



NGO NEWS

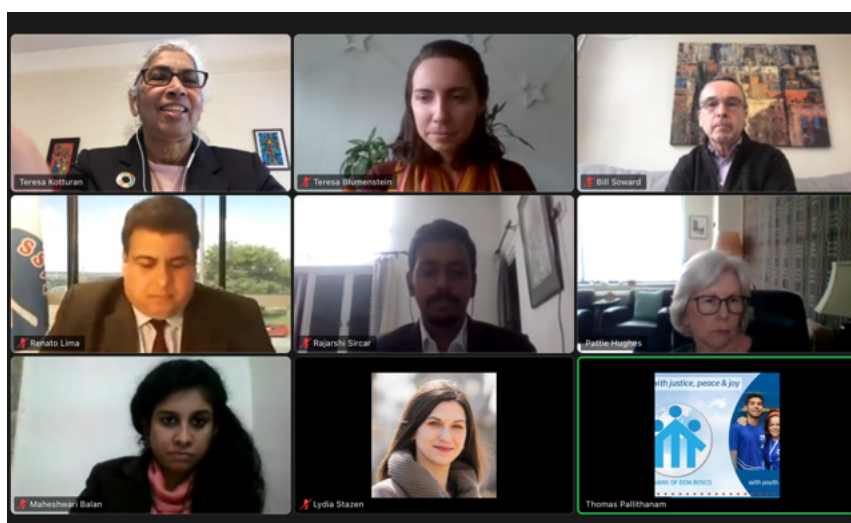
BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN

MARCH 2021

59th Session: Commission for Social Development

The commission, with a priority theme, “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies and social development on the wellbeing of all,” took place virtually Feb. 8–17, 2021. At the UN, except the opening and closing sessions of the commission, all other meetings were virtual. Since all the official sessions were available on UN Web TV, participants could join the sessions from anywhere. Sisters of Charity Federation members Sisters Carol De Angelo, SC (New York); Helene Alain, Marion Sheridan and Teresa Kotturan participated in the commission.

The Civil Society Forum organized by the NGO Committee on CSocD was also held virtually this year. The opening session, held on a platform called REMO, allowed participants around the world to move from table to table for interaction and networking. Besides the opening and closing sessions, the forum held three thematic sessions on “Digital Inclusion in Education and Social Protection for All,” “Digital Technology and Financing for Development: Eradication of Poverty and Promotion of Equality at Global, National and Local Levels”; and “Digital Technology and Good Governance: Creating a Legal Environment that Protects Human Rights, Respects Privacy and Prevents Abuse.” All these issues are critical to bridge the digital divide and inequalities, in access, affordability and availability of internet for the 3.6 billion people who are left offline. Digital inclusion is not just access to the Internet—it is about social justice, equity and human rights. Digital inclusion should create an enabling environment to restore dignity to



people who are left behind and provide pathways for social, financial and political inclusion. Internet and broadband access should be a global public good and a fundamental right for all. The new slogan is: “Leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline.”

Those interested can watch the major sessions of the commission [online](#).

Side Event: Digital Technology at the Service of Ending Homelessness

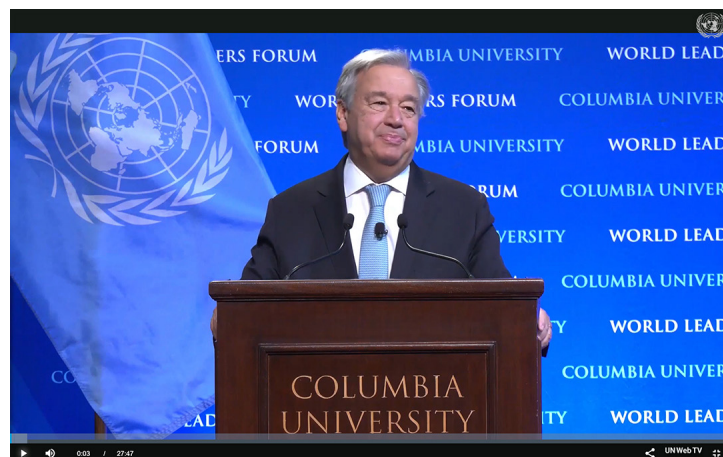
The Sisters of Charity Federation along with the NGOs from the Vincentian Family, Salesian Missions and Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary hosted a side event titled: “Digital Technology at the Service of Ending Homelessness” on Feb. 9. The speakers brought best practices from their field to show how technology is currently used by persons experiencing homelessness to enable them to connect with family and friends; restore missing/runaway children to their

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The State of the Planet

Ahead of the Climate Ambition Summit, in his address at Columbia University in New York on Dec. 2, 2020, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for an end to humanity's apparent "war on nature" and to "make peace with nature." He said we are facing a devastating pandemic, global warming, ecological degradation, biodiversity loss and destruction of ecosystems. The past decade was the hottest in human history, and 2020 is one of the three warmest years on record globally. We are also experiencing climate extremes. The world needs to reduce fossil fuel use by 6 percent to limit global warming. He states that, our "assault on our planet is impeding our efforts to eliminate poverty and imperiling food security," which is impacting peace and security in many countries. Most of the climate vulnerable countries are politically and economically fragile. In fact, countries and regions who have contributed the least to the climate crisis are suffering the most. He further noted that the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation affect women drastically: 80 percent of those displaced by climate change are women. Human activities are the root of the problem.

Guterres went on to say that, "COVID recovery and our planet's repair must be two sides of the same coin." To address the climate emergency, he proposes the following: achieve carbon neutrality within the next three decades; align global finance with the Paris Climate Agreement; and invest in adaptation to protect



the most vulnerable people and countries from climate impacts. To make this happen, every country, city, financial institution and company should adopt plans for transitioning to net zero emissions. As consumers, producers and investors, every individual should do their part. The shift to decarbonization is costly on workers, and to address the human cost, the world needs to adopt "just transition" and provide social protection, temporary basic income, re-skilling and upskilling to ease the changes.

He called on all people to work together "to transform humankind's relationship with the natural world and with each other. Solidarity is humanity and Solidarity is survival."

Please listen to the Secretary General's speech: [watch video](#) This is a crucial year for climate change. The next COP26 (Conference of Parties) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be taking place in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021. (Originally it was scheduled for last year.)

UN Secretary General's Priorities for 2021

During the UN General Assembly plenary meeting on Jan. 28–29, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres outlined the following priorities for the year 2021, to put the world on track. They are:

1. **Respond to COVID-19**—the first moral test of the year is to make vaccines available and affordable for all, treating them as a global public good.
2. **Start an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery**—he stressed the need for investments in health systems, universal health coverage, mental health care, social protection and safe returns to

school. All countries are urged to embrace renewal energy and green and resilient infrastructure.

3. **Make peace with nature**—he called on countries to declare national climate emergencies, submit nationally determined contributions for reducing emissions, phase out fossil fuels, increase support for adaptation, and help build a carbon-neutral world.
4. **Tackle poverty and inequality**—we need a New Social Contract with a strong emphasis on quality education for all, measures related to fair labor markets and fair taxation, universal health coverage and a new generation of social protection measures, especially for the 2 billion informal economy workers, many of whom are women.

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The Future We Want



Along with 1.5 million people from all the UN member countries, many of you participated in the global consultation - UN75 2020 and Beyond, Shaping Our Future Together. The final report of the expectations and priorities of participants were published in January 2021. It is a roadmap for the future of the UN, with a clear message, that citizens from around the world want to participate more actively in decision making at the UN. Here are some of the priorities:

- Amidst the current crisis, the number one priority for people around the world is access to basic services – healthcare, water, sanitation and education.
- Second priority is greater international solidarity and increased support to the places hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic – including tackling poverty, inequalities, and boosting employment.
- While health appears to be the first priority now, it is actually one of the areas many expect will improve over the next 25 years. Respondents also believe access to education and women's rights will improve.

- Looking into the future, the overwhelming concern is the climate crisis and natural environment.
- Other major priorities for the future include: ensuring greater respect for human rights, settling conflicts, tackling poverty, and reducing corruption.
- When it comes to the future, the young and respondents from developing countries tend to be more optimistic. Respondents from countries with lower human development index ranking are more optimistic about future.
- Globally, 87% of the respondents believe international cooperation is vital to deal with today's challenges. The COVID-19 crisis has made international cooperation more urgent.
- Finally looking to the past, 6 out of 10 people believe the UN has made the world a better place. Looking into the future, 74 percent see the UN as “essential” in tackling global challenges. And sadly, over half of the respondents see the UN as remote from their lives and say they don't know much about it.

In countries where the UN held dialogues, the participants called for the UN to be more inclusive of the diversity of actors in the 21st century.

The key findings can be accessed at:
<http://report.un75.online/en>

NGO Liaisons Meeting

On Jan. 22, 2021, the Sisters of Charity Federation NGO Liaisons, NGO Representative and executive director, Sister Grace Hartzog, SC, met virtually to share about their current advocacy focuses. Some of the issues our membership are engaged in include: immigration, care of creation, supporting people with food insecurity, Earth literacy, study and sharing on racism, homeless people, nuclear disarmament, advocacy letter writing on behalf of indigenous peoples without water, death penalty, missing women in Canada, affordable housing, training of new growers, ban on natural gas, elimination of social barriers. The group also strategized about the upcoming annual meeting during the federation leadership virtual gathering in June. Our regular gatherings since the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown have strengthened our bonds, allowing us to learn from the best practices and to value the “gifts we are to one another.”



A World Free of Nuclear Weapons: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) is a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. The treaty has a comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapon activities. “Each State party undertakes never under any circumstances to: Develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” It also prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State in the conduct of prohibited activities. This treaty not only bans all nuclear weapons, it requires victim assistance and environmental remediation for people and places harmed by nuclear weapons use and testing.

The Treaty was adopted by 122 countries on Sept. 20, 2017, and on Jan. 22, 2021, the treaty came into force. Fifty ratifications were required for entry into force. Currently, 86 countries are signatories to the treaty, and 52 countries have ratified it. No nuclear power country has signed the treaty. In the words of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the entry

into force is “an important step towards a world free of nuclear weapons. The elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority for the United Nations.” He commended the “States that have ratified the treaty and saluted the work of civil society, which has been instrumental in facilitating the negotiation and ratification of the treaty.” Chief among them is the [International Campaign to abolish Nuclear Weapons](#) (ICAN), which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. Beatrice Fihn, executive director of ICAN, had this to say on the treaty’s entry into force: “a new chapter for nuclear disarmament. Decades of activism have achieved what many said was impossible: nuclear weapons are banned.” Many survivors of nuclear explosions and tests had advocated for this treaty. (The articles of this treaty are not open to reservations and has unlimited duration. States parties do have the option to withdraw from the Treaty.)

In August 2021, the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) (NPT) will be reviewed. It is reported that there are deep divisions among the nuclear-weapon states and between them and the non-nuclear-weapon states. The non-nuclear-weapon states are deeply disappointed with the lack of progress towards nuclear disarmament despite the commitments laid down in the NPT. In a joint statement by representatives of 16 states (Stockholm Initiative for Disarmament Diplomacy) has renewed the “call on all nuclear-weapon states to show leadership, address and reduce nuclear risks and advance nuclear disarmament by taking meaningful steps to implement the commitments under the NPT.”

We are acutely aware of the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. Are we any safer because of the TPNW’s entry into force? There are 14,000 nuclear weapons in the hands of nine nuclear-armed States—United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan—and they do pose existential threats to humankind. In fact, innovative technologies have accelerated nuclear and nuclear arms production in the recent past. The United States, Russia and China have created Space Commands and are testing anti-satellite missiles, deploying on-orbit systems in the name of deterring conflict. Those who have nuclear weapons say it is a deterrent for their national security.

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Here is a useful booklet, created and produced by ICAN, that explains how the TPNW works:
https://www.icanw.org/how_the_treaty_works

It includes:

- How the treaty came about
- The activities prohibited under the treaty
- The framework for verifiably eliminating nuclear weapons
- The framework for assisting victims of nuclear weapons
- The work to bring all countries on board
- Arguments for joining the treaty
- What people can do to help make the treaty work

Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons:
<https://undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8>

Securing our Common future,
an Agenda for Disarmament:

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/>

Priorities *continued from page 2*

5. **Reverse the assault on human rights**
6. **Gender equality**, the greatest human rights challenge
7. **Heal geopolitical rifts**
8. **Reverse the erosion of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime**
9. **Seize the opportunities of digital technologies** while protecting against their growing dangers
10. **Launch a reset for the 21st century**—since the COVID-19 pandemic exposed huge gaps in government structures and ethical frameworks, he called for the reimagining of global systems and institutions to build a more inclusive, equal and sustainable world. To usher in a new world, “we need a New Global Deal where power, resources and opportunities are better shared at international decision-making tables—and governance mechanisms better reflect the realities of today.

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According to Dr. Rebecca Johnson, former president of ICAN, “there are no safe hands for these unsafe weapons of mass annihilation.”

Today one of the biggest threats we face is global warming, and the billions of dollars poured into nuclear weapons cannot protect humanity from the impacts of climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic. The entry into force is an opportunity to renew our efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Though the Sisters of Charity Federation member congregations have disinvested from nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, we need to join hands with organizations for advocacy on nuclear disarmament.

The following developments in human rights law, as reported by UNFold Zero, can support civil society nuclear disarmament campaigns. One of those developments is a powerful statement from the UN Human Rights Committee in October 2018: “The threat or use of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, which are indiscriminate in effect and are of a nature to cause destruction of human life on a catastrophic scale is, incompatible with respect for the right to life, and may amount to a crime under international law.” This is derived from the application of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Congratulations to SC Federation youth rep

The Civil Society Unit of the UN Department of Global Communications selected Wantoe Teah Wantoe, our Sisters of Charity Federation Youth Representative, to be part of the Youth Representatives Steering Committee, 2020–2021. Wantoe, a native of Liberia, is a student

at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, New York City, New York. On Jan. 21, 2021, he co-moderated a UN Civil Society Youth-Led Briefing on “#Leave No one Behind: Towards a world with equal opportunities and rights for all.” The Sisters of Charity Federation is proud of Wantoe Teah Wantoe, his passion for engaging youth in global issues such as climate change, gender equality, solidarity, equity, and human rights. We wish him many successful engagements at the UN.



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families; provide education and extracurricular activities to homeless children; access health care and other services; access skills trainings, find jobs and shelters. In the absences of reliable data on homelessness, the event highlighted how technology can assist in data collection and develop solutions to end homelessness. (It was encouraging to see a good number of federation members participating in the virtual event.)

[Watch videorecording](#) of the side event. You will need to enter the following passcode: o8YzE#qu



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