



NGO NEWS

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN NOVEMBER 2019

Highlights from the 74th UN General Assembly

While the UN is trying to improve women's leadership in the organization, at the General Assembly there were very few women leaders during the high-level debates. Of the 83 leaders who spoke on Sept. 24 and 25, only five were women. Out of the 193 countries, just 16 women delivered their national statements. (In 2019, there are 23 women heads of states in the world.) If women were under-represented, so were the role of women and women's rights. The women leaders who spoke on Sept. 24 focused on climate change and the need for international cooperation.

SDG Summit

At the first SDG Summit convened by the General Assembly Sept. 24-25, global leaders reiterated the need for accelerated action to fulfill the vision and the Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Though considerable progress has been made, the most vulnerable people and countries continue suffer the most. The Political Declaration of the Summit highlights that "Vulnerabilities are high and deprivations are becoming more entrenched... Assessments show that we are missing the poverty eradication target... Hunger is on the rise. Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is too slow. Inequalities in wealth, incomes and opportunities are increasing



in and between countries. Biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, discharge of plastic litter into the oceans, climate change and increasing disaster risk continue at rates that bring potentially disastrous consequences for humanity. International migration is a multidimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination.

Violent extremism, terrorism, organized crime, corruption, illicit financial flows, global health threats, humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades."

This is a stark picture of our world today. Given this reality, the world leaders recognize the urgent need to accelerate action on all levels by all stakeholders to ensure we leave no one behind. We have a decade on action and delivery for sustainable development, "to free humanity from the tyranny of poverty and heal and secure our planet for future generations." We all have a duty to engage in the process.

Read the [political declaration](#) of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly

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Highlights from World Bank/ International Monetary Fund Civil Society Meetings



Civil Society Town Hall with Kristalina Georgieva, IMF Managing Director

Kristalina Georgieva is the first person to assume this role from Eastern Europe (she is from Bulgaria, an emerging economy), and the second woman to become managing director. During the Town Hall, she came across as a person concerned about vulnerable people, gender equality, fragile countries and climate change. She wants to focus on the importance of gender equality, especially on how society is devaluing the unpaid work of women and IMF's role in perpetuating it. Importance should be given for promoting women's leadership, redistributing the burden of unpaid care work, and equitable labor access.

According to her, real changes can happen when countries demonstrate the political will for policy changes and implementation. She also highlighted the need for IMF to lead by example on equality and gender pay. From the stage, she told IMF's human resources director to send her a calendar invite to discuss how to achieve equal pay between the genders within the institution. She told the women present, "Do not ever accept to be any less than men and be She4She." If Kristalina keeps up the gender equality crusade, we can expect changes in the coming years.

Learning Poverty: Building the Foundation of Human Capital – at the World Bank

It is said, "A child who can read, can lead." It is assumed that all children should be able to read by the age of 10. Today we are confronted with a learning crisis called Learning Poverty, leading to human capital deficit. More than half of all the 10 year olds in low and middle income countries, who are in school, cannot read. Learning poverty is measured as the percentage of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a basic story. Currently, 53 percent of children in low-and middle-income countries have learning poverty.

Reading is the gateway for learning as a child progresses through school and if the child is unable to read, that gate is shut. Eliminating learning poverty is important to build up the human capital of a coun-



IMF Research on Women and Work
(YouTube) | [Watch video](#)



try, to eradicate poverty, hunger and achieve shared prosperity for all through sustainable development. Human capital is the most important component of the wealth of a country. There is urgent need to invest more in quality education. The World Bank has initiated the “Human Capital Project” in October 2018 to accelerate more and better investments in people. On October 17, 2019, the World Bank introduced its ambitious new Learning Target, which aims to cut by at least half the global rate of Learning Poverty by 2030. According to WB President, David Malpass, “Success in reaching this target is critical to our mission.” To support the countries to reduce learning poverty, they will offer: (1) A literacy policy package to promote reading proficiency, (2) A refreshed education approach to strengthen entire education systems

for better education outcomes and (3) An ambitious measurement and research agenda for innovation on how to build foundational skills. WB will achieve this in partnership with UNESCO.

There is public criticism on this initiative by the World Bank. Why does the Bank—a group of economists—feel it is better placed to tell the rest of the world what to focus on education? Are they focusing on the economic returns from education? Bank’s narrow focus on “halving learning poverty by 2030” will have unintended consequences—the focus is measurement, it can exclude children with learning disabilities, children of migrant workers, those affected by conflicts and children from illiterate households. What is needed is increased financing for education because the learning crisis is the result of increased enrollment leading to overcrowded classrooms with untrained teachers.

Perhaps another initiative, [Global Platform for Education Finance](#), will provide the investments needed to improve access, equity and quality.

World Bank event on Learning Poverty: Building the Foundation of Human Capital | [Watch video](#)

Editor’s note: Sister Teresa had the opportunity to attend these meetings in Washington, D.C.



74th UN General Assembly Highlights *continued from page 1*

Read the [Report of the Secretary-General](#) on SDG Progress 2019

High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage

This meeting represents the aspiration for all people in the world to receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. To move this vision from an aspiration level to reality—access for all to, affordable, inclusive and resilient health systems—requires investment. UN member states have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to health, and the community should participate actively to realize it. The meeting galvanized global commitments to ensure health for all, recognizing the strong links to climate action and the fact that health is a human right and a precondition, outcome and driver of sustainable development.

The outcome document calls for “health systems that are strong, resilient, functional, well-governed, responsive, accountable, integrated, community based, people centered and capable of quality service delivery, supported by a competent health workforce, adequate health infrastructure, enabling legislative and regulatory frameworks as well as sufficient and sustainable funding.”

The outcome document recognizes that “half the world’s population lack access to essential health services; more than 800 million people spend at least 10 percent of their household income on healthcare; and out-of-pocket expenses drive 100 million people into poverty each year.” Currently the “world spends \$7.5 trillion on health, which is close to 10 percent of global GDP... but on average, one-third of national health expenditure is covered by out-of-pocket expenses, while less than 40 percent of funding on primary health care is from public sources in low-income and middle income countries.”

The outcome document reiterates “the fundamental importance of equity, social justice and social protection mechanisms as well as the elimination of the root causes of discrimination and stigma in health-care settings to ensure universal and equitable access to quality health services without financial hardship for all people, particularly for those who are vulnerable or

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in vulnerable situations.” In the final analysis, the achievement of universal health coverage will depend on the political will and commitment of the governments to implement the outcome document they have embraced at the UN. The lack of universal health coverage undermines the validity of health care as a human right.

Read the [Political Declaration](#) of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage: “Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World”

High Level Dialogue on Financing for Development

Financing will help turn the vision of sustainable development into reality. It is no secret that most developing countries around the world are failing to mobilize adequate, predictable and sustainable funding needed implement the [2030 Agenda](#). According to Tijjani Muhammad Bande, President of the General Assembly, we are facing a significant challenge to “finance our wide web of sustainable development goals against a backdrop of weak global economic growth, unsustainable debt levels, volatile financial markets and significant financing deficits.” The Secretary-General stated, “Financing is the test of our seriousness. Without resources, we will simply not deliver for people and planet.”

A few takeaways of the dialogue are: There was high-level participation by heads of state and ministers to find a way forward for financing the SDGs. It is important to have decision makers around the table. And the focus was not on finding new money, but on illicit financial flows, taxes and debt. Developing countries are deprived of billions of dollars through tax evasion, tax avoidance and illicit financial flows, thereby depriving governments of the revenue needed to finance economic growth. The global body needs a broad and forceful coalition to tackle illicit financial flows; there is urgent need for reforms to the international tax architecture for every country to have a place at the table and their voices to be heard; systemic change in financial markets and business; and responsible borrowing and lending in the face of increasing debt vulnerabilities. None of these are possible without international cooperation and partnerships from all stakeholders.

Civil Society Conference focused on SDG11

As my plane descended into Salt Lake City, I was unaware that I was flying into one of the worst cities in the United States for air pollution. How apt, and perhaps ironic, that I was arriving for the 68th UN Civil Society Conference focused on the theme of “Building inclusive and sustainable cities and communities.”

The conference itself was teeming with representatives from non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, businesses, and faith groups from across the world to think, share, and learn about environmental sustainability and inclusion. I had opportunities to attend plenary sessions, go to workshops, and visit booths and vendors in the exhibit hall. Overall, it was a refreshing experience to encounter so many people on the leading edge of work on the environment, gender equality, economic inclusion and all the sustainable development goals.

It was exciting to see in one workshop how a variety of faith communities around the world are beginning to rethink their connection to creation and the efforts they are taking to become more sustainable. The workshop included representatives from the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, the Baha’i Faith, and the Loretto community.



Overall it was a wonderful experience to be a part of the gathering and learn from the experience of those who are working on similar issues around the world. It also continued to challenge me to think about the way I travel and work, and to consider what more I can do to offset my emissions and be sustainable in a world that so desperately needs authentic climate conscious leadership.

—John Shively, NGO Liaison, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

What an incredible opportunity to be among thousands of participants from dozens of countries at the 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference. Every plenary session and workshop built on Sustainable Development Goal #11: “to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable by 2030.”

We heard voices from urban and rural towns, mountain areas and small villages, youth, indigenous people. We considered the importance of empowering girls and women and of providing appropriate resources for families. And, of course, we affirmed the need for immediate and effective action with regard to the climate crisis.

There are two things in particular that stay with me.

First, each plenary session and workshop modeled inclusivity in that there were always co-presenters or panels. No session that I attended or heard about had a single presenter. And every session included participation from everyone in the room. Second, each session ended with identifying action steps regarding the specific topic. The message was clear: We are all in this together.

In the inspiring outcome statement, we committed ourselves “to actions that uplift the human spirit, create humane cities in which people can flourish, and enhance the quality of life and dignity for all.”

—Sister Louise Lears, SC, Cincinnati



To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Generation Equality Forum and CSW64 will look back at the past 25 years to evaluate progress, as well as look forward to determine concrete action for gender equality. The [Generation Equality Forum](#) is a multi-stakeholder gathering with

two major meetings in Mexico, May 2020 and Paris, July 2020. The Forum is convened by UN Women, co-chaired by France and Mexico, and in partnership with global Civil Society.



A Civil Society Feminist and Women's Movement Action Plan to advance global gender equality

- Central premise is “women’s rights are human rights”
- A feminist approach aimed at positively transforming norms and power structures
- Open, welcoming, inclusive of wide diversity of feminist and women’s movements
- Creative, action-oriented, brave and safe
- Using power of existing political commitments and obligations to avoid “reinventing the wheel”
- Utilizing extant CSO processes actions at global, national, regional and sub-regional levels to help advance

Objectives for Beijing+25/Generation Equality

- Emergence of a coherent feminist agenda with demands reflecting an agreed set of priorities
- Achieving cross-cutting alliances
- Galvanize activists globally who will speak with one voice against suppression
- Help connect activists across silos working for similar objectives to achieve goals
- Help create the platforms that will address inequalities and lead to action
- Address inequalities created by patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and militarism

Source: NGO/CSW/NY Publications. Graphics used with permission.

Sister Seonmi: Reflection on UN internship

In September 2019, I had the privilege of having an internship experience at the United Nations with Sister Teresa Kotturan. It was a great opportunity to learn about how NGOs at the UN work for peace and eradication of poverty through the lens of the Gospel and look at our mission and ministry through the global lens.

I attended various meetings, such as the 2019 UN General Assembly, inter-faith committee meetings, activities by the committee of Religious NGOs, actions on Climate Change and forum for Culture of Peace. In the meetings, I listened to speeches by world leaders and scholars, and met many activists, religious people and many NGOs working together for the common good. They all are raising their voices into one single voice for peace in the world.

Pope Francis said that everything is connected. Peace is also connected with everything that we need to tackle: Poverty Eradication, Human Rights, Trafficking, Migration, Climate Change, Sustainable Development, Education for Global Citizenship, and Empowerment of Women and Girls. The Risen Jesus said to us, "Peace be with you." We know the peace that Jesus left us is not self-satisfaction or just a feeling. It is peace that we taste together only when we share our lives with others.



Our mission is to share our lives with others like Jesus, while working for the peace with the poor and the marginalized, people suffering from wars and conflicts, creatures crying out because of climate change, and the women and children suffering from physical and emotional abuse. Through these missions, I believe, we can work to 'leave no one behind' and we become global citizens as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton called us to be.

Sister Seonmi Jin, SC is a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

- UPCOMING - EVENTS & NEWS

November 25, 2019: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

December 10, 2019: Human Rights Day

February 10–19, 2020:
Commission for Social
Development

March 9–10, 2020:
Commission on the Status
of Women



Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN
NGO Representative
747 Third Avenue, Second Floor # 213
New York, NY 10017
scfederationunngo@gmail.com
facebook.com/ngoscfederation
@ngoscfederation
sistersofcharityfederation.org/ngo
Vincentian Family: famvin.org