

UN Update - Sister Helen Martinez - Journal for November 1-7, 2014

Life is not all work here in the Big Apple. On Saturday, despite the rain and wind, Alex, the volunteer from Australia, and Amitra, from India, and I went to the Cloisters. On the way there we dropped in to the church to see the shrine to St. Frances Cabrini. The Cloisters was wonderful. It was always a dream of mine to go there. My favourite was seeing the unicorns. On Sunday, I went alone on the bus to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was delightful. I decided to take two guided tours to see highlights of the Museum. I was introduced to several pieces of art. I especially liked the landscape painting called *The Harvesters* by Pieter Bruegel, the Elder, because it showed the change of seasons and the story of the people. In any case, I fully intend to go back again on the weekends because there is so much to see there.

On Monday, Mary Margaret, Alex and I went to a high level and interactive panel discussion, co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Argentina, Austria, Costa Rica, France, Greece and Tunisia to the United Nations and UNESCO. It was titled *“Ending Impunity: Upholding the Rule of Law”* in the ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ. It was very special for it was the occasion of the first International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The panelists were: Ambassador Michel Spinellis, Permanent Representative of Greece, Mr. Getachew Engida, Deputy Director – General of UNESCO, Mr. Joel Simon, Executive Director, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Dr. Agnes Callamard, Director, Global Freedom of Expression and Information, Ms. Nadia Bilbassy-Charters, Foreign Correspondent, Al-Arabiya News Channel and MBC TV.

Last year two French journalists—Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon—were assassinated in Mali on November 2. This resolution condemned all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers. Countries are urged to do all that is possible prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability, bring to justice perpetrators of crimes against journalists and media workers, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies. During the past ten years, more than 700 journalists have been killed for bringing news and information to the public. This does not include those who daily suffer from non-fatal attacks, including torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations. If you are a woman journalist, you face specific risks including sexual attacks.

On Tuesday we attended a combined meeting of the Mining Working Group. We were members of Mercy International, Medical Missionaries, Loretto Community, UN Anima and IPA. We are members of the Financing for Development, Committee for Social Development and Feminist Task Force. We met with some of the staff of Amina J. Mohammed of Nigeria who is the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, namely, Nelson Muffuh (Head of Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement, Post-2015 Development Planning and Coordination), Joe Colombano (Economic Advisor, Executive Office of the Secretary-General), Gabriel Ferrero (Policy Advisor, Post-2015 One Secretariat, EOSG Team), and Muhammad Sani Abdullahi (Policy Advisor, Post-2015 Development Team, Executive Office of the Secretary-General).

The representatives of each committee introduced the various NGO committees. They presented the letter given to the Secretary General and response to provide background. We listened and asked questions – particularly regarding the political landscape going forward, the synthesis report, CSO participation and how we can influence the post-2015 agenda post the synthesis report.

In the afternoon, Mary Margaret, Judy, Amitra, Michelle and I went to the US Permanent Mission to the UN. The U.S. State Department released the Trafficking in Persons [TIP] report which is a congressionally mandated report that looks at the governments around the world and what they are doing to combat trafficking in persons – modern slavery – through the 3P paradigm of prevention, protection, and prosecution. There are narratives of what is happening in the countries which are laid out so that one can see exactly the analysis of the countries, and what is the evidence for the eventual ranking. It ranks governments based on their perceived efforts to acknowledge and combat human trafficking, advance reforms and target resources for prevention, protection and prosecution programs. Some key findings were: There is evidence of forced labor and sex trafficking in Malaysia and Thailand. Migrants from other Asian nations who seek work on farms, factories and construction sites in Malaysia are trapped and have their passports taken and wages withheld. In Thailand, tens of thousands of migrants from neighboring countries are being exploited in the commercial sex industry, on fishing boats or as domestic servants. In Venezuela, women and girls are often lured from poor interior regions to tourist centers with the promise of false job offers. When they arrive, they are often forced into prostitution. The State Department acknowledged its own problems fighting trafficking. Several new groups within the U.S. may be vulnerable to traffickers, including teens living on Native American reservations and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered community.

I do not think that any country – including Canada - is doing a perfect job on the fight against human trafficking. Everyone is in this together. We see people around the world in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, in the sex industry, or as domestic servants and that is when there are unscrupulous and cruel bosses and vulnerable people. This is the recipe for human trafficking. I think that is as true in Canada, as it is in countries around the world.

The Canadian narrative tells what the Canadian Government is doing but also what's happening out in communities whether it is to First Nations girls and women, to vulnerable men and women because of a disability or a drug addiction, or to the young men and women, boys and girls, who fall prey to pimps who offer a better life and opportunity.

On Wednesday morning, Elsa, Mary Margaret, Alex, Jancy and I attended a moving and innovative two-hour session, “Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change: Toward right relationship with America’s Native Peoples.” It was led by Paula R. Palmer, the Director of the Toward Right Relationship Project. It is a project of the Boulder Friends Meeting (Quakers) as a response to calls from Indigenous leaders and the World Council of Churches. The exercise traced the historical and ongoing impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery, the 15th-century justification for European subjugation of non-Christian peoples. The experience raised our level of knowledge and concern about these impacts, recognized them in ourselves and our institutions, and explored how we can begin to take actions toward “right relationship.” The roots

of injustice are in the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. We identified ourselves, named the area we came from and the names of the native peoples who were associated with that area.

We then heard the voices of Indigenous leaders and Popes, monarchs, presidents, generals and western historians unfold the story for us. This doctrine was used to take away lands from non-Christian people. We learned how it continues to violate the rights of indigenous peoples around the world. We heard how the indigenous people organized to claim their rights through the passage of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I had been given a pink card which represented those who died by illness brought by Europeans. We stood on blankets until our color pink was called. Over half of us then sat down. During the telling of the story, I was flooded by a wide range of emotions: sadness, anger, and shame. Like most of the people in the room, I had not known about this Doctrine of Christian Discovery. This was followed by some reflection and sharing about what we learned, how we felt, and an action we would take. I shared how NL had destroyed our native people - the Beothucks - and how unaware I was about the culture of the students from Conne whom I taught when I was missioned in St. Alban's. A recommended book about this is *In the Light of Justice: The Rise of Human Rights in Native America and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, by Walter Echo-Hawk. In the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we find the seeds of change. Paula gave us a corn seed with the question, "How can we nurture these seeds to bring forth the fruits of right relationship among all peoples?"

On Thursday morning, we went to the Department of Public Information Non-Governmental Organizations Conference Town Hall Meeting in the ECOSOC Chamber. There is a 13-page Declaration reflecting vision, recommendations and monitoring and accountability framework for an "Action Agenda" on poverty eradication, sustainable development, human rights and climate change. The Declaration is accompanied by a 34-page Resource Document, which reflects joint statements by UN Major Groups and Stakeholders from civil society. Together, these two form the Outcome Document of the 65th annual DPI/NGO Conference. There was discussion about looking ahead to next year's conference in NY.

The IPA group and several other NGOs went to the Franciscan International office on Friday to hear Ms. Johana Rocha Gómez who is a human rights lawyer and co-founder of the non-profit lawyers collective, Tierra Digna, in Bogotá, Colombia. Kaya Allan Sugerman who is a Fellowship of Reconciliation Peace Presence [FOR] accompanier, was with her. Tierra Digna is a Colombian collective of lawyers who work with rural communities that face being forced off their land by armed groups, the Colombian state and multinational corporations. She spoke about the relationships between environmental extractivism and displacement in Colombia, and the devastating environmental impacts of coal mining in the northern region of Colombia.

Over 40% of Colombia's national territory has either been granted or asked for in a mining concession. People are reclaiming that stolen land and speaking up more for justice. Tierra Digna and these communities are developing strategies to create alternatives. Through legal aid, research, capacity building and advocacy, Tierra Digna is initiating a means to hold the Colombian state and multinational corporations accountable to protect these communities and the environment.

The FOR Peace Presence team accompanies Tierra Digna in Colombia's coastal region. This area is highly paramilitarized and in the last 20 years has been subject to the arrival of various large coal-mining companies –US-based Drummond Co. Inc, Anglo-Swiss mining and commodity company Glencore Xstrata. Because there are not many NGOs working in the coastal region, this leaves the area more vulnerable to human rights abuses and environmental destruction.

Tierra Digna works in collaboration with others to hold these corporations accountable for the devastation they have done on Colombian communities and the environment. Tierra Digna seek truth, justice, and holistic reparation, not only through Colombian and international legal systems, but also by harnessing and supporting community processes and engaging in nation-wide debates and discussions, taking a stand against policies that have allowed and continue to allow for the displacement of communities. Some communities they work with are seeking fair and equitable re-settlement, complete with collective discussions, decision-making processes, and prior, informed consent. All of them are seeking social, cultural, political, and economic inclusion and rights.

All the NGOs present and who are members the Mining Working Group at the UN exchanged business cards and gave them a copy of the Advocacy Brief entitled “A rights based approach to resourced extraction in the pursuit of sustainable development.” It is hoped that there will be further collaboration with NGOs at the UN and other organizations.

On Friday afternoon we went to the Church Centre for the UN where the NGO Health Committee presented “Water: Global Crisis.” Dr. Elizabeth McGovern, MD founded Mudula Water and WEEMA International located in Ethiopia. One out of ten people in the world have no access to clean water. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa spend more than 25 percent of their time collecting water. Dr. McGovern showed us a yellow jerry can which held 5 gallons or 20 liters of water. It has to be back breaking work for women for it weighs 40 pounds when full. Without clean water, people die. One of the most common ailments that contaminated water delivers is diarrhea. Every 20 seconds, a child dies from diarrhea. In the Mudula area, 60% of the community goes without access to potable water. The well in town is available to community members only once every three days, and even then, it is not dependable due to its reliance on electricity.

It is WEEMA International's belief that until the water crisis is solved in a community, progress cannot be made in other areas. A lack of access to clean water contributes to large-scale health problems, keeps girls who are often responsible for fetching water out of school and ties women down, making it harder for them to participate in economic activities that would improve the earning power of the entire family unit. WEEMA International began its life as Mudula Water and why it continues to emphasize water projects. For Mudula, the best solution to their water need was a gravity flow water system. WEEMA works to find the best water solution for individual communities.

I was impressed that the organization listened to the people, did research, and consulted with Ethiopian government departments. Some issues they inquired of the community before engaging in the project were whether: the community will be able to maintain and repair the

water system; the water system will be sustainable for at least ten years; the water system includes sanitation components, to reduce the risk of contaminating the water supply; and whether the source of the water and the community needs at the source of the water have been taken into account.

The word ‘weema’ is a meaningful one in Tembarsa, the local dialect spoke in the Kembata-Tembaro Zone of Ethiopia. It can mean something that carries all the necessary or important elements in it, and it also is an expression of optimism, hope, positivity, perfection and fullness or wholeness. It signifies something all encompassing. ‘Weema’ is a popular word in Tembaro culture and is applied to many situations that relate back to the idea of wholeness.

Dr. Jonathan Essoka, Ph.D. spoke about the Millennium Goal 7c: Drinking water and sanitation. The industrial revolution affected natural resources. The Bruntland Report of 1987 said that economy and society depend on the environment. Oceania and Sub Saharan Africa are not on track to meet this goal. There is hope in that 4/10 people in China and India have improved water access since 1990. Climate change is exacerbating these problems: carbon emissions from coal, oil, gas and cement.

I am chairing our IPA meeting on Monday morning. The IPA team is accepting an invitation to spend Presentation Day with the sisters on Staten Island.