



# The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – JANUARY 2024

## From the NGO Desk

A few days before Christmas, I joined other religious NGO representatives and activists from various faith traditions in singing Christmas carols, sending prayers, and calling for peace in front of the United States Mission across the street from the United Nations Headquarters.

I was especially moved when a colleague from the Jewish Voice for Peace organization asked to sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Captured in this hymn, as we know, is a historic and spiritual moment of nonviolence and peace, some 2,000 years ago. It provided hope that day, as it did so many years ago.

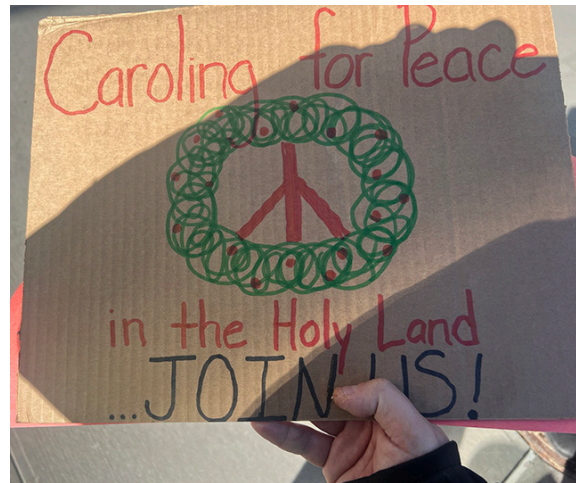
As we faced some disturbed looks and heard a few criticisms by those passing by, the call to unity was felt and rooted in this small gathering. I was humbled and honored to be among them.

When the time came to sing “Silent Night,” my mind and heart quickly recalled that just one day earlier, I was praying at my children’s school for their annual Christmas Mass.

As those 200-plus children sang that same familiar hymn, I felt deep gratitude that my girls have this safe and spirit-filled community to call home.

Now, standing in the shadows of the waving flags of the United States and various UN Member States, my heart grew heavy as I tried to comprehend the grief and loss of so many children in Israel and Gaza. I cannot even grasp the suffering of so many parents who lost their children, and children who lost their parents, since early October.

How do you even begin to process the devastating loss of [10,000 children](#) in Gaza alone? More than [100 days](#) into Israel’s war against Hamas, over 24,000 Palestinians have died and over 61,000 are wounded. NPR also reports that [2 million are displaced](#) with thousands of homes destroyed. The UN warns the worst is



to come, with fears of starvation, the spreading of disease, and exposure to winter conditions. Not to be forgotten, over 1,200 Israelis died from the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, with some 250 others taken hostage- many of whom are still missing and feared dead.

“What we have seen since 7 October is a stain on our collective conscience. Unless we act, it will become an indelible mark on our humanity. People

will continue to suffer and die from the rockets, the bombs, the missiles and the bullets; and in increasing numbers from starvation, disease and exposure,” [UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said Friday](#).

This conflict is deeply rooted, and there are much smarter people than I who have ideas to remedy this never-ending conflict in the Middle East. I know now, more than ever, that beyond the gratitude I have for my own and my children’s lives, our prayers are needed, and our voices must be heard.

This isn’t meant to be a commentary on the conflict and devastation in Israel and Gaza. This is simply a reminder to raise our collective voices in prayer and advocacy for peace.

Since the war started, we, as the Catholic NGO representatives at the UN, have wrestled with how to best respond. Many hours were spent in difficult dialogue, long emails were crafted and read, education continued by reviewing published literature and opinions, and we spoke to those directly impacted, all in an attempt to make a difference at this international stage.

Among the many ideas, it was the hope in prayer that spoke loudest. As St. Elizabeth Ann Seton once said, “We must pray without ceasing.” St. Vincent de Paul reminds us that “It is chiefly in prayer that God will give you strength.”

So, we pray and as a Sisters of Charity Federation community, we are invited to do so together by reciting

[this prayer](#) (from the Sisters of Charity of New York) every Monday.

The Justice Coalition of Religious also invites us to pray a silent prayer every morning at 9 a.m. EST. Additional prayers are offered [here](#).

While our advocacy must continue, and our voices must be raised, it is prayer that unites us, and we must believe, will lead to an end of violence, not just in the Middle East, but throughout the world. There are more than 110 armed conflicts in our world today, including more than 45 armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Since 2015 in [Yemen](#), 23.4 million need humanitarian assistance and 19 million are facing food insecurity. More than 19,200 civilians, including over 2,300 children, have died, and 4 million people are displaced. In Ukraine, [the UN reports over 10,000 civilian deaths](#) in almost two years of Russian attacks.

How many lives will be lost this day alone? How much money will be spent on violence when so many go without their basic needs?

There must be another way.

Near the end of our protest, as the police monitored us from a friendly distance, we sang these words that I will leave you with in hope and solidarity:

“Let there be peace on earth,

And let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on earth,

The peace that was meant to be.”

## CSocD62

The 62nd Commission for Social Development (CSocD62) is a key time at the United Nations for Civil Society from Feb. 5-14. We invite your participation in the following ways:

1. Sign the [Civil Society Declaration](#) (as a congregation and as an individual). Help us get to 1,000 signatures.
2. Participate in the [Virtual Orientation](#) on Sunday, Feb. 4 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. (EST)
3. Watch the Civil Society Forum on [UN TV](#) on Friday, Feb. 9 from 10 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. (EST)
4. Download the [JCoR Guide for CSocD62](#) for more information and Take Action steps.
5. Follow us on X (formally known as Twitter) at [@ngoscfederation](#)
6. Pray for our delegation which will offer advocacy at the CSocD62, representing several congregations in New York, with many others participating virtually.

The theme of this year's CSocD62 is “Fostering social development and social justice through social poli-



cies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication.”

## Justice Circle

All are welcome to join the UN NGO Impact Justice Circle that meets every six weeks virtually. This Justice Circle, led by the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, seeks to connect the global work of the UN with the diverse local contexts of our congregations.

The [UN NGO Impact Justice Circle](#) is open to all members of the Sisters of Charity Federation. This circle meets every six weeks on Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. ET on Zoom. Dates for 2024: Feb. 20, April 2, May 14, June 25, Aug. 6, Sept. 17, Oct. 29 and Dec. 10.

Contact Mackenzie Doyle ([mackenzie.doyle@srcharitycinti.org](mailto:mackenzie.doyle@srcharitycinti.org)) or Sister Marge Kloos ([marge.kloos@srcharitycinti.org](mailto:marge.kloos@srcharitycinti.org)) if interested in joining this circle.

## Summit of the Future

Before the end of 2023, NGOs were invited to a Civil Society Town Hall with Dennis Francis, the president of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly. [You can read his remarks here](#). Francis spoke of the importance of our role at the UN and the importance of unity when there is so much conflict and division.

This Town Hall prepares us for ongoing conversation leading to the [Summit of the Future](#) (Sept. 22-23, 2024), which is billed as “a high-level event, bringing world leaders together to forge a new international consensus on how we deliver a better present and safeguard the future.”

*Dr. James Walters, EdD, represents the Sisters of Charity Federation NGO at the United Nations. Jimmy educates federation members and the public on the services and activities of the United Nations.*  
[jwalters@sistersofcharityfederation.org](mailto:jwalters@sistersofcharityfederation.org)