

UN Update - Sister Helen Martinez - Journal for February 2-6, 2015
“News and Views” - Shorter Version

- **“Youth Engagement in the transition from MDGs to SDGs: what will it take”?**
United Nations 4th ECOSOC Youth Forum was held on 2-3 February 2015. The Forum discussed ways in which young people can and are helping to manage the shift from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was a good platform for youth to engage in dialogue with Member States and contribute to policy formulation on economic and social aspects. This two-day event featured brainstorming sessions, interactive speaker panels and discussions with Member States, providing youth representatives with an opportunity to voice their opinions, share ideas, and think together about specific issues that relevant to youth as well as the broader role of young women and men in enabling and promoting sustainable development.
- **The Civil Society Forum** was hosted by UNDESA-DSPD, the NGO Committee for Social Development and the Friedrich Ebert –Stifung Foundation. The theme was "Civil Society Perspectives: Re-Centering Social Development in a Sustainable World". The purpose of the forum was to prepare civil society participants to participate during the 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development [CSocD] (February 4-13, 2015) at United Nations and to reflect on key issues related to this year’s priority theme as well as the upcoming post-2015 development agenda. The Forum provided a platform for civil society representatives to exchange views on important issues of social development and contribute to the overall outcomes of the Commission. The Chair was Margaret Mace, Dominican Leadership, NGO Committee for Social Development who gave a broad overview of the Civil Society Declaration 2015. The document highlights the areas of greatest import: inequalities and poverty, human rights, accountability, and means of implementation.
- On Wednesday, the 53rd **Commission for Social Development** “Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World” opened. CSocD53 is expected to attract more than 500 representatives from various ECOSOC organizations. This year’s theme was chosen with attention to the proposed new global development agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), currently under deliberation in the General Assembly. During the morning and afternoon the delegates discussed various means to refine a transformative people centered approach to sustainable development. The aim is to leave no one behind. The Commission started the session with a debate and a high-level discussion which evaluated the current

situation and the challenges facing countries. It also reflected on green, inclusive means to progress.

- On Thursday, the CSocD continued. “People-centred” development remained critical as governments, civil society and the UN worked to finalize the next generation of targets meant to improve peoples’ lives. The keynote address was delivered via video link by Juan Somavía, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Interregional Policy Cooperation, “We can continue to hold the trust of the people of the world only if we make their needs our priority.” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that growth must be judged not simply in terms of quantity, but of quality. “The year 2015 must be a year of global action. ... We are the first generation that can wipe out extreme poverty. We are the last generation that can address the worst impact of climate change. Let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting social development and social justice and building a better, more sustainable world for all.” In the afternoon session, participants focused on effective strategies for promoting well-being and obstacles interfering with their efforts. According to some speakers, results had not met expectation even though it was twenty years after the World Summit of Copenhagen. Vulnerabilities across the board were becoming more acute and the poor were bearing the brunt.
- On Friday, CSocD delegates addressed the perceived trade-off between economic growth and social progress, and debated means to design policies that could improve overall well-being without sacrificing the productivity that allowed their communities to flourish. There was a panel discussion about “Emerging issues: Contributions of Social Development to the Transition from Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals.” Five experts identified areas where social policies could directly and indirectly promote economic and environmental benefits. They agreed that sustainable development needed economic growth and opportunities for the maximum number of people to share in it.
- The Commission opened its general debate on the “Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups” in the afternoon. Participants stressed the need to include in the post-2015 development agenda dialogue with a number of vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and youth. Several speakers described innovative actions taken in that regard, with some recommending further regional and global efforts to narrow development gaps. Many emphasized that providing basic social services was a weapon in the fight against poverty and exclusion in many areas, including health, water, education, housing and full employment and decent work.
- There was a side event on **Social Protection strategic tool for poverty reduction and bridging the inequality gap in Ghana**. The discussion highlighted the socio-economic

context in Ghana, including the poverty and vulnerability of different population groups, labor market status, the history and policy objectives of social protection, current status of social protection, gaps and challenges and institutional arrangements. The social protection programs such as livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP), National health Insurance scheme (NHIS) Ghana School Feeding program (GSFP) have brought development in the country.

- Another side event was **Briefing on Pathways to Strengthen Social Development and the Human Rights of Older Persons Post 2015**. Their website is www.INPEA.net. There was an informal discussion that raised questions about equality and what it means. In many countries, widows do not have rights. The group is pushing for a UN Convention to protect the rights of older persons. In the documents it is essential that the phrase “all people of all ages” be inserted. We were given homework when we left to read Principles for Older Persons –a UN Resolution of December 1991.
- On Thursday, there was a side event titled: **A Future for all: The United Nations through Women & Faith**. Discussion revolved around the question: What does it mean to be a woman of faith?
- On Friday, there was a special event on the occasion of **World Interfaith Harmony Week**. The event focused on promoting religious and inter-religious actions for sustainable development and provided an opportunity for religious communities to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development. There was a message from Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. "World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrates the principles of tolerance and respect for the other that are deeply rooted in the world's major religions. The observance is also a summons to solidarity in the face of those who spread misunderstanding and mistrust." Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, said, “Religions and faith-based organizations are partners for sustainable development, and will be potent agents of the achievement of the post-2015 sustainable development goals, as they have been for the MDGs and, indeed, in the history of humanity.... Moreover, this act is a reminder that in many regions of the world, there are cases of marginalization or restrictions if not open persecution of religions and religious organizations, which constitute not only violations of basic human rights, but also a failure to acknowledge the positive role that religions and faith-based organizations played and continue to play in society.”