

UN Update - Sister Helen Martinez - Journal for November 17-21, 2014

Saturday morning I went to meet a former colleague from Presentation Elementary-Noreen Greene Fraize, and her daughter, Alanna. Alanna is in her fourth year of studying opera at the Metropolitan School of Music with a focus on Opera. We had brunch at the French Café.

I worked all day on Sunday on an analysis response to the Open Working Group proposals for Sustainable Development Goals. My contribution was sent to Elsa who is working with two others.

Monday morning, we were fortunate to have some time to hear the experiences of Sister Mary Jo Toll, SNDN, Veronica Brand, RSHM and Justine Gitanjali Senapati, CSJ. They shared their experiences of coming to work at the UN as NGO representatives of their congregations. It was helpful to hear that it takes time to learn how to contribute to various groups according to interests. I feel proud that IPA is part of the UN that influences and impacts systemic change for the world. It fits into how our focus here is on the social protection floor for human rights of people. I learned that NGOs have grown in their influence in draft resolutions by their ability to contact Permanent Missions – in part because religious are involved on the ground level in so many countries. Time here is spent doing research, meeting and participating in working groups, task forces, attending the various sessions at the UN and then sharing this information with those who can influence change. Advocacy work consumes about half of their time.

In the afternoon I went to the Baha'i International Center to attend a session on "Ethics Education for Children – The missing piece in Interfaith Education and Peacebuilding Efforts." Maria Lucia Uribe Torres, the director of Arigatou International, introduced the Arigatou International Learning to Live Together Programme. It was developed in close collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF. It has an educational approach to promote critical thinking and spirituality in children, and identify common areas of potential collaboration with organizations.

The Learning to Live Together program is guided by an overall pledge to safeguard human dignity. It aims to strengthen children's commitment to justice, respect for human rights, and harmonious relationships between individuals and within societies. The manual includes introductions to interfaith and ethics; an imaginative, engaging multicultural curriculum; a teachers' guide; and a library of resources about ethical issues, many of them written by children from around the world. More than simply educate, the program seeks to empower children in ways that allow them to improve the worlds where they live, concluding by challenging them to start their own projects. The resources are free online and the training for the program would need some form of sponsorship. There is a webpage www.ethicsforchildre.org. After the session was over, I spoke with Rabbi Roger Ross who trains interfaith ministers with an evolving perspective of global consciousness, see www.NewVisionsSeminary.org

"Friar Francis: Traces, Words and Images" is the title of an exhibition that I attended Monday evening, along with Judy, Jancy, and Amitha at the United Nations November 17. It is

the first time that manuscripts of the 13th and 14th centuries and Papal Bulls relating to the Saint of Assisi are being shown in the U. S. The exhibition consists of 19 artifacts from the Ancient Fund of the City Library of Assisi, part of the library of the Sacred Convent in Assisi.

The heart of the exhibition is the Codex 338, a collection of the first writings and documents relating to St. Francis and the order of the Friars Minor, containing The Cantic of Creatures, considered the starting point of Italian literature.

The exhibition is divided into three sections. The first, "Traces", includes documents which closely illustrate the historic journey of the saint. Manuscript 338 also contains the *Laudes creaturarum*, better known as The Cantic of Creatures, considered the first work in the ancient Italian vulgate and which has been recognized since the 18th century as the oldest poetic text of Italian literature. The first part of the exhibition also includes several Papal Bulls, including one from the year 1220 where the saint's name appears in an official document for the first time.

The second section of the exhibition, "Words," includes the oldest biographies of the saint. The third section, "Images", consists of a selection of miniature illustrated codices depicting the saint of Assisi. Among these is an antiphony, a Franciscan breviary, a missal and the Bible of Giovanni da Parma. Starting with words that tell the story of the Franciscan friar, the exhibition continues with images that celebrate sanctity with documents that use language and beauty to simplify and spread the spiritual physiognomy of the saint.

On Tuesday morning there was a visit from Sister Pushpa Joseph, FMM from Bangalore, India. We had a stimulating discussion and visit with her as we discussed IPA work and religious life in India. I shall enjoy reading the book she gave me: Feminist Hermeneutics: A contextual reconstruction.

Following that session, I went to a Third Committee session on human rights. There was a very intense debate that focused on targeted country reviews on Iran, Syria, and North Korea, I learned that it was dialogue and not politically driven actions that trigger the advancement of human rights.

The debate among members was quite heated at times about the draft resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea as there was a wide range of positions among delegates. The representative from Venezuela emphasized human rights should not be a pretext for political gains as country-specific resolutions undermined state sovereignty, and said the focus should be on taking a constructive approach to human rights issues. He said the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry had submitted an unprecedented and historic report on the human rights situation in the country, where systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations were being committed. This view is held by a number of countries and the European Union.

The delegate from North Korea rejected those claims and the draft resolution. The Commission's report was a compilation of groundless political allegations and had no credibility as an official United Nations document. The representative from Ecuador remarked that country-specific resolutions did not improve human rights situations, and called on all countries to make positive contributions to human rights mechanisms.

The Third Committee proceeded to the draft on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (document A/C.3/69/L.33). Canada's representative introduced the draft and said that there was little improvement and extremely troubling developments in the human rights situation of Iran. Those realities had been reported in meticulous detail by the Secretary-General and special rapporteurs. The draft resolution –L .33—reflected the concerns of the international community.

Before the vote, the representative from Iran made a general statement and stated that the draft resolution represented a hostile act by Canada. Canada was not preoccupied with human rights and individual rights, as proven by that country's position on the atrocities committed against civilian populations in Gaza by Israel. That inconsistency in Canada's record in the field of human rights was one of many, which proved the prejudicial nature of the action at hand. He added that the draft text ignored the readiness of Iran to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms and in addition to that, its readiness to report and implement recommendations received through the universal periodic review. He called for a recorded vote on the draft resolution because he believed that politically motivated vendettas were counterproductive and pointless.

Canada's representative noted that there were extremely troubling developments in the human rights situation of Iran that had justified the draft text. Iran's representative said the draft text ignored the readiness of his country to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms as well as its readiness to report and implement recommendations received through the Council's universal periodic review.

On Tuesday evening, Pushpa and I set out to see *The Lion King*. As the show was sold out, we chose to see the Broadway musical "Matilda". Based on a children's story by Roald Dahl. Everything is seen from the perspective of the brilliant 5-year-old title character. She leaps into the works of upwardly mobile literature: *Jane Eyre*, *The Secret Garden*, and especially Dickens. Protagonist Matilda is a young girl of unusual precocity, but is ill-treated by her father or neglected by her mother. At school, Matilda befriends her teacher, Miss Jennifer Honey, who, astonished by Matilda's intellectual abilities, tries to move her into a higher class, but is refused by headmistress Miss Agatha Trunchbull. I thought that the staging was ingenious in that the design originates in ordinary childhood materials like books and blocks and dollhouses; Scrabble tiles become tools for climbing over walls, just as words do, at least for Matilda.

Wednesday morning we – Sister Eileen Reilly and Adwoa Aidoo from Girl Scouts and I – visited the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN. The Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations is part of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada and is the primary channel for communications between the Canadian government and the United Nations. The Mission works together with the New York-based UN programs and funds.

Our diplomats represent Canada in the General Assembly, at open meetings of the Security Council, on the Economic and Social Council, and at the many specialized UN commissions, committees, and conferences. At these UN meetings, Canadian diplomats explain

our national positions on global issues and learn the views of other member states. By negotiating the resolutions and international treaties that guide state behaviour, they help to promote peaceful relations and a stable, prosperous world. The Mission has six sections of which the Economic and Social Affairs Section is concerned with advancing Canadian priorities on many issues, including human rights, humanitarian emergencies, the environment, sustainable development, international law, and UN budgeting.

We are members of the Working Group on Girls-Ms. Adwoa Aidoo, Girl Scouts and Sister Eileen Riley, SSND UN NGO Director and me. Before we went, we met in the Olympia Café to prepare for the meeting. While there, we spent an hour with the First Secretary (Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs) Katrina Burgess and the Second Secretary (Human Rights and Social Affairs) Greg Dempsey. The Mission had requested a meeting to gather feedback about Third Committee Resolutions.

It is the General Assembly that allocates to the Third Committee, agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian affairs and human rights issues that affect people all over the world. An important part of the work of the Committee has a focus on the examination of human rights questions, including reports of the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. The Committee discusses questions relating to the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination. The Committee addresses important social development questions such as issues related to youth, family, ageing, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control.

The topic was Third Committee Resolutions on women and girls. The issues addressed were violence against women and girls; elimination of female genital mutilation; rights of child; crime prevention and criminal justice; literacy for life. Some good suggestions were given us regarding how to give our reactions for draft resolutions for the coming year.

On Wednesday afternoon, I registered for three events for the 25th Anniversary of the Convention for the Rights of the Child. Father Larry celebrated Mass in the convent. After supper I then made a fruit cake – using Sheila Leonard’s recipe—to bring to the IPA office for Friday’s celebration of Presentation Day.

Thursday had such energy and excitement because of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified legal agreement to protect child rights. UNICEF hosted an event at the General Assembly featuring the #IMAGINE Project – one of the world’s largest-ever combined music recordings, to one of the world’s most loved songs, John Lennon’s Imagine. ‘Imagine’ is a song with lyrics encouraging listeners to imagine a world at peace without the barriers of borders or the divisiveness of religions and nationalities.

The concert at the United Nations General Assembly included live performances by Angélique Kidjo, Brazilian singer-songwriter Daniela Mercury,--who got everyone up from their seats to dance—Swedish-Iranian pop sensation Laleh, cellist Trey Lee from Hong Kong, Nigerian musician Don Jazzy and 15 year old Russian singer Kristian Kostov. The actor Hugh

Jackman, Yoko Ono and Björn Ulvaeus from ABBA made special appearances. After Laleh's performance of Chiquitita, ABBA's Bjorn Ulvaeus, who wrote the song, said, "When the song has been, as it were, at the service of UNICEF, it has taken on a new meaning. It's as though the words were sung to all those sad, sad girls out there in the world today who are suppressed in one way or another, who are denied their rightful place in societies." He told us that the royalties from the song Chiquitita will be donated in support of young girls worldwide. Jackman told us that "all children everywhere have the same rights, no matter where they live or what they believe. Now, almost every government in the world has committed to respecting and protecting these rights for children. Yet still, so many children around the world are denied their basic right." Before a grand finale of a performance of John Lennon's song 'Imagine', his widow, artist Yoko Ono said "think peace, act peace, and spread peace. Imagine peace." The performance was led by Kristian Kostov, who was then joined by all artists on the main stage of the Hall, accompanied by a 65 person children's choir. I was moved to tears. We were invited to sing with John Lennon and help UNICEF protect the rights of children. unicef.org/imagine.

I then went to the General Assembly Plenary session at 11:00 for a High Level meeting on the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Mr. Tony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Under Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Ivan Šimonovic, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ms. Marta Santos Pais, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Ms. Kirsten Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Ms. Maud De Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and a child delegate Miss Teyise Dlamini from Swaziland.

I was so pleased to hear Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), speaking on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. I smile to myself when he inquired what Dr. Seuss [author of children's literature] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child had in common. The answer was the belief that "a person's a person no matter how small". The Convention had articulated, for the first time ever, a principle that, regardless of gender, ethnicity, economic status, religious belief or disability, all children possessed innate rights, no less than adults did. But a recognized right was not necessarily an executed right.

I was moved and touched by the speech given by Teyise Dlamini, this young girl who spoke from the heart. She said it was humbling to be the voice not only of the children of Swaziland and of Africa, but the voice of girls everywhere. Seeing her single mother struggle to give her and her siblings everything they needed was a motivation for her to work hard every day. Not all children had received such an upbringing, not all girls had realized their rights and not all children even knew what their rights were. She stated that many leaders had spoken about progress for children over the past 25 years, and she was one of those children. But every day, children's rights in all countries were being violated. A girl she knew from a nearby village was deaf and blind and could not enroll in the local school because it lacked the facilities for her. Programmes were needed to teach boys how to respect women and girls. Decisions that affected

children and young people had to start with discussions with children and young people, she implored. In conclusion, Teyise told the delegates what to say when they talked to their governments about children's rights, teaching them to say "children are the future" in her language, SiSwati, "Bantfwana bangumliba loya embili". "It's my way of asking you, in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on behalf of all children in Swaziland, Africa and the world, to please protect us and invest in us today, tomorrow and always."

Following the General Assembly Plenary at 3:00PM, I attended an Interactive panel discussion in the Trustee Council Chamber. "25 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: is the World a better place for children?" The event was co-chaired by Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden and Ms. Laura Vargas Carrillo of Mexico. The moderator was Maysa Jalbout, a non-resident fellow at the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. Queen Silvia told the representatives "Do listen to the children. "Let them tell us what they think is important."

There were more than 30 speakers participating. Several young representatives pointed to terrorism and violence as the main obstacles they faced. A boy from Iraq urged representatives to look at him, and other children like him, as they looked at their own children, when they woke up smiling in the morning and when saying goodbye to them when they went to school. He declared, "We long to feel this simple, beautiful sense which we miss in our painful lives."

Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said that, as the most ratified human rights treaty in the world, the Convention had resulted in an international consensus that the protection and promotion of children's rights was a moral, social and legal imperative.

Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, said that every five minutes a child died as a result of violence. That pervasive exposure to violence was well documented by United Nations reports, academic evidence and children's heartbreaking stories. For millions of children, life was defined by two words: fear and pain.

Kristen Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, said she was pleased the Convention was the most widely ratified United Nations human rights instrument, with 194 States parties. She called upon all States to ratify the third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

Maud De Boer-Buqicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In 2014, there were still people who sold and bought children, exploited them and regarded them as commodities. That was a "blatant denial" of the human dignity of the child, a betrayal of children and it seriously compromised opportunities to develop as a society. Several forms of sale and sexual exploitation of children had considerably worsened since 1989, as the development of information communication technologies (ICTs) had made it much easier for criminals to produce, share and store child abuse material with full impunity. Moreover, child prostitution was still a major problem in many countries and its root causes, including the

dissemination of sexual images of children, had multiplied in recent years. Child-sex tourism had also increased, driven in part by nearly non-existent preventive measures and the inadequate criminalization of such offenses. Children were also being sold and forced into marriage.

Heiko Thoms, Germany, on behalf of the Western European and Others Group, said States must continue to focus on effective implementation of the Convention. He celebrated the dedication of UNICEF staff, some of whom had been injured or killed while championing children's rights over the past 25 years. But many challenges remained. Every 10 minutes, an adolescent girl was killed, he said, noting that 11 per cent of girls worldwide were married before their fifteenth birthday.

While walking in the curved wall area of the Conference building on the first floor, I was quite moved by an exhibition named "Poland and the Convention on the Rights of the Child: the legacy of Janusz Korczak. I have always had a keen interest and read much about the Shoah (Holocaust) but I had not heard about this influential man. The Convention on the Rights of the Child owes much to Poland. The Convention's vision of the child as a subject of rights was inspired by the writings, work and life of Janusz Korczak [1878-10942], Polish pediatrician, educator and writer who reminded the world that children are not people to be, but people of today with rights and dignity, conscience, feelings, reason and opinions. He was the first to put into words the necessity to respect children as fully fledged human beings. It was Poland that on the occasion of the International Year of the Child (1979) proposed the drafting of the UN Convention, which was led by Polish lawyer Adam Lopatka. The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations in 1989 drew on Korczak's work. Although widely ratified, the Convention is not always respected. His work and vision paved the way for the articulation of children's rights as expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. His deep and unwavering dedication to children was expressed until the moment of his death in 1942, when he chose to accompany the children of his orphanage, in the Warsaw Ghetto, to the Treblinka extermination camp where they all perished together.

In the middle of the events for the Convention of the Child, I went to the UN NGO Committee on the Family held at the Bahai International Center because I wanted to meet the Canadian psychologist. Mrs. Renata Kaczmarek is a Social Affairs Officer and a Focal Point on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and F in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) at the United Nations Secretariat in New York. She spoke on "The UN, The Family and Sustainable Development Goals." I introduced myself to Dr. Josephine Tan who is a clinical psychology faculty member at Lakehead University of Thunder Bay, ON and works with First Nations clients on psychological trauma. Her topic was *Psychological Trauma Among Canadian Aboriginal Peoples and Impact on the Family* The web site is <http://ngofamilyny.org/>

First Nations in Canada experienced intergenerational trauma as well as discrimination, racism, and oppression. Tribal cultural and regional differences exist which can impact how the wounding across generations and within an individual's lifespan are experienced and addressed. Residential schools impacted generations of First Nations. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the federal government wanted Aboriginal peoples to abandon their traditional beliefs and adopt western-based values and religions. The role and impacts of residential schools on First Nations traditional knowledge and mental, emotional, physical and

spiritual well-being was viewed within the context of colonization. Residential schools were funded by the federal government, but were operated by various religious institutions. The goal of residential schools was institutionalized assimilation by stripping them of their language, culture and connection with family.

On Friday, we celebrated Presentation Day at the office. I prepared the prayer and used as readings the greetings from various Presentation communities. We had lunch afterwards with Indian food as the main course. For desert, everyone enjoyed the boiled fruit cake I had made using Sister Sheila Leonard's recipe. Now it is time to get ready for tomorrow's celebration at Staten Island.

Helen Martinez, PBVM