

# DOMINICANS AT THE UN

"Cry out as if you have a million voices, for it is silence which kills the world."  
– Catherine of Siena



## ‘IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING’

Margaret Mayce, OP

I suspect that the headline drew your attention right away. Of course, I can't take credit for it! If you live in New York City, it is a message heard quite often in this era of terrorism. But recently the message was used in a provocative way in a New York Times opinion piece\* that addressed the issue of *global climate change*.

The article refers to the overwhelming consensus among climate scientists that human-caused climate change is happening. However, all too often the scientists themselves seem reluctant to be perceived as too outspoken or political about their position. At the same time, the author speaks of a "virulent strain of anti-science infecting the halls of Congress, the pages of leading newspapers and what we see on TV, leading to the appearance of a debate where none should exist." The author, a scientist himself, goes on to say, "If scientists choose not to engage in the public debate, we leave a vacuum that will be filled by those whose agenda is one of short-term self-interest."

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As a follow-up to the 2012 Convocation which raised the question *"What Is Earth Asking of the Order?"*, the Dominican Sisters Conference is engaging with this issue in area meetings throughout the United States. It seems that it couldn't be a more timely topic. Consider these facts:

- The National Climate Data Center states that for 2013 as a whole, most regions across the globe were warmer than average, and that 2013 was the fourth warmest year globally since record keeping began in 1880.
- Water shortages and increasing temperatures are of particular concern in the Middle East and Northern Africa.
- 63% of California is reporting extreme drought.
- Climate change remains one of the main concerns of European public opinion, while 63% of US citizens believe global warming is taking place (<http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/>).
- Tunisia has become the third country to incorporate the importance of addressing climate change in its constitution, joining Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.
- China has introduced measures requiring factories to report air emissions hourly and wastewater discharges every two hours, and post the information on the internet.
- Mayors of ten of the largest cities in the US have committed to radical action to cut carbon pollution as part of the (<http://www.nrdc.org/media/2014/140129a.asp>). The cities

participating are Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Orlando, Philadelphia and Salt Lake City.

- At a recent Democratic fundraiser in Seattle, President Obama commented that "we'll be four feet underwater" if China and India continue to consume energy like the USA.
- The U.S. has pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions 17% on 2005 levels by 2020. However, President Obama will be under pressure to deliver a higher target for 2030 when countries start their final negotiations for a global climate change agreement, which is scheduled to be signed in Paris in December 2015.
- Oil from Canada's tar sands - one of the world's single biggest sources of greenhouse gas pollution - may be making its way to Europe, in light of a pending decision by the European Commission to drop a law curbing the carbon-intensity of transport fuels.



*If you see something, say something.* Remember what the author of the New York Times article said: "If scientists choose not to engage in the public

debate, we leave a vacuum that will be filled by those whose agenda is one of short-term self-interest." What will happen if we choose not to engage in the public debate? Whose interests will be served by our silence? Whose interests will suffer?

Over the next several months Dominican Sisters, Associates, Co-Workers and Friends will be grappling with this issue. Our hope is that we will become more engaged in our respective geographic areas and move toward action on a national level. As members of the Order of Preachers, how could we not engage in the public debate? As our sister Catherine of Siena says, *"Cry out as if you have a million voices, for it is silence which kills*



*the world."*

\* Michael E. Mann, Director of the Earth System Science Center. NYT January 29, 2014.

## **58th COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

*Abby McCrary, Dominican Volunteer*

Poised in a strategic moment of transition in the UN development framework, the priority theme for the Commission on the Status of

Women (CSW) this year is *Challenges and Achievements in the Implementations of MDGs for Women and Girls*. The 58th Session of CSW in March holds a critical opportunity for evaluating the results of the goals from a gender perspective. The Commission will focus on experiences, lessons learned, and best practices from the past 15 years.

With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set to expire next year, a great deal of conversation has focused on the achievements and shortcomings of the MDGs. Though significant progress has been made, it has been uneven, and many of the goals will come up short of their targets by 2015. The global community is now moving on two fronts: pursuing the MDGs to the end, and looking ahead to the post-2015 development agenda. As Rwandan President Paul Kagame said in his General Assembly speech in September, "As we think about a new era of human development, we must have courage to go further than MDGs. The MDGs are a floor not a ceiling."

The MDG framework has failed to address several important dimensions of gender equality. An assessment of progress for achieving the MDGs reveals a mixed picture with progress in some areas, such as girls' primary school enrollment, but less in others, such as reducing maternal mortality. However, progress has not necessarily led to better outcomes for women and girls. For example, the heavy focus on enrollment in school has come at the cost of quality education.

Commission on the Status of Women

CSW58


 IMPLEMENTING THE MDGs  
 FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS  
 10 - 21 MARCH 2014

More broadly, gender equality has not been systematically mainstreamed into the implementation of the MDGs, particularly those which deal with sustainability and governance. The successive global crises have widened inequality between and within countries, and intensified vulnerability of marginalized groups, particularly women and girls.

The 58th Commission on the Status of Women will aim to address these issues in further detail, identifying gaps and challenges, as well as strategies for accelerating achievement of the MDGs in the time remaining. Looking ahead, these conversations will lead to recommendations for integrating gender equality and empowerment into the post-2015 agenda.

## SEX TRAFFICKING: BIG BUSINESS

*Abby McCrary, Dominican Volunteer*

Each year, hundreds of thousands of women and children from developing and developed countries around the world become victims of the global sex trade. They are recruited using tactics involving force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation and financial gain. Criminals working in organized networks treat the victims like commodities, buying and selling them for profit. This modern-day form of

## Spotlight on countries where Dominican Sisters serve:



**PERU:** Peru has succeeded in reaching the goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger. In education, the target has been surpassed; Most South American countries have primary school registration rates close to 90%, however there is progress to be made in quality of education. The country has reached targets for MDG 3 on gender equality, as well as combatting HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Peru is the only country in the region which has succeeded in reducing the mortality rate for children under-five by two thirds. Progress remains in the field of maternal health, as well as environmental sustainability.



**NIGERIA:** Poverty reduction lags behind growth in Nigeria due to increasing inequality. The country has failed to meet international goals for poverty reduction, as well as maternal health and HIV/AIDS. There is insufficient information on primary education. The goals on gender equality and child mortality indicate progress, but still fall below target. Growing urban development continues to cause concern for progress on the environmental front.



**PHILIPPINES:** The Philippines has succeeded in meeting many MDG targets, halving the proportion of undernourished citizens, achieving gender parity and schooling, increasing the number of the population with access to safe drinking water, and combatting HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Progress has been made, but still falls below UN targets in achieving universal primary education, decreasing child and maternal mortality, and reducing extreme poverty.

slavery is called sex trafficking, and can affect victims from all countries and socioeconomic levels. In the U.S. the average age of entry into the commercial sex trade is 12 to 14 years old. Many underage, exploited children are being bought and sold every day.

## The Super Bowl

Large-scale sporting events can create a market for the sex trafficking industry. The recent Super Bowl brought hundreds of thousands of people to the New York metropolitan area, and with that influx of tourists came demand and profitability for commercial sex. This issue has been the center of focus for Dominican Volunteer Margot Morris, currently serving with Caldwell sister, Pat Daly, OP at the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment.

There have been multiple initiatives around human trafficking and the Super Bowl in the preceding months, including a hotel outreach campaign, led by Margot, as well as the creation of an educational display in New York City designed to raise public awareness around the issue. This educational exhibit (pictured below) was organized by the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons, in which the Dominican family has an active voice.



## Demand and the Media

Like drugs and arms trafficking, human trafficking is a market-driven industry that is based on the rules of supply and demand. Too often, society places blame on the victims rather than the perpetrators of sex trafficking. Yet there is a growing movement focusing on deterring the purchasers of commercial sex, and addressing the forces of demand which fuel them. This strategy holds enormous potential in eradicating the destructive human rights violations of sex trafficking. When the buyers stop buying, the continuum of indignity collapses.

While increasing social services and obtaining a firm commitment from law enforcement to investigate and prosecute abusers would certainly help trafficking victims, the abuse will continue as long as we fail to address more subtle yet pervasive demand-driven factors.

Though events such as the Super Bowl can cause an increase in demand for commercial sex, there are also more subtle and pervasive means to cultivate this drive. The media, through its sexualized images of women and girls in advertising, film, television, and music, de-sensitizes society to violence, particularly sexual violence. The commercial sex industry is glamorized and romanticized without properly acknowledging the damage done to both women and men as a result of the commodification of women's bodies. It is essential for this culture of commodification to be dismantled, and the inherent dignity and rights of each person upheld at all levels of society and in all countries.



## THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE: ARE THEY REALLY THAT ELUSIVE?

Margaret Mayce, OP

This passage from St. Luke's Gospel has always intrigued me. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, cries from deep within, *"If only today you knew the things that make for peace, but they are hidden from your sight..."* We all long for a time when light will pierce the darkness of our individual and collective lives so that all of God's people, and our planet, can enjoy the peace that God desires for us all. Why does it all seem so elusive? If we are honest with ourselves, we each know what we need to do in order to foster peace within us, around us, among us. *It is simply, profoundly, a matter of intentional doing.*

When we play this out on the international stage, it gets a bit more dicey - but the same holds true. It is a matter of intentional doing - doing the right thing. Some would call this action on behalf of

the common good. But the great tragedy of our times is that the players on the international stage seem to have lost a sense of what the common good means, and just how important it is for us all - Earth included.

### Empowerment of People

The upcoming Commission for Social Development will be addressing the theme *Promoting the Empowerment of People in Achieving Poverty Eradication, Social Integration and Full and Decent Work for All*. This theme resonates strongly with the Dominican Family worldwide. Our brothers and sisters live and work among some of the world's most vulnerable populations. From Democratic Republic of Congo, to the Philippines, to the Solomon Islands, to Peru, to Mexico and the United States the questions are the same: where is the political will to bring about transformative change? Where is the sense of the common good that would bring an end to the inequality that dooms untold millions to a sub-human existence? In other words, why is there no intentional doing of what everyone on some level knows needs to be done?

### An Unequal Playing Field

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, "Lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty." People remain disempowered when they have no access to the elements that make for a life free from fear and want. In a report to the Secretary General, "Realizing the Future

We Want for All," the UN Task Force urges us to make globalization a positive force for present and future generations. However, at present the benefits of globalization are very unevenly shared. Moreover, the report states that persistent inequalities and struggles over scarce resources are among the key determinants of situations of conflict, hunger, insecurity and violence, which in turn impede sustainable social development.

### **The Scandal of Military Spending**

In an opinion piece published in August 2012 entitled *The World Is Over-Armed and Peace Is Under-Funded*, the Secretary General addressed the dilemma which contributes heavily to the disempowerment of millions of people worldwide; namely, global military spending. Last year it was estimated that this spending exceeded \$1.7 trillion - or more than \$4.6 billion a day. This figure includes billions of dollars for modernizing nuclear arsenals well into the future. Weapons of mass destruction being improved, while inequality and poverty run rampant - is this what makes for peace? NGO representatives at the UN are persistent in raising this issue. Is there the political will to divert a portion of this wasted money to the basic needs of the human family, as well as to safeguarding the integrity of the planet?

As we prepare to participate with members of civil society from all over the world in the Commission for Social Development and the March session of the Commission on the Status of Women, my colleagues and I will take to heart the words of Pope Francis, who spoke of *"the scandal of poverty in a world of plenty."* He referred to it as *"a piercing moral challenge for the whole human community...A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table."*

*"If only today you knew the things that make for peace..."* We know what these are; and so do the world's leaders. Are we prepared to deal with the cost of inaction? Or, are we willing to be inconvenienced, for the sake of the common good?

### **2014 UN Observances**

Feb. 20: **World Day of Social Justice**  
 March 8: **International Women's Day**  
 March 22: **World Water Day**  
 April 22: **International Mother Earth Day**

## **DOMINICAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

Margaret Mayce, OP, DLC/NGO Representative to the United Nations

Abby McCrary, Dominican Volunteer