to these principles. In this context, U.S. President Donald Trump’s speech on September 25, 2018 has far reaching implications.

**Multilateralism** – He focused on nationalism instead of globalism and sovereignty in place of multilateralism by stating “America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism... America will always choose independence and cooperation over global dominance. The U.S. will not tell you how to live or work or worship, we only ask that you honor our sovereignty in return.” He positions nationalism and patriotism against globalism or global governance. His assumption is that global governance is threatening the sovereignty of the United States. It is a retreat from being a leading multilateral actor, driven by nationalistic interests. In the past the United States has taken steps to uphold human rights and democratic institutions around the world.

He has weakened the UN and principles of multilateralism and cooperation through the decisions taken to pull out of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Human Rights Council, UNESCO, Iran nuclear deal, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and is very critical of WTO (World Trade Organization) and the International



UN Secretary General  
Antonio Guterres

Criminal Court – just to mention a few.

The United States is not a signatory to the Rome Treaty that set up the International Criminal Court. ICC’s decision to prosecute U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan is one reason for the U.S. stand. His statement, “We will not surrender America’s sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable global bureaucracy” has to be viewed from this perspective. The ICC is a unique international institution, and it has investigated and prosecuted individuals from many countries, for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Trump sees the international system as a way for the world to constrain America, for he

said: “The U.S. will not be taken advantage of any longer.” Emphasis on sovereignty impacts global trade, how treaties and agreements are upheld and it is seen in the manner he accused WTO – for allowing its members to “rig the system in their favor,” meaning product dumping and intellectual property thefts. He forgets that the WTO, established after World War II to prevent conflicts and advance trade and promote freedom, was in fact designed to benefit the victors of the war.

Foreign Aid is an issue that will impact other countries and groups – the U.S. is planning to reduce funding to the UN peacekeeping program and to countries that do not support U.S. values and “have our interests at heart.” He threatened to end aid by saying “Few are giving anything to us; that is why we are taking a hard look at UN foreign assistance... We are only going to give foreign aid to those who respect us and are our friends.” How countries vote in the Security Council and other UN bodies will determine who those friends are. Foreign assistance meant to eradicate poverty and usher in sustainable development is being used as a bargaining chip, forcing developing and least developed countries to fall in line to consider the interests of America to get aid. Expecting returns for humanitarian aid defeats its purpose and effectiveness. Though the United States is committed to making the UN more effective and accountable, there are no clear development priorities or its role cooperation.

The role model he presented was: “Sovereign and independent nations are the only vehicle where freedom has ever survived, democracy has ever endured or peace has ever prospered. So we must protect our sovereignty and our cherished independence above all.” Authoritarian leaders or strongmen can pursue whatever they consider in their national interest. In our globalized world, where the consequences of war, violence and climate change are impacting everyone, multilateralism and cooperation are required to limit damages, resolve issues and usher in peace, security and fundamental freedoms for all. The international community needs to stand together to uphold and protect the UN and global governance.

# High Level Summit on Tuberculosis and Non-communicable Diseases

**T**uberculosis is the top infectious killer in the world: 1.6 million people die each year from TB. There were 10 million new infections detected during the last year alone. Unlike HIV and cancer, TB, which affects millions of people, has not commanded global attention and investment, because it is a disease that affects the impoverished and disenfranchised communities in Africa and South Asia. Global health experts wanted to engage the world leaders for political commitments at the highest levels, increased investments for new medicines, vaccines and diagnostics to elevate the fight against the disease. For this reason, the summit was held during the General Assembly. In spite of their presence in the building, many heads of governments did not participate in the meetings.

The preparatory meetings held to draft a declaration was held up by disputes, which lasted for three months between the United States and other member countries over intellectual property language that would affect the affordability of drugs. (The United States is the biggest donor for TB control, yet it chose to stand with the pharmaceutical industry and profits over saving lives.) This left little time for focusing on the meeting itself. The whole world knows that TB is treatable and curable, but the question is, who will pay for it? It is not a medical problem, but a political issue, and no one wants to be held accountable. Though the World Health Organization's "End TB" strategy has an annual shortfall of \$1.3 billion, governments didn't lay out any specific or new funding pledges. Experts say they require \$3.5 billion investment for prevention and treatment and \$1.3 billion for research. The United States has committed to \$30 million over several years to build up accountability and data tracking and \$30 million to assist India. The U.K. has given \$10 million to the TB alliance for drug development. The summit did not live up to the expectations of everyone concerned; the global leadership failed to make TB a priority.

The prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) was another issue taken up by the General Assembly. Sustainable Development Goals target 3.4 is about reducing by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by 2030. The world has been able to control most communicable diseases through vaccines and better healthcare delivery. Today, non-communicable

diseases are responsible for 71 percent of all deaths globally: 41 million people. The five main NCD risk factors are unhealthy diet, tobacco use, air pollution, harmful use of alcohol, and physical inactivity. Each year, 15 million people's lives are cut short due to NCDs. Eight hundred thousand people die from suicides annually (mental health is part of NCDs). People living in poverty are disproportionately affected by NCDs and mental health conditions. While the West is adopting healthier lifestyles, multinationals are aggressively marketing processed food, sugary beverages and tobacco products in developing countries.

The meeting adopted a declaration entitled: "Time to Deliver: Accelerating our response to address NCDs for



the health and wellbeing of present and future generations." It pledges to take 13 actions to prevent and control cancer, heart and lung diseases, diabetes, etc. Leaders are in agreement that actions should be taken to restrict smoking, unhealthy foods, alcohol and sugary drinks, including controls on the marketing of such products. World leaders will have to roll out public education and awareness campaigns to promote healthier lifestyles, vaccinating against HPV virus to protect against cervical cancer and treating hypertension and diabetes.

Without multi-sectoral partnerships and universal health coverage the fight against NCDs will not succeed. Governments will have to lead with political will that translates to adequate resource mobilization. While two-thirds of NCD deaths occur in developing countries, these countries receive only 2 percent health funding. A small country like Micronesia spends 70 percent of its health budget on NCDs alone. NCDs are best treated at the local level through awareness creation, promotion and education for prevention and behavior change; early detection, diagnosis, intervention and treatment, but primary health care systems in low and middle income countries are not equipped to address these diseases. Concerns of most countries are about financing the policies and plans. From a civil society perspective the political declaration on NCDs is unambitious and non-committal, lot of emphasis given to lifestyle changes, rather than on environment and policies to help people make the right choices.



# 'Migrant Workers: An Asian-Pacific Experience' in Delhi, India

In 2016, the United Nations held a high-level summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants with a coordinated response, to strengthen governance through international cooperation, facilitate opportunities for safe, orderly and regular migration; and to address the root causes that force people to be on the move. Since 2017, we NGOs at the UN have participated in the intergovernmental negotiations for a Global Compact on Migration as well as creating awareness and advocating on this issue.

Some of the New York-based NGOs organized migration conferences in Rome in 2016 and in Nairobi, Kenya in 2017. Seeing the impact these conferences had, the following NGOs —Congregation of St. Joseph, International Presentation Association, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Passionists, Proclade Internazionale Onlus, Sisters of Charity Federation, UNANIMA, and Vivat International—planned for a conference in Asia on the theme: "Migrant Workers: An Asian-Pacific Experience" in Delhi, India. A group of NGOs based in Delhi joined the group as national organizing partners who were instrumental in looking after all the logistics and arranging for resource

persons. One hundred sixty one participants from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Philippines, South Korea, and Sri Lanka deliberated on labor migration, rights of migrant workers, recruitment fees, high cost of remittances, inconsistent policies across nations, and causes of internal migration, including climate change, environmental disasters, religious and conflicts, etc. Best practices, experiences of people's movements and stories of internally displaced people were shared during the conference. The conference stressed the need for connecting people at the grassroots to strengthen collaboration and networking for effective advocacy locally and globally.

Two Sisters of Charity of Nazareth from the Delhi area—Manisha Azhakathu and Nirmala Mulakal—were part of the national organizing committee and worked hard to make the conference a success. A total of eight SCNs from India and Nepal participated.



## UN Orientation for Sisters of St. Martha Justice Ministry

From Sept. 3–6, 2018, four members of the Sisters of St. Martha Core Committee, Martha Justice Ministry, attended a UN Orientation in New York. The agenda was gathered from the participants — Amy Brierley and Olga Gladkikh, Antigonish and Mark Nixon, Lethbridge, Alberta and Sister Marion Sheridan. The Agenda provided some hands-on experience: attending the RUN (Religious at the UN) meeting and the meeting of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development. A highlight was a meeting with Cameron Jelinski, First Secretary for Human Rights and Social Affairs at the Permanent Mission Canada to the United Nations. Cameron is open to receiving

our input and sending us material that will help us in our ministry of Social and Ecological Justice in Canada. Sister Teresa provided excellent input, with visual aides, in this Orientation: How the SDGs intertwine with Catholic Social Teaching; the structure and workings of the United Nations; and other topics too numerous to mention here. A tour of the UN helped to put these discussions in perspective. Dialogue was key to this process in the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Each of us would highly recommend this UN Orientation and are grateful to Sister Teresa. — Sister Marion Sheridan, CMS



# Vincentian Family Collaborative Action Program and Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change Seminar in Pacet, Mojokerto, Indonesia

As a member of the Vincentian Family Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change, I had the opportunity to participate in a seminar organized by the Daughters of Charity and Congregation of the Mission leadership teams in Indonesia from September 11-15, 2018. Seventy participants from 17 branches were from Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. The inputs provided a basic understanding of Systemic Change and Collaboration for a paradigm shift in thinking and a new methodology for ministries/interventions to promote sustainable development of people living in poverty. Every day, the participants were encouraged to keep the following mantras in focus: "everything is connected everything else...nothing happens in isolation" and "nothing worthwhile gets accomplished alone." The topic on 'Vincentian as a catalyst for Systemic Change' gave emphasis to personal formation through reflection on mystics of charity, value of personal prayer and the need to learn from people living in poverty. Ministry/project examples were taken up to

examine the methodology and integration of the elements/strategies of Systemic Change and Collaboration. The struggle is to get started, because Systemic Change and Collaboration entail time and commitment. Each participant had the opportunity to formulate "My Action Plan" as individuals and country teams. The experience of the seminar is summed up in the words of one participant: "We had wonderful time learning...sharing...listening...exchanging culture and being...in Pacet!" The Indonesian organizing team made sure the seminar was not only successful, but a memorable one for everyone.



## - UPCOMING - EVENTS & NEWS

December 3-14, 2018 – COP 24 - Katowice, Poland

December 4-9, 2018 – Global Forum for Migration Development, Marrakech, Morocco

December 10-11, 2018 – Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Marrakech, Morocco

February 11-22, 2019 – Commission on Social Development, New York

March 11-22, 2019 – Commission on the Status of Women, New York

Please pray for the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Global Compact on Migration: February 20 -23; March 12-15; April 3-6; May 14-18; June 4-8; July 9-13



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