



NGO NEWS

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN

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General Assembly Resolution on Homelessness

Way back in 2017, when the Vincentian Family NGOs at the UN came together for advocacy on homelessness, first on their own and later on as a coalition of NGOs called Working Group to End Homelessness, their aim was to have a definition of “homelessness” and reliable data on how many people experience homelessness. Each country had its own definition, and the last time there was any kind of estimation on homeless people worldwide was in 2005. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights assures that “everyone has the right to adequate housing,” but still the UN had failed to address this issue during its 75 years of existence until 2019. The 2030 Agenda for [Sustainable Development Goals](#) highlighted the issue of homelessness under SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities: “Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.”

Sustained advocacy from the NGO community resulted in having a priority theme: “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness,” for the 58th Session of the Commission for Social Development in 2020 and



giving visibility to this global challenge. At the conclusion of the Commission, the Economic and Social Council issued a resolution on homelessness with a description of homelessness, not a definition. It called the UN member states to collect disaggregated data on demographics. This was a huge win for the members of the Working Group to End Homelessness.

Since the resolution was a soft law, its non-binding nature lacked capacity to enforce implementation by member states. Hence, the vision of the NGOs for “a future, in which every person experiences the dignity of having a safe, habitable, affordable, secure home,” and the commitment to value and respect would not be realized without having a binding resolution from the General Assembly. To achieve a binding resolution, the executive committee members of the Working Group to End Homelessness worked tirelessly with some member states to table a new resolution in the Third Committee of the General Assembly

from 2020. This was passed by the General Assembly on Dec. 16, 2021.



Photo: Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN

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A Presidency of Hope

Abdulla Shahid, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Maldives became the 76th President of UN General Assembly on Sept. 14, 2021. Considering the gigantic challenges he was facing, he has referred to his one-year-term as the “Presidency of Hope.” As he took charge, he said, “Presidency of Hope is what this moment in time is calling for; let us choose to write a new chapter. Let us dare to dream and let us dare to hope. Hope is never an over-rated cliché, but instead drives people not to give up, despite the odds seemingly high.”

Five core principles of the Presidency of Hope:

1. Close the gap to vaccine access and vaccinate the world to recover from COVID-19.
2. Ensure that the socioeconomic recovery is forward thinking, bluer, greener and more resilient, focusing on climate change and environment. Will work for targeted interventions for countries in special situations and the least developed countries.
3. Gender equality: will create a Gender Advisory Board and promises to lead by example by participating in panels with equal number of women and pushing for a family friendly UN. (As the Foreign Minister of Maldives, he brought gender equity across the ministry.) He has delivered on his promise to make his office gender balanced, multinational, with geographical diversity – the office has representation from 30 countries, representing all five regional groups of the UN.
4. Youth participation in decision-making: will launch the “President of the General Assembly Youth Fellowship Program” to empower young diplomats and civil servants from underrepresented countries.
5. UN reform and revitalization to make the UN a forum for all, a forum of “We the Peoples,” and to achieve this, he works to enhance the participation of civil society organizations and



promises to engage regularly with civil society and youth. (He has kept his promise.)

In January, during an informal meeting of the General Assembly on his priorities for the remaining months of his presidency, he stressed “Throughout all our efforts, there is one constant that needs to be present: hope. Yes, the tasks before us is daunting. Yet cynicism offers us no solutions, cynicism is a path to inaction. If we give in into it, we will be lulled into complacency, into the false belief that our actions do not matter and that we can only await the inevitable. Hope is what will strengthen our resolve. Hope is what will give us the courage of our convictions and inspire us to act. Hope is what will remind us of all that we have achieved and all that we can achieve if we work together.”

He wants to demonstrate to the billions of people that:

- We are aware of their plight and their anxiety
- We are listening
- We are willing to work together to overcome our problems, and
- The United Nations is as relevant to today’s crisis as it was 76 years ago.

“Let us dare to dream and let us dare to hope...”

Read [“Interview: New UN Assembly president highlights hope”](#)

Watch (3-minute video) [“Presidency of Hope”](#) (YouTube)

“I am angry, dismayed and saddened; in fact powerless, for advocacy has no room in the face of arrogant military power. Instead, in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, I lift my heart in prayer, begging God to intervene. Miracles can still happen, in the guise of diplomacy.” — Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN

[‘We are afraid, but we are also strong’: Stunned sisters worldwide watch as Russia invades Ukraine](#)

Global Sisters Report Feb 24, 2022 by Chris Herlinger

Shrinking Civil Society Space at the UN

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has always upheld the value of civil society in the functioning of the United Nations. This is what he said during the 75th anniversary of the UN Charter, “You are with us today as we face the COVID-19 pandemic. You are our allies in upholding human rights and battling racism. You are indispensable partners in forging peace, pushing climate action, advancing gender equality, delivering life-saving humanitarian aid and controlling the spread of deadly weapons. And the world’s framework for shared progress, the Sustainable Development Goals, is unthinkable without you.” The UN also takes pride in stating that NGOs have been partners of the Department of Global Communications (DGC) since its establishment in 1947. Official relationships between DGC and NGOs began in 1968.

Yet, the doors of the UN in New York are not open to the NGOs since March 12, 2020; the indispensable partners are almost like pariahs. It is a known fact that some member states would like to see the status continue; in their view, the UN is a place for intergovernmental processes and NGOs have no role to play. In many countries, NGOs are looked upon as enemies of the government and not as partners who help to implement their developmental policies. It is also reported that countries like the United States and United Kingdom are quietly pushing for more restrictions on NGOs and less funding for NGO-supportive UN



“focal points” for a while, while giving lip service to the cause of NGO access. The reason for their actions is related to NGO advocacy on disarmament and opposition to war in Iraq. Historically, the UN members have not stood up for NGOs against pressures from powers big and small – for some they are an annoying opposition to be avoided. Given this context, it is a clever way to

use the concerns and restrictions related to COVID-19 for restricting civic space. It is said, the UN leadership considers the “electronic platforms” more suitable for engaging the civil society, at least for a while. Excluding NGOs is a violation of Article 71 of the UN Charter, which calls for the Economic and Social Council to establish “suitable arrangements for consultation” with NGOs.

Persistent requests from a group of 61 Member States and protests from major human rights organizations have resulted in the UN doors being cracked open a bit. During the past two years, NGOs were issued special passes twice — Nov. 17, 2021 and Feb. 16, 2022 — for meeting in the UN General Assembly Hall. Since January 2022, the UN has begun the process of issuing a limited number of UN Grounds passes to NGO Representatives. Sisters Teresa Kotturan, SCN, Sisters of Charity Federation NGO representative, and Carol De Angelo, SC, NGO liaison for the Sisters of Charity of New York, received their Grounds Passes on Jan. 25.



UN Orientation for NGO Liaisons

Participating in an online UN orientation led by Sister Teresa Kotturan are: Darlene O'Leary, incoming NGO Liaison for the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada; Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN; Sister Victoria Marie Gribshaw, SC, NGO Liaison for the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania; Mark Nixon, Core Team member of Martha Justice Ministry; Sister Marion Sheridan, CSM, outgoing NGO Liaison for the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish; and Katherine McGrath, SC, NGO Liaison for the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

SC Federation collaborates to host side events during the Commission for Social Development (CSocD)

In collaboration with VIVAT International and Greek Orthodox Church, the SC Federation co-sponsored a side event on behalf of Mining Working Group, on the theme: “Divestment from Extractive Industries: Building Forward for Resilient and Sustainable Recovery & Implementing Inclusive Practices in line with 2030 Agenda” on Feb. 11, 2022.

“For decades, human activities have induced a significant increase in global temperature, triggering a rapid change in the earth’s climate system. The expansion of fossil fuel use has generated a large amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, causing global warming. According to the IPCC report 2014, 65 percent of carbon dioxide in the air comes from fossil fuels and industrial processes. Fossil fuels, including coal, oil, and natural gas, are unsustainable extractive resources. The link between extractive industries, the environmental crisis, and human rights is indisputable. A key component of achieving the 2030 agenda is to remove the demand for those resources and offer alternatives. Governments must increase their investments in the green economy that, according to the UNDP, could lift 74 million people, specifically women, out of extreme poverty by 2030. Divestment from extractive industries is an alternative way to end fossil fuel expansion and transition to renewable energy. The promotion of divestment from fossil fuel mining is oriented toward an urgent paradigm shift and a small step toward a New Social Contract. Governments can turn to policy makers to conceptualize more sustainable outcomes in extractive industries and use revenues for a green transition in the wider economy.” (From the concept note of the event.)

The event highlighted the urgency to divest from extractive industries; alternative investments for building forward for resilient, sustainable and green recovery, i.e., Samaritan economy and nature-based solutions; impacts of green recovery for food security, livelihood and decent work. Consideration of these issues and potential solutions are necessary to create an economy that is equitable for all.



Watch “[Divestment from Extractive Industries](#)” (YouTube video).

Another side event that the SC Federation co-sponsored was in collaboration with members of the NGO committee on Financing for Development on the theme: “Investing in Youth Human Capital: A key driver for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Recovery from Poverty and Hunger” on Feb. 15, 2022.

The event attempted to give visibility to the urgency to eradicate poverty and hunger and to ensure an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, the importance of children’s education and youth empowerment cannot be emphasized enough. Education and skills training oriented to employability and Decent Work will be crucial for building the capacity of youth to achieve sustainable livelihoods, and for their long-term well-being. In 2020, globally, 1.2 billion children were out of school and more than 24 million children are at risk of dropping out. In the midst of a global crisis, lack of investments in education today’s youth will face generational inequality. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, youth were three times more likely to be unemployed than older workers. A recent study conducted in 112 countries among 12,000 youth finds the pandemic’s impact on young people to be systemic, deep, and disproportionate, impacting especially young women, younger youth, (migrant youth) in developed and lower-income countries.

The proportion of young people not in employment,

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UN Secretary-General outlines priorities for 2022

“We face a 5-alarm global fire that requires the full mobilization of all countries” is how, the UN Secretary-General described the current global scene: COVID-19 pandemic, rising inequalities, a morally bankrupt global financial system, the climate crisis, pollution, biodiversity

loss, political unrests and ferocious conflicts, mistrust among world powers, lawlessness in cyberspace, and diminished peace and security. All these challenges are, at heart, failures of global governance. From global health to digital technology, many of today’s multilateral frameworks are outdated and no longer fit for purpose. They do not protect critical global public goods meant to support humanity’s wellbeing -- from the global economy and finance systems to the health of our planet. Nor are multilateral frameworks delivering on our common aspirations for peace, sustainable development, human rights and dignity for all. Now is not the time to lament. Now is the time to act. Our responses to the five emergencies will determine the course of people and planet for decades to come.

The following is an abridged version of the address:

Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Though stopping the spread is at the top of agenda, the virus cannot be used as cover to undermine human rights, shrink civic space and stifle press freedom. Our actions must be grounded in science and common sense. The science is clear: Vaccines work. Vaccines save lives. Important to fight the plague of vaccine misinformation. The World Health Organization strategy to vaccinate 40 percent of people in all countries by the end of last year, and 70 percent by the middle of this year is not on target. At this rate, Africa will not meet the 70 percent threshold until August 2024.

Reform the global financial system, which is morally bankrupt. It favors the rich and punishes the poor. One of the main functions of the global financial system is to ensure stability, by supporting economies through financial shocks. Yet faced with precisely such a shock – a global pandemic – it has failed the



Global South. Low-income countries are experiencing their slowest growth in a generation. Many middle-income countries are ineligible for debt relief despite surging poverty, and the growing impact of the climate crisis. Women and girls, who represent the majority of poor in most regions, are paying a

high price in lost healthcare, education and jobs. These imbalances are not a bug, but a feature of the global financial system. They are inbuilt and structural. They are the product of a system that routinely ascribes poor credit ratings to developing economies, starving them of private finance. Credit ratings agencies are de facto decision-makers in the global financial system. They should be accountable and transparent. Urgent reform of the global financial system is required to support the needs of developing countries, through an inclusive and transparent process.

For a sustainable recovery, governments must be able to invest in strong health and education systems, job creation, universal social protection, gender equality and the care economy, and a just transition to renewable energy. Reforming the global financial architecture requires an operational debt relief and restructuring framework. It means addressing illicit financial flows, which drain more than \$88 billion annually from Africa alone. In 2022, I will continue pushing for these fundamental reforms, and use the convening power of the United Nations to boost investment in the SDGs.

Tackle the climate crisis. The battle to keep the 1.5-degree goal alive will be won or lost in this decade. Our planet has already warmed by around 1.2 degrees. The consequences have been devastating. In 2020, climate shocks forced 30 million people to flee their homes — three times more than those displaced by war and violence. Small island nations, least developed countries, and poor and vulnerable people everywhere, are one shock away from doomsday. Numbers don’t lie. We need a 45 percent reduction in global emissions by 2030 to reach carbon neutrality by mid-

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Homelessness *continued from page 1*

[The resolution](#) notes with concern that homelessness is a global problem, affecting people of different ages and with diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds in both developed and developing countries. The following excerpts highlight the human rights language on homelessness:

- Recognizes that homelessness constitutes an affront to human dignity and may be an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights.
- Homelessness is a barrier to full participation in society. Access to affordable, stable, safe and adequate housing is a part of the human right to an adequate standard of living.
- Member States need to address legal, administrative, social, economic, digital and cultural barriers that limit people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, from full, equal and meaningful participation, representation and input at all levels.

Relationship to SDGs:

- The eradication of poverty, hunger and malnutrition as they affect people experiencing and at risk of homelessness is crucial for the advancement of global and sustainable development.
- Member States must consider people experiencing homelessness and access to affordable, stable, safe and adequate housing towards achieving sustainable development goals and fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind.
- Poverty eradication requires that Member States implement and strengthen social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, ensuring access thereto for the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and those in the informal employment, in an effort to prevent and address homelessness.

Policies and programs to address homelessness:

Responsibility for developing policies and programs lies with Member States and local governments in consultation with individuals and families with lived experience, civil society organizations, and relevant

stakeholders. (Do take note that people with lived experience need to be at the table for policymaking. They are the experts.)

Description of homelessness and Data Collection:

- This description is the same as given in the previous resolution. Noting that “homelessness is not merely a lack of physical housing, but is often a disaffiliation process interrelated with poverty, lack of full and productive employment, decent work and access to infrastructure, as well as other socioeconomic issues that may constitute a loss of family, community and a sense of belonging, and depending on national context, can be described as a condition where a person or household lacks safe habitable space, which may compromise their ability to enjoy social relations, and includes people living on the streets, in other open spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation, people living in temporary accommodation or shelters for people experiencing homelessness, and, in accordance with national legislation, may include among others, people living in severely inadequate accommodation without security of tenure and access to basic services.”
- Calls upon Member States to collect disaggregated data on demographics related to homelessness and establish categories of homelessness, accompanying the existing measurement tools, and encourages Member States to harmonize the measurement and collection of data on homelessness to enable national and global policymaking.

[This resolution](#) is a testament to the power of consistent, coherent and sustained advocacy, partnership and collaboration at the global level among NGOs and Member States. It is very important to find common ground and champions to support and follow through until the end. This resolution has the capacity to transform the lives of millions of people who are homeless and live in unsafe housing conditions in urban slums all over the world. That requires continued advocacy at the national and local level. Are you ready?

Farewell to NGO Liaison Debbie Webber

Sisters of Charity Federation staff and NGO Liaisons gathered on Jan. 6, 2022 to thank and bless Debbie Webber upon her retirement from her ministry with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati.

Debbie joined the NGO Liaisons in 2013, and during this time, she generously shared her gifts to network, organize and initiate advocacy efforts among the Federation members. We thanked God for her gifts of insight, integrity, fidelity and wisdom and her untiring willingness to give herself freely. Executive Director Sister Grace Hartzog, SC adapted the missioning of Louise de Marillac in 1629 to bless Debbie. "May the divine goodness accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in weariness, your strength in toil. Let us go forth in charity and in peace, in the name of our one and only God, Creative Love, Love Incarnate and Breath of Love, forever and ever. Amen."



Side Events *continued from page 4*

education or training remained stubbornly high over the past 15 years and now stands at 30 percent for young women and 13 percent for young men worldwide. "There are presently 71 million young people unemployed, and many millions more are in precarious or informal work" (World Youth Report: Youth and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). "Recent estimates suggest that 600 million jobs would have to be created over the next 15 years to meet youth employment needs. Finding decent work can be especially difficult for this demographic". (Youth Social Entrepreneurship and 2030 Agenda - 2020 report). Societal failure to address labor market youth vulnerabilities and lack of jobs for youth has the potential to have significant negative effects on the economy, health, emotional well-being, happiness, crime levels, and socio-political stability.

The objectives of the event were:

- Explore the intersectionality between education and employment with inclusive, resilient, sustainable development and eradicating poverty and hunger, from the viewpoint of grassroots practitioners, civil society organizations, funding agencies, policymakers, and the Member States
- Highlight the efforts made to link education and skills development and employment in the agricultural sector while investing in the eradication of poverty and hunger.



- Highlight good practices from the grassroots and formulate policy asks that can help replicate, sustain and scale up such initiatives.
- To make recommendations to address gaps and financing challenges

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century. Yet, according to present commitments, global emissions are set to increase by almost 14 percent over the current decade.

This year, we need an avalanche of action from developed and developing countries to reduce emissions. No new coal plants. No expansion in oil and gas exploration. Developing countries will require technology and resources to accelerate transition from coal to renewable energy. Now is the time for an unprecedented investment surge in renewable energy infrastructure, tripling to \$5 trillion dollars annually by 2030. Wealthier countries must finally make good on the \$100 billion climate finance commitment to developing countries, starting in 2022. Developing countries cannot wait any longer.

The first three crises undermine human rights and are a powder keg for social unrest and instability and they require better global governance to restore fairness, inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

Put humanity at the center of technology. Technology should not use us. We should use technology. And if governed properly, the opportunities are extraordinary, especially if we can ensure safe and secure internet connectivity everywhere. But growing digital chaos is benefiting the most destructive forces and denying opportunities to ordinary people. In countries with low broadband connectivity, simply connecting schools to the internet can grow GDP by 20 percent. Over 2.9 billion people remain off-line mainly in developing countries. Women still lag far behind men in terms of internet access. This year's Transforming Education Summit will be an important opportunity to help

close the digital divide, and ensure affordable, safe and secure internet services for all.

As we seize the opportunities of the digital world, risks like data misuse, misinformation and cyber-crime are already outpacing any meaningful efforts to address them. Our personal information is being exploited to control or manipulate us, change our behaviors, violate our human rights, and undermine democratic institutions. The business models of social media companies profit from algorithms that prioritize addiction, outrage and anxiety at the cost of public safety. We need strong regulatory frameworks to change this business model.

To address these issues, I have proposed a Global Digital Compact as part of the Summit of the Future in 2023 to bring together governments, the private sector and civil society to agree on key principles underpinning global digital cooperation. And I have proposed a Global Code of Conduct to end the infodemic and the war on science, and promote integrity in public information, including online. I continue to urge Member States to speed up work on banning lethal autonomous weapons, and to begin considering new governance frameworks for biotechnology and neurotechnology.

Delivering sustainable peace to a world that sees too little of it. We face the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945. Military coups are back. Nuclear weapons stockpiles still exceed 13,000. Human rights and the rule of law are under assault. Populism, nativism, white supremacy and other forms of racism and extremism are poisoning social cohesion and institutions everywhere. The pushback on human rights – especially the rights of women and girls – continues. My [Call to Action for Human Rights](#) is a pushback against that pushback.

[Watch the Secretary-General's address](#) on YouTube.

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Upcoming UN Meetings:

[Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW66\)](#)

March 14–25, 2022

[ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development](#)

April 25–28, 2022

[Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 21st Session](#)

April 25–May 6, 2022

[High Level Political Forum](#)

July 7–15, 2022