

## **Reflections on the Tidal Wave of Justice at the United Nations**

**October –March 2015**

For six months, I have had the privilege and grace to be a presence at the United Nations in the name of the International Presentation Association. The core of our advocacy ministry is seeking to ensure the rights of the disadvantaged through diligently monitoring and participating at every level in every conversation from policy to implementation. The foundation of this prophetic role at the UN is giving a voice to those who need yet are denied one.

Nearly every day, I passed through the Canada Doors at the north end of the General Assembly building. On the exterior of the doors are four panels in bas-relief symbolizing peace, justice, truth, and fraternity. These words are powerful shapers of my understanding of the role of IPA at the United Nations and took on a life of their own as I was gradually influenced to become a world citizen.

Through our commitment to Gospel values, religious at the influence the language used when writing policies, form partnerships worldwide, bring the stories of grass roots people, and share their concern for all creation. This was evident for me this year when I attended the Religious at the United Nations (RUN) meetings. As a proud member of the Working Group for Girls, I was fortunate to have the experience of going to the Permanent Mission of Canada to advocate for the ongoing inclusion and development of girls' rights in the work of the United Nations system and structures and in the document for the CSW59 political declaration. Although the document was heavily criticized, it was gratifying to see that there were seven inclusions of the words "women and girls". At the Mining Working Group, I learned and discussed efforts at working to have water included as a human right and not just access. I frequently wondered where the issue would be if it was not for the presence of religious congregations. On issues such as water rights, women and girls, mining, migration, and human rights we are collaborating with others who share similar goals and values.

These past six months gave me an incredible opportunity to hear from many national and international leaders who work tirelessly to prevent human trafficking, advocate for fair and just human rights for women and girls and boys, and work to improve maternal health and reduce infant mortality. It has been an eye-opening experience for me and I truly enjoyed the opportunity to attend a wide variety of working group meetings about mining, girls, and trafficking. Seeing cross-cultural and cross-generation connections happening was a moving experience in my life. I am inspired to continue prioritizing the role IPA plays as social justice advocates.

I saw firsthand that our role in the Non-Government Organization (NGO) community in the United Nations is to be a moral goad, a prophetic voice, a voice without the power of government that can and must remind this august institution both of the goals it must pursue and

of the values it must embody in the pursuit of peace and justice. I think there is no better place than being at the United Nations to fulfill Jesus' great commission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation". (Mark 16:15). I saw this in evidence at so many meetings and the side events in which IPA sponsored and/or participated.

Bringing the voices of grass roots people enables the UN to shed light on the horrific condition of ordinary citizens and gives a forum to those who are suffering. In February, it was a privilege and an honor to present the IPA oral statement "Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World" to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Commission on Social Development. In March I authored a statement on "Realizing the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls" that Joe Morrow delivered on the March 18 for the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW59).

Economic justice underlies the pursuit of peace and justice. Dignity, equality, perfectibility, responsibility for justice and peace, the rule of law, a just distribution of God's wealth entrusted us, and the demand that we use the world's resources moderately and sustainably are the values that IPA brings to bear on the pressing issues confronting our world today. We have an obligation to pursue justice and are called to be the pursuers of peace to partner with God in the healing of this broken and hurting world. There is a link between peace and justice. The work of social justice is God's work and the work of making this world a better place is holy work. Many times I walked the Scharansky Steps on the way to the UN and read the Isaiah 2:4 wall that has the most eloquent call for international peace ever written. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore."

The Gospel mandate is to share our wealth with those of God's children who are less fortunate than us. This is a vision of internationalism and all of these constructs of justice came the recognition that all nations, all peoples, are responsible for the other and that international cooperation is indispensable for international justice. Working and listening and attending to the sessions on sustainable development goals and targets made me more deeply conscious of incredible global inequity and discontinuity that is accepted indifferently each day. That is simply irreconcilable for all those who care about God's call for us to be the steward of God's resources for all God's children.

The ideas which the UN has been at the forefront of exploring and promoting include sustainable development, human rights and gender equality. These concepts continue to be elaborated on, promoted, and is changing conventional ways of thinking and decision-making. During the duration of the negotiations, IPA, as part of the civil society, has played a role in the formulation of these transformational goals. This work to advance sustainable development is reliant on the application of spiritual principles of peace and justice. Our presence at the UN enables us to

bring the voices of the most vulnerable in the world—women and children, the indigenous and marginalized peoples including those made poor, those who suffer violence in all forms, those who live with disabilities, and all creation. Bridging research, practice and policy is an essential part of IPA becoming a better advocate for the most vulnerable in our society and this really happens here at the UN.

The story of the quest for peace and justice for all people was awakened again in us—Mary Margaret Mooney, Jancy Selvaraj, Rabekka Selvaraj and Salome Joseph—with many thanks to Elsa Mutathu. To each of them, I say what Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his book **Markings**. For all that has been, thanks. To all that shall be, Yes.

Here at IPA and the UN, we responded to an invitation to look deeply and listen to the struggles to achieve gender equality and human rights. By balancing the outer world with the inner and by looking into our hearts, for a brief moment in time we became explorers and the boundaries of our world leaped from Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, and the Americas to a world still dreamed of for 2030.

“History says,” Don’t hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime the longed for tidal wave of justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme.” [*The Cure at Troy*. Seamus Heaney]. I believe that the work, the dream and the vision of Nano Nagle brought that tidal wave of justice to the people of Ireland in the education of the poor. We walk today as pilgrims and the miracle and the work of IPA at the United Nations is that the tidal wave continues to flow as we continue on our journey to go one pace beyond.

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March 27, 2015