The Girl Child: Important International Attention

The elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child was the United Nations theme of the 51st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), March 2007. While this topic may be very familiar to Good Shepherd, it only came to full attention at the UN after Section L on the Girl child became part of the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995. It was through the work of the NGO community that Section L was inserted and the NGOs continue to promote the rights of girl children, including prevention, protection, empowerment and participation.

The rights of the girl child are now part of an international process for strengthening policy so that governments fulfill their responsibilities about education, health, and other needs of girls. Good Shepherd can be part of this process, not only through the NGO office in New York, but also through local and national initiatives.

The UN will again give attention to the girl child when the September 2007 General Assembly has a five-year review of A World Fit for Children. Then in 2010 the CSW will review the actions of governments on behalf of girls from 2007 to 2010.

We encourage Good Shepherd Units to highlight the rights of the girl child and collaborate with other NGOs to do national and local advocacy.

More on CSW 51 and documents:
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51ses.htm
More about a World Fit for Children at:
http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/wffc/

Raising the Voice of the Girl Child, an NGO responsibility

Over the years Good Shepherd NGO has been an active member of the Working Group on Girls, working in New York to promote girls’ voices and girls’ participation though supporting girls’ presence and organizing “Speak Outs” for girls. CSW 2007 gave a special opportunity to promote the girl child. The Working Groups raised funds to bring 10 girls from all parts of the world to the UN. The activities of the girls
included orientation sessions, girls-only caucuses, a reception, speaking at various panels and workshops, and lobbying officials to strengthen governments’ promises. The grand finale event was *Girls Speak Out* where the high level podium of the UN chamber, usually a bastion of bureaucracy, protocol, and hierarchy had no UN official on it! It was filled with girls from around the world! The girls told their stories of child soldiering, of rape, of HIV, of hunger, of lack of education. They spoke of their determination to find solutions, with family and NGO support. Every story and every hoped-for solution was typical of GS stories of the past 200 years across the globe.

We encourage all Good Shepherds to continue to find ways for girls to raise their voices and be part of the world movement for girls’ rights. Let the Girls Speak Out.

**Good Shepherd Girls: Living in a Political World**

We offer congratulations to the Good Shepherd teenage girls who applied for a travel grant to participate at the UN CSW in New York:

- Mekdes Assefa Taye, Ethiopia (*WGG Mary Purcell Grant Recipient*)
- Jakline Akwera Joseph, Kenya (*WGG Mary Purcell Grant Awardee*)
- Sunitha Narasimha, India (*WGG Mary Purcell Grant Applicant*)

Out of ten girls who were awarded a grant ($1,000 for travel expenses, raised by the NGO committee in NY) two Good Shepherd girls were accepted, Mekdes and Jakline. As often happens in Good Shepherd life, it was not that simple and in the end, no Good Shepherd girl participated in the UN meeting, each was caught in some force of the world today.

Jakline from Kenya, while in excited preparation, suffered a big disappointment when she was unable, despite help from GS in Kenya and letters from the Committee in New York, to obtain a Visa to come to the US. The reality of those who are allowed to enter some countries and the arbitrariness of the decision demonstrates the fact that we live in an unequal world where some are favored and some remain on the outside. These are the structures and systems that our recent GS Directions have challenged us to change.

Mekdes from Ethiopia did obtain her visa but her intended chaperone, despite repeated applications, was unable to obtain a visa. The family decided that Mekdes (age 18) could travel alone, to meet Clare in New York. However, Mekdes got no further than the airplane change in a US city 300K from NY. While we still do not know all that happened, it seems this family and child agreed that she would move on her own with her Visa and try to start a new life in USA. We pray for her safety and we pray for all families desperate to give their child a chance out of poverty.

There are clear risks in trying new things and in supporting girls’ participation. There are risks in addressing systems and structures of injustice. But we will continue to seek every way to empower the girl child and to allow her to speak in her own voice.

*Travel-grant recipients at the girl’s reception*
UN in Geneva, Human Rights: Good Shepherd Speaking

This report is from notes sent by Mau Catabian

The UN in Geneva houses the Human Rights Council. This past March Good Shepherd was part of Human Rights advocacy on two fronts: killings in the Philippines and migration in Sri Lanka.

Sr. Mau Catabian and Immaculate de Alwis at the UN, Geneva, each in Geneva with different issues.

Sr. Mau Catabian was a member of the Philippine Ecumenical Delegation. They spent a week in Geneva and submitted a Report on Extrajudicial Killings to the Fourth Session of the Human Rights Council. The delegation was told their report would be incorporated in the submission to the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Because of so much loss of life in the Philippines, there was urgency to the mission whose goal was: “Stop the Killings.”

Hesitancy and insecurity went hand in hand with urgency. Mau reports fears that she might be labeled a “leftist, activist, or communist” or even that she could be killed, as has happened to so many social justice activists; there was also the risk of being maligned by the military forces that now stand accused with liability for the killings.

Along with the opportunity to speak out on human rights, Mau found the ecumenical aspect of the delegation enriching. She found a deep unity that transcended the commonly defined differences. The integral connections between human rights and interfaith activity emerged as a relevant theme central to our globalized world. In fact, lack of inter-religious respect has bred the climate that has allowed the human rights abuses in the Philippines to reach such monstrous proportions.

Note: The GS NGO office represented GS at a US Conference and Congressional hearings in Washington D.C. the week before the Geneva hearings. The US government is entwined with the Philippine government in the abuses that are amassing.

More on UN Human Rights Council Session 4: http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/

CEDAW – GS active!

GS Sister Claude Naddaf was part of a Syrian NGO delegation who presented an NGO report to the CEDAW in New York in May 2007. (Watch for a report in the next edition).

Migration – On the Agenda

Good Shepherd NGO has applied to have Sr. Magdalena Fransiscus represent us at the UN affiliated Global Forum on Migration & Development, in Belgium, July 2007. We want to affirm that migration policies must include adherence to human rights, social protections, labor standards, and gender perspective.
African Regional NGOs Debate Issues
An African Civil Society Forum (AfCSF 2007) was held in March at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Centre in Addis Ababa. Sr. James Clines attended some sessions of the meetings on behalf of GS.

The Forum brought together more than 250 Civil Society leaders from 32 African countries (organized by the Conference of NGOs, CONGO) under the theme: “Democratizing governance at the regional and global level to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).”

Objectives of the Forum included providing African NGOs a space to express concerns, and to share experiences and successes. There was a strong desire among African NGOs to be more active in achievement of the MDGs. Discussion and debates included topics as diverse as peace and security in Africa, human rights violations, gender equality, governance, trade and development issues.

New UN Secretary General sets agenda:
Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon began work in January 2007. His first appointments included women and experts from the global south. There is hope that these actions are a signal that the UN will not be dominated, as has been the history, by patriarchal or Western influences.

Michele Montas, the personal spokeswoman for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is from Haiti where she suffered exile and death threats for her criticism of government while working in journalism. Alicia Barcena Ibarra, a Mexican environmentalist, will serve as the undersecretary-general for administration and management. China's Margaret Chan, the director-general of the World Health Organization, promises to make Africa and women top priorities. Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro of the United Republic of Tanzania is in the 2nd most powerful position at the UN, the Deputy Secretary-General; Dr. Migiro was previously the Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children and she served as a member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Ban himself has said: “I will do everything in my power to ensure that our United Nations can live up to its name, and be truly united, so that we can live up to the hopes that so many people around the world place in this institution, which is unique in the annals of human history.” Ban’s priority agenda includes:
* Strengthening security, development and human rights, the 3 pillars of the UN;
* Enlivening and renewing confidence in UN personnel (the Secretariat);
* Setting the highest standards of ethics, professionalism, and accountability.

If the member governments, through the mandates of their citizens, can unite with such priorities, the UN will increase its effectiveness and better ensure peace and human dignity in the entire world.
Events and Resources:  
For awareness and local involvement

G8-summit in June 2007, Germany
Has your Unit been involved in National or regional action around the G-8 Summit in Germany? Many GSs signed a petition demanding economic justice and inclusion of those adversely affected by globalization. Coalitions of NGOs from all over have been organizing cultural events, rallies, action days, and camps. Is the GS voice among them?
http://www.g8-germany.info/index.htm (German and English)

A World Fit for Children: 5-year review at UN September 07
The UN General Assembly will review the commitment made for children 5 years ago. Do you use these documents in your youth programs? Do you teach Child Rights to youth in GS programs?
background: (links to several languages)
http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/wffc/

Slavery
March 2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in England. Slavery still exists. An estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked every year (UNICEF 2007) and used as domestic servants, factory workers, camel jockeys, child soldiers and sex slaves. Is your unit working to change systems and structures?

Jubilee Sabbath year
Leading to Year 2000 GS has been active in Jubilee commitment to debt cancellation. Inspired by the Jubilee vision of liberation and life for all, people of conscience around the world are calling their political leaders to observe 2007 as a Sabbath Year. By 2000 progress was made but the debt crisis has not ended. The imperative to continue the Jubilee journey remains: to lift the burden of debt that exploits impoverished countries and direct resources toward health care, education, and clean water.

Contact your local or national Jubilee committees to find local links for action.
Links can be found:
http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/
http://www.jubileeusa.org/?id=114

Around the World - Notes

From Colombia JP Contact, Hna Hennis Marlley: Colombia responded to the NGO invitation to raise the voice of the girl child by using the Internet Voices for Youth in preparation for the UN Commission on the Status of Women, March 07. Colombia highlighted issues of government ineffectiveness in stopping discrimination; they also linked how discrimination against migrants and racial minorities makes girls vulnerable; and guns that come into Colombia from the USA support increasing violence that leaves girls and families vulnerable. Thank you for your contribution!

From Mid-North America, Saipan:  
(Saipan is the capital of the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) in the western Pacific Ocean.) GS Sr. Stella Mangona, with staff Lauri B. Ogumoro, and trafficking survivor K. E. (name withheld for privacy) from the GS shelter collaborated with the US Catholic Conference of Bishops in February to testify about injustices on migration and trafficking. They urged US Congress to support reforms to prevent the exploitation of women and girls. The US National Advocacy Office sent the news of this testimony throughout GS USA so that the delegation would be securely wrapped in prayers of solidarity. http://www.gsadvocacy.org/ April News for more information
From Singapore/Malaysia JP Contact
Gloria Bon: Singapore Malaysia sponsored a two-day session on “Globalization: Its Effect on Women and Children.” Dr. Irene Fernandez, who presented at the Asia-Pacific JP Contact workshop in 2006, was the speaker. A network was invited from local religious communities and from GS Asia-Pacific region. This ongoing formation is geared toward the integration of Justice in all aspects of mission.

From Senegal, JP Contact, Sr. Yvonne: GS Yvonne Bambara participated in a diocesan meeting for the promotion of Justice, Peace, and Human Rights. She spoke at the meeting about the GS international commitment to Justice, the NGO office, and her local responsibilities as JP contact. The group has planned annual activities and formation for the diocese.

From Canada, Sr. Deborah: GS Sr. Deborah Isaacs of Canada received praise from The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) for her testimony before the Status of Women Committee in Ottawa last November. “Thanks for all the good work of Deborah... in making this report the kind of feminist abolitionist document that it is,” says Jan Raymond, PhD, co-executive Dir of CATW. Congratulations Deborah!

From Malta, JP Contact, Rosalinda
For the past 5 to 6 years GS Malta has gathered about 100 boys from difficult schools and broken families for a weekend that includes talks on domestic violence. GS spends time with the boys and listens to their difficulties and questions, helping to form positive gender attitudes. This is consistent with a theme reviewed at the UN Commission on the Status of Women last March: the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality.

From Pakistan, JP contact Sr. Seraphine: GS in Pakistan marked International Women’s Day with events organized to promote family rights. Through school contacts, GS has become more aware of the situation of women. They are continuing programs throughout the month.

From Kenya, Sr. Bibian: Women’s Day in Kenya is not a holiday but GS made it one by including women in international commemorations; around eighty women celebrated with GS. The day included talks on women rights and on appreciation of oneself as a woman. They included the UN CSW theme to eliminate violence against the girl child. Teenager Jakline, who was accepted to come to the UN but who could not obtain a Visa, gave presentations locally on the girl child.

JP Contact workshops scheduled are:
The Americas, May 14-19, Guatemala
RIOMA, July 21-26, Egypt
Europe, December 02-07, Belgium

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