"WHEN PEOPLE COME TOGETHER, PROGRESS CAN BE ACHIEVED"
From reports by Sr. Agatha Priuntari, Indonesia, and Sr Pranee Sitti, Thailand, who represented Good Shepherd at the Asian Civil Society Forum (ACSF,) 9 to 13 December 2002, Bangkok, Thailand.

We want to share, especially with those of you who work at the grassroots level in our world community. At the forum we sought to give meaning to words such as development, human rights, and democracy – a meaning that has reality for those we struggle with and work beside each day.

Why is an Asian Forum important?
• The Asian region has the largest proportion of the world’s population. Civil society, or NGOs, can strengthen the Asian voice in the world, including at the United Nations.
• Asia-Pacific NGOs represent 17 % of NGOs who have Consultative Status with ECOSOC. It is our challenge that the voices of 61 per cent of humanity are heard in the world body.
• NGOs in Asia are challenged to reach out beyond boundaries. A process of mutual reaching out between international and Asian NGOs requires an empowerment process in Asia.

The ACSF 2002 was organized (by the Conference of NGOs, CONGO) to help “civil society” formulate and advance advocacy strategies at national, regional and global levels. The daily program was filled with dialogue on many subjects such as women, refugees, environment, and labor. Training workshops took place on topics such as UN Human Rights processes. Plenary sessions and special briefings kept the days full and centered on the UN agenda as expressed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A special event was held to mark Human Right Day, when flowers were distributed, silence honored victims of abuses, and music and speeches expressed dreams and hopes for the future. At the end participants put their flowers on posters on the floor to symbolize their commitment to the cause of human rights.

Diversity was central to the Forum. More than 500 participants represented local, national, regional and international NGOs from more than 33 countries. Diverse cultures and religions, different levels of social and economic development, political systems and environmental conditions were all represented. There was opportunity to share common concerns and aspirations. Partnerships were built across Asia. NGOs challenged the effectiveness of the UN and called for greater representation of and support for grassroots realities. Good Shepherd was a part of it!

The Asian Civil Society Forum increased our understanding of the situation and conditions of all Asian countries. For Good Shepherd there is clearly a benefit in coming together with others striving to protect the dignity of all and to empower people, especially women, to shape their future. No one person or organization can do this alone, but together there is strength. We have new ideas to improve our daily ministry and we made contacts that will build new networking opportunities.

Reports and more information on the ACSF can be found at:
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN


“My NGO affirms the fundamental right of equality and dignity for women, the right of women to be free of violence... I seek to highlight the harm and violence done to women in systems of prostitution.”

“The condemnation of the prostitution of women is a contentious issue due the sovereignty of nations who have legalized prostitution. Likewise, those who profit from systems of the prostitution of women welcome silence on this issue. The international community has learned through processes of working toward the elimination of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, early marriage and other formerly legal, sanctioned and protected cultural or traditional practices, that no law, no culture, no tradition may deny the fulfillment of human rights. They apply and must be protected in all situations.”

“Prostitution is an issue of human rights of women. ...There is no regulation of prostitution that can ensure freedom from the abuse, violence, and harm done to women.”

“Members of my NGO express the situation of women in prostitution this way:

- A Sister who accompanies women on the streets in Belfast says that, in the last year, two women in her neighborhood were murdered. Beatings of women are frequent; one woman is now paralyzed, another unconscious. Stabbings and drug usage are a part of the scene…

- A Sister from India says that the gap between women and girls and general society is growing wider. Both local and global efforts are required to bridge the gap. Breakdown in relationships in family, lack of service provision in schools and health agencies, poor implementation of existing laws, serve to alienate women and girls. Thus their lives center on survival and they are vulnerable to further exploitation of trafficking or prostitution.

- A Sister from Latin America pleads: “Our girls are violated without voice and without future. Who takes responsibility for the trauma done to these girls? Who will call for justice?”

“We seek to support the work of this Commission in upholding the rights of women to self determination, to access to universal human rights, and to oppose any tolerance of those who traffic in women and girls, who prostitute women and girls or who sexually exploit women or girls in any manner.”

LOCAL ACTION CALLED FOR


Plan now! Organise an Event!

Promote this day in some way!

Good Shepherd is a collaborator in this global campaign to raise awareness of and to prevent abuse of children. It is a way for NGOs to share local and national practices that contribute to the eradication of child abuse.

Send a brief report on your local events on Nov. 19, 2003 to Clare at the NGO office. She will forward them to the Women World Summit and you may be included in their global report.

For direct information, contact:
WWSF, The Women's World Summit Foundation
P.O. Box 2001, 1211 Geneva 1, Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 738,82,48. Web: www.woman.ch

You can see reports of last year's global activities at the web site.
AT THE UNITED NATIONS: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
By Clare Nolan

The UN Commission on Social Development includes topics that closely parallel Catholic teaching on social justice. Good Shepherd NGO participates in this Commission, held annually in February.

This year we collaborated with other NGOs in submitting statements to the governments on the following topics:

The Social Responsibility of the Private Sector. This area focuses on the need for private corporations to integrate human rights standards into all their practices.

Policies of International Financial Institution (IFIs). The NGOs call for international debt cancellation and a priority of inclusive social policy within all economic policy decisions.

Sharing of “Best Practices”: This refers to calling on governments to form real and practical partnerships with NGOs, especially those with grass roots expertise in poverty eradication. The NGOs also challenge governments to include those who suffer the ill effects of government policies to have a formal place and voice in policy formation.

Employment strategies. Among other strategies, NGOs call for universal minimum wages, eradication of trafficking in persons for exploitative labor, and the integration of sound ecological policies, to be adopted and regulated by governments.

Further information on the Commission and full NGO statements in major UN languages can be found at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2003.htm

LINKING DIRECT SERVICE TO SYSTEMS

Good Shepherd NGO, through Clare’s efforts, had two people with grass roots experience attend the International Conference of Activists, on “Pathbreaking Strategies in the Global Fight Against Sex Trafficking”, held in Washington DC, USA in February 2003. The conference was sponsored and funded by the US State Department. Our accepted nominees were:

Sr. Geradine Rowley (Dublin, Ireland). Geradine has taken active and practical lead for Good Shepherd in Ireland and has collaborated with other NGOs in the development of local and national work against trafficking. She works in direct service and has a grasp of international issues related to trafficking. Geradine's reaction upon acceptance was: “I got a call from the US embassy here in Dublin to say I was chosen for the conference. I was delighted...Oh, I’m getting excited already! Don’t worry - I will represent the issue well when I’m there and will work hard."

Ms Sophie Wirtz-Jekeler, Brussels, Belgium.
Sophie Wirtz-Jekeler is the President of Le Nid in Brussels, Belgium, where Sr. Lalini Gunawardena works. Lalini describes Sophie as doing magnificent things for women victims of trafficking, raising public awareness of the problem, working very closely with the European Women's Lobby and the Women's Rights Commission in Europe. Recently Sophie obtained housing for the women from City Hall. She is now part of planning a project with Sr. Alphonsa Donders, Provincial of Holland, to help give professional formation once or twice a year. Lalini collaborates very closely with the Le Nid and we thank her for her recommendation of Sophie.

Rome-based Working Group on Trafficking also represented: Sr Eugenia Bonetti, an Italian Consolata sister, and
member of the JPIC Commission Working Group on Trafficking of the Union of Superiors General (USG/UISG) also attended the Washington Conference. She was nominated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Rome, and attended as a representative of the working group.

Eugenia, who was a missionary in Nigeria for 25 years, works for the Italian Conference of Religious Women, specifically with women in who are trafficked and working in prostitution in Rome and other parts of Italy.

FACTS FOR CONTEMPLATION:

Up to 70% of female murder victims worldwide are killed by their male companions.

As many as one third of girls are forced into their first sexual experience.

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NORTH-SOUTH SOLIDARY
Compiled from Good Shepherd Volunteers, North America.

A recent description of the ongoing violence in Colombia, SA, noted that the active generals were trained by military in the USA, at the School of the Americas (SOA). The school has a long history of training dictators who have perpetrated great harm and violence on their citizens in Central and South America. US citizens have long protested these practices and still call for an end to the School. In November 2002, Good Shepherd Volunteers in North America joined the thousands of protesters at the gate of the SOA, demanding justice. Those who participated share their reflections:

"We came together to share in the mission of closing the doors of the SOA forever and to protect people around the world from terror and the suffering endured by it." Katherine Ward

"It is not our choice to pay attention to the events in our world—it is our work as the body of Christ, for what affects one member touches us all." Maureen Kirch

"As an individual in a global community I have a responsibility to take action to bring about some small change. By doing this I am able live a more meaningful life." Hilary Zeller

"To make this world more just I add my little drop of water to the great river of revolution." Michelle Schaap

"As we began to walk, arms linked, heads bowed, raising our signs and the sisters banner, the unity of the Good Shepherd Volunteers made me feel part of something much greater. I could feel the presence of the sisters with us …"

Cristin Mathiez

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NETWORKING FOR CHILDREN


I was privileged to attend this conference of over 100 people at the invitation of the Maryknoll NGO whose representative to the UN collaborates often with Clare Nolan. While the conference included the participation of large collaborative agencies such as UNICEF and BICE (International Catholic Children's Bureau), the participation of children was the most important aspect. Every panel exposed the reality of children and each panel included children as participants. Children were the protagonists, not objects, of this conference. Boys and girls shared their experiences and their sufferings as well as their hopes and desires. The children shared similar and sorrowful situations; often their words brought tears to our eyes.
A spiritual and friendly atmosphere marked the conference. Prayer was included in the daily program and all faith traditions were recognized and included. A special meditation on the Rights of the Child was interpreted through various religious expressions.

Education was a central theme throughout the conference. The final document called on governments to increase educational resources for children. The children, in their final declaration, called for an end to poverty and violence. They appealed for universal access to education. They want action, asking that their words not just be on paper. This is the commitment for each of us in our own work and in the empowerment of those with whom we work.

FRESH WATER – A MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE

The year 2003 is designated International Year of Freshwater.

“Though you have no money come – Come to the water!”
(Isaiah 55:1)

Water is now one of the most sought after commodities in the world today. And yet water is a common good that belongs to all living beings in general and to humankind in particular, says Professor Riccardo Petrella, Secretary General of the International Committee for World Contract on Water. At a public seminar in Rome in February, organised by the JPIC Commission of the USG/UISG, Professor Petrella spoke passionately about water.

Some Water facts from Professor Petrella’s talk:

• Today 1.5 billion people do not have access to drinking water;
• 2 billion do not enjoy hygienic and sanitary systems;
• 3 billion do not benefit from the systems of treatment of recycled water;
• If a “water revolution” does not take place, around 5 billion persons will live in regions where access to water will be a serious problem.
• Some countries are close to losing sovereignty over their rivers and lakes because privatisation of water is made a condition of loans from international institutions.

Water is a sustainable resource but we need to use it wisely.

This year the Rome-based JPIC Promoters Working Group on Ecology is preparing a booklet on Water (similar to the one they produced last year on Climate Change). For more information on water, visit these sites or contact Caroline at the Secretariat:
http://www.un.org/events/water/
http://www.cipsi.it/contrattoacqua/home/
http://www.worldwaterforum.org

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LOBBYING IN LONDON

The following excerpt, from a letter received by Sr. Consolata Smyth from the House of Commons, gives evidence of the attention that letters of advocacy can receive. Great Britain, a province with many elderly sisters, is active in various lobbying efforts as well keeping informed on issues that focus their very active prayers.

“...offers a ray of hope amid a bleak world. I remember... that you have a long standing interest in debt relief in the poorest countries... [with my colleagues] I personally thank you for your concerns.

Dr Rudi Vis, MP, London

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REFUGEES ON THE AGENDA

Australia – East Timor:
Christine Carolan, Executive Officer for Good Shepherd Social Justice Network,
Australia, was one of five delegates who met the Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock in February regarding Common Sense for East Timorese Victorians. The City of Yarra, which hosts the largest of the communities of East Timorese asylum seekers, joined with other host cities to get a more compassionate and common-sense decision from the Australian government.

Congo – Canada: Good News for Separated Children
Three Congolese children from different families, left orphans when their parents were killed in fighting, were reunited with relatives in Canada recently. The children had been adopted by relatives living in Canada but had been stranded in the Ivory Coast since April 2002 waiting for their visas. Sr Deborah Isaacs of Canada became involved in August 2002 and pushed for the children’s visas. She contacted the joint community of Good Shepherd and Our Lady of Charity sisters based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, who helped care for the children. Thanks to intensive collaboration and networking, the children arrived in Canada at the end of February, after only 10 months instead of the expected delay of 18 months.

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REBUILDING SOCIETY AFTER CONFLICT
Sr Lalini Gunawardene, Belgium

Last September I was privileged to attend the 55th Annual Conference organised by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). The theme was: Rebuilding Post-Conflict Society: A Shared Responsibility.

The discussions centred on existing situations of conflict. The United Nations, along with the NGOs, focused on the need for initiatives to prevent the resurgence of conflict and war. Hearing the stories of many survivors of conflict was a very moving experience and a way that governments can learn creative initiatives.

POVERTY ERADICATION PRACTICES
A note from Clare in the NGO office

In November 2002, the NGO office sent a request through the ICJPC JP Contact Persons to respond to a questionnaire about Poverty Eradication. The purpose was to gather, in collaboration with other NGOs, Best Practices in Poverty Eradication that will be used by NGOs to keep the UN connected to the real grass-roots level.

Thanks to each project that responded! I received 21 responses from Good Shepherd projects. Seven are in Spanish and the rest are in English. There were

3 from Colombia;
1 from Great Britain;
3 from Indonesia;
4 from Peru;
6 from the Philippines;
1 from Sudan; and
3 from the United States.

The projects included savings and credit programs; bake shop and co-operative micro-enterprises; support for women and children displaced by war; preventive family services; outreach to women in prostitution; services in the based service to women and girls in crisis; building of ecclesial communities; literacy and values training; human rights for Indigenous peoples, and more. What a wonderful mission we have!

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Original in English. Please distribute to all communities and collaborators in your province. Thank you.