

UN Update - Sister Helen Martinez - Journal – November 8-14, 2014

On Saturday afternoon, I met with my cousin, Diana Dopfel of Long Island. Her great grandmother, Irene Newhook Stewart, and my grandmother were sisters. We had a delightful conversation and shared a meal at Edgar's Café. It is located at 650 Amsterdam Ave, quite near where I live. The cafe originated on the former site of the Brennen Mansion located on 84th street between West End Ave and Broadway known as Edgar Allan Poe Street. Edgar Allen Poe resided there from March 1844 to August 1845 at which time he wrote and gave to American literature "The Raven". I quite enjoyed the Poe pictures that decorate the walls.

On Tuesday, I attended the afternoon session Preparatory Process for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development Substantive informal session held in the Trusteeship Council Chamber at the United Nations. The sessions was on *Mainstreaming sustainable development criteria and effective use of public finance*. The Moderator was Mansur Muhtar, Ministry of Finance, Nigeria and the Panel was composed of Benedict Clements, Division Chief, Fiscal Affairs Department, International Monetary Fund; Yoganath Sharma Poudel, Undersecretary, Ministry of Finance, Nepal; Vinicius Pinheiro, Deputy Director, International Labor Organization; Rainer Kattel, Professor of Innovation Policy, Tallinn University of Technology; Claire Schouten, International Budget Partnership, and William Dorotinsky, Acting Director, Governance and Public Sector Management Practice, World Bank.

Yogan Nath Poudel, spoke about Gender Responsive Budgeting: Initiation and present status in Nepal. He stated that under-investment in women and girls is costly in terms of human development outcomes and growth. I learned a great deal about gender-responsive budgeting which is government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfillment of women's rights. It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. GRB also aims to analyze the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources. Effective gender-responsive budgeting should be institutionalized and linked up with other ongoing public finance reforms. Data availability is important to understand the impacts of gender-responsive budgeting.

The global view showed that the concept of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) came to the attention of policy makers very recently and was implemented in Australia for the first time in 1984 as a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy. The UN 4th World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 also endorsed this concept. Beijing+20 review: ensuring adequate financing for gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in all the critical areas of concern.

He gave an update on the progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. There is a commitment to normative frameworks and international standards as well as adoption of several progressive laws, policies and plans. Women secured 30% representation in the

November 2013 elections to the Constituent Assembly (Parliament) and Nepal is on track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (6 out of 8). The country is committed to post-2015 development agenda and stand-alone goal on gender equality. Nepal is on the way forward because the Government has prioritized gender equality in its Development Cooperation Policy. The National Women Commission is to be established a constitutional body. There is the implementation of social protection measures, including employment and livelihood schemes that target women, and the introduction and enforcement of legislation guaranteeing equal rights, as appropriate, to inheritance for women and men and for girls and boys. The country has identified a need to address disproportionately low economic participation of women.

Benedict Clements addressed us on the topic **Energy Subsidy Reform: Lessons and Implications**. One of the six reforms reform ingredients he noted was: Targeted mitigating measures to protect the poor: targeted cash transfers are preferred; when cash transfers are not feasible, other programs can be expanded as administrative capacity is developed; SOE restructuring may also require targeted measures e.g. job training.

On Thursday morning, I attended the Economic and Financial Second Committee which was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi of Italy. During this session, it dealt with draft resolution issues relating to economic growth and development such as macroeconomic policy questions including international trade, international financial system, and external debt sustainability, financing for development, sustainable development, human settlements, poverty eradication, globalization and interdependence, operational activities for development, and information and communication technologies for development.

The Committee then voted on a draft resolution for the “Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources” (document A/C.2/68/L.27). It approved the text by a recorded vote of 162 in favour to 5 against (Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Palau, United States), with 9 abstentions.

The representative of Israel said the Committee was engaged in a meaningless exercise, rather than addressing sustainable development and poverty. At a time when resources of the United Nations were scarce, it was sad that the Committee’s agenda was hijacked. The resolution did not improve the situation between Israel and Palestine and was motivated by anti-Israeli sentiment, designed to ferment division and unilateralism at a time when such issues could only be resolved through negotiation. He said that Israel’s hand remained outstretched.

The observer for the State of Palestine said the approval of the draft resolution was a testament to the importance attached by States to development and prosperity. The majority voted in favour of the resolution, which reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty over their natural resources, which were vital for progress. The resolution called on

Israel to put an end to its violation of international instruments and cease its exploitation of Palestinian land and water resources, and to stop destroying agricultural land and polluting the environment. The international community had clearly spoken against the colonial nature of Israel's occupation. However, Israel faced the outstretched hands of the Palestinian people by confiscating land, building settlements and walls and destroying the capabilities and resources of the Palestinian people.



Returning from that session, I found, quite by chance, the Meditation Quiet Room at the United Nations, the place where there is dedication to work and debate for the service of peace. The aim is to have doors that may be open to infinite lands of prayer and thoughts. Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General (1953-1961) wanted to have one room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense. People of many faiths meet there and so there are none of the symbols usually associated in our meditations that could be used.

In the middle of the room there is a shimmering surface of solid rock. There is the light of the sky, symbolic of giving life to the earth on which we stand. The rock or altar is dedicated to the God whom humanity worships in many ways and under many names. It is to remind us of the firm and permanent in a world of movement and change. The iron ore block has the weight and solidarity of the Everlasting and is a reminder of that cornerstone of endurance and faith on which is based every human endeavor.

He stated in this dedication of the room that the material of the stone leads to thoughts to the necessity of choosing between destruction and construction and between war and peace. How will humanity use the wealth we have inherited on this planet? The light shafts strike the stone in a room of utter simplicity. Because there are no other symbols, we are not distracted by anything and nothing can break in on the stillness within us. When my eyes moved to the front wall, there was a simple pattern that opened the room to harmony, and freedom and the balance of space. There is an ancient saying that the sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void. This room is for those who come here to fill the void with what they find in their center of stillness.

I was delighted to get a call from Sister Sharon about our acceptance from Rome regarding fusion with Ireland. It is continuing the journey and being open to the plans of God for us.

On Friday afternoon, we went to the Mining Working Group [MWG] Retreat. This group is a coalition of NGOs that, in partnership with our members and affected local communities, advocates at and through the United Nations for human and environmental rights as related to extractive industries. The MWG addresses unjust and unsustainable extractive practices and policies through the lens of the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples and Earth's carrying capacity. The MWG promotes a human and ecological rights framework as the foundation for sustainable and just natural-resource management, through just and transparent international policies; national laws and practices that meet the highest international standards and obligations; and intervention to address violations. In this context the Group also advocates for the use of economic benefits of resource extraction for the holistic and long-term social, economic, and sustainable development needs of local communities. We looked at the specific contribution of the MWG and discussed what limited the impact. There was a discussion regarding setting priorities for 2015. In addition there was a discussion about the use of the Rights-based Litmus Test which assesses resource-extraction policies in the context of sustainable development.

There were four oral statements delivered in March in Geneva in the name of the Mining Working Group. The website is very good and provides excellent resources about the work.

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