Reconciliation with the Poor: the GS NGO internship

Mau Catabian presenting on “Challenges to NGOs”, New York, May 2006

As an Asian Filipino woman I have a national history of colonial oppression and exploitation (by Spain and the USA) as well as resistance and struggle. Applying and coming to New York for the NGO internship was a chaotic process for me. I carry a cultural baggage of biases and prejudices against a “First World” country whose policies cause impoverishment to a “Developing” country like my own.

The Philippines is in chronic crises on the economic, socio-political and cultural level. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, debt, labor migration, political repression and human rights violations, graft, corruption, the trafficking and prostitution of women and children, militarism, degradation of the environment are all worsening. It is difficult to reconcile the experience of affluence and surplus economy of the US with the dehumanizing poverty and remittance economy of my country. It is paradoxical, though, that I was able to find easy affinity with the “American” culture in terms of food, film/entertainment and music. I realize that my ability to identify with this culture is a result of the assimilation of the Filipino psyche from past and post-colonial history.

Within myself I struggle with the complexities of neo-colonialism. That is, as a GS NGO intern I am interacting now with the exploitative structures of neo-liberal globalization. The resistance and struggle of the oppressed and marginalized, including women, children, impoverished nations, indigenous peoples, and the deteriorating environment resonates with my aspiration for justice and liberation. Linking the personal context with the national and global context led me to appreciate aspects of the UN system; but I am critical of the limits of governmental structures and want to maximize other grassroots international structures to expand our networks for social transformation. I see the UN system strive to be on the side of the poor of the world. The UN system however accommodates multilateral financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO. Transnational Corporations are visible along with civil society groups and governments.

Overall, what I found life-giving in the UN
system is the passion and commitment of the NGOs (over 2000) who represent the poor, trying their utmost to be a prophetic voice in government deliberations.

"The United Nations needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a "family of nations.""

Pope John Paul II, 50th General Assembly of the UN

The UN system, through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has stated a priority for issues of poverty eradication, education, gender equality, empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environmental sustainability and development. While the governments have reached consensus on some solutions to these global issues they are not united in naming the root causes of problems, which could address genuine social change by challenging institutions to relinquish control and domination. The development model of free-market globalization is an assault to the poor. It has preferred economic goals above human goals and so the gap between the rich and the poor is continually widening. The challenge to NGOs is to call the global community to uphold human dignity and the common good.

If global solidarity is to be a significant response to the problems of global marginalization, it must align itself primarily with and among the poor. To paraphrase Robert McAfee Brown: What you see depends on where you stand - what you hear depends on who you listen to - who you are depends on what you choose to do. Global solidarity can be a true mission of reconciliation when it stands on the side of the poor, listens to the voice of the poor, and works for justice with the poor. When the NGO office works closely with the poor and marginalized, gains inspiration from their voice and sees their resilience amid oppressive global structures, I have the energy to continue to work for global solidarity.

The Philippines, is among the most poverty stricken countries, ranking 43rd most poor according to the World Bank’s measure of 141 countries. The UN places the Philippines 84th among 177 countries according to its 2004 report Human Development Index, measured by the average of life expectancy, literacy and standard of living. According to a World Bank’s formula for determining world poverty - the number of persons living on US $1 a day - the Philippines is Asia’s Third poorest country (next to Nepal and India).

Grassroots Women and Girls: Transformative Strength of the UN

By Vandana Lobo, GS NGO intern

I have worked only at the local level, first with women in India and now with teenage girls in Nepal. So I was apprehensive of what I would experience in the richest country of the world as an NGO office intern. The image that we form in our countries is so different from what we actually experience. And the United Nations, that dominates global politics, stands in contrast to the small worlds that we live in. Thus, being an intern was a
milestone in my ongoing formation. I was exposed to many cultures; I was enlightened and inspired by a variety of peoples and by their many displays of solidarity with the poor. My experience has created many connections that I hope to maintain in the future.

The UN is a body that seeks to resolve international conflicts as well as formulate polices on matters affecting all. The UN system works to promote economic and social goals. It coordinates responses to humanitarian crises and plays a crucial role in building consensus on action for development. There are many UN agencies that are based regionally in various countries: UNICEF (for children); UNDP (development); ILO (labor); WORLD BANK (economics); Program on HIV/AIDS; the WHO (health); UNIFEM (women); and many others. Then, there are NGOs who play a part in the policy-making decisions on social, economic and political matters. The Good Shepherd NGO office works in coalition with many NGOs on issues of trafficking, violence against women, girls, economic justice, & gender equality.

As I attended input sessions, workshops, and UN Commissions these past months, I came to understand how the systems and structures of different countries dominate and oppress the poor, especially women and girls. The women who work in factories, fields, homes, or cottage industries contribute to national economies through their productive and creative skills. But these women have no labor unions; their worksites are unhygienic; they are often illiterate and abused. Women are the constant victims of globalization. The most vulnerable are teenage girls, who are exposed to all the ills and abuses of the dominant systems. At the same time, these women and girls can be the vehicles and forces to change systems and laws of governments.

My reflection on the Directives of our 28th General Chapter statement: "Profoundly challenged by the suffering and distress in our world, we witness to the fact that another reality is possible for humanity and for the whole of creation. We dare to create a globalized network of action and contemplation woven together with all the tenderness and compassion of our Shepherd God", has actively engaged and trained me to be involved in analysis on the issues of women. It calls me (and all Good Shepherds) to use networks to find new meaning in our lives and apostolate. I feel a very urgent task: the education of the human rights of the girl child. It is in the community where she lives that the girl child begins to shape her identity through education, formal or informal. Women and girls at the grassroots can be organized, mobilized, motivated, and empowered to know that they are the only ones who can change their culture and male dominated policies. Women’s participation in politics and collective protest can ensure economic change on the national level. Entering mainstream systems and networks is really the only space from which women can draw their strength.

The voice of women is a strong tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are so related to their lives. The voice of grassroots women can be heard in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) if we make the links. At CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) the expert panel challenges governments on the basis of reports submitted by members of NGOs in their country. A picture of a bridge comes to my mind, people walking from one side of the bridge to the other side, systems to grassroots and grassroots to systems. Good Shepherd people who have
knowledge of advocacy and the workings of governments carry the issues of people who are in direct service work. Each of us have specific tasks but each of us must walk back and forth across the bridge with issues of globalization, eradication of poverty, gender inequality, education, trade liberalization and market economics so that the voices of women and girls will be in front of governments, as all work to bring about change in the system.

Nepal is among the poorest and least developed countries in the world, with almost one-third of its population living below the poverty line. The median age is about 20. Unemployment is ranked at 42%, with 1/3 of the female population illiterate. 19% of the population completes secondary education. The country is beset by conflict between government forces and Maoist rebels, leaving people displaced across the country. Up to 7,000 women and girls are trafficked each year into India.

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**NGO Events and Resources:**

**Migration**

The UN is now engaged in high Level Dialogue on Migration issues. Good Shepherd has responded to the Secretary General’s Report with a goal to keep people-centered policies in the forefront.

See: http://www.un.org/esa/population/hldmigration/

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**CSW 2007**

The main theme for March Commission on the Status of Women is *The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child*. Good Shepherd is active in preparation, trying to promote the voice of the Girl Child. See *(English)*: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html

**UN Study-Violence Against Women**

The Study will have been published in September. Many Good Shepherds gave input but we are expecting to be disappointed with the outcome. GS will continue to work on the issue of Violence against Women (VaW). See *(English)*: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/index.htm

**Day for Eradication of Poverty**

Does your Unit commemorate October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty? Good Shepherd NGO participates in the commemoration at the UN. The Global Call to Action against Poverty is another resource. See: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/poverty_link3.htm and: http://www.whiteband.org/Lib/about/about/en

**10 years as an NGO!**

November ’06 is the 10th anniversary of Good Shepherd’s affiliation as an NGO with Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations. See the NGO prayer network note on the international website in November to join us in gratitude and hope.

**Indigenous Issues**

The UN Forum on Indigenous will be in Bangkok in May 2007. It is an excellent opportunity for Asian GS to participate at a UN international meeting. See: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/index.html

**HIV-AIDS**

The UN High-Level Meeting on AIDS to unite world policy against AIDS met in July 2006. See: http://www.un.org/ga/aidsmeeting2006/
GS Mission and Citizenship
By Shalini Podimattam, JPSM office

“The purpose of politics is to resolve conflict and to ensure well being and justice for all with the aid of government.”

Walter John Raymond

The politics of our global village is influenced by the international interactions of the latter half of the last millennium. In the 16th Century, people migrated from Europe in the name of “discovery.” This resulted in wars, colonization, enslavement, exploitation of land and resources. The accumulation of wealth and global domination by European cultures was the beginning of ‘globalization.’

In the 20th century, those already in power developed systems of exploitation. They used the structures of multinational corporations, the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund. At the national and international level power is centralized, leaving the vast majority of people and nations at the margin. Modern politics has justified massive violations of human rights: disappearances, massacres, militarism, torture, and gender exploitation. There is little separation between political administration and wealth.

Why are States not able to implement human rights, education, health, fair employment, and a healthy environment? Why can they not stop corruption, criminality, and terrorism? What is our role as Good Shepherd People, as citizens of over 60 countries?

Active and responsible citizenship is recognized as a vital to healthy political, economic and cultural life. We are the ones who can hold governments and corporations accountable for their actions. Voters can demand the promotion of the public good and the participation of youth and women is a key to better governance.

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. Every believer is called to faithful citizenship, to become an informed, active, and a responsible participant in the political process.”

Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

We, and those who participate in our programs, especially youth, are urged to:

- Develop Citizenship skills - communication, debate and negotiation;
- Be involved with and open to different cultures/ideologies;
- Understand the functions and processes of governments and their local and international impact;
- Participate in local political action – lobby on national and global issues;
- Take part in community responsibility - re-cycling of materials, neighborhood clean up, conservation of energy and water.
- Give public witness to values of democracy, liberty, justice & peace;
- Join community groups to demand human rights and to preserve God’s creation.

See more on Vatican Statement at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/

Brief Notes - Around the World

From South Africa, JP Contact Person, Lydicia Letlaka, News notes of 4 06:

South Africa’s Justice and Peace (JP) Province meeting (March ’06) had guest speakers from the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC). They addressed the history of JP, JP in parish life, human trafficking and future vision. South Africa is a source and destination country.
for trafficking, South Africa’s third most lucrative crime. These topics are very close to the ministries of GS, which include a home for unwed mothers, daycare centers for HIV & AIDS orphans, and skills for vulnerable women.

From New York, GS Province and GS Services agency:
The New York Province and New York City Good Shepherd Services are part of an Anti-Trafficking Coalition working to pass legislation to deter trafficking within New York State. The new act would strengthen civil law and enhance procedures to criminalize the trafficking of persons for labor servitude and sexual servitude. It will also provide rehabilitative services and legal protections for victims of trafficking.

From Syria, Sr. Marie-Claude Naddaf:
Sister Marie-Claude presented an NGO petition against the prostitution of women to the first representative at the German embassy in Syria. Over 60,000 persons from different nations signed the petition, following the campaign to stop the prostitution of women at the World Cup Games. Mrs. Daniela, the first representative at the embassy stated: “…we do not deny that there is a contradiction in legalizing prostitution on the one hand and trying to help women on the other.” Marie-Claude also used the occasion to raise the issue of Palestinian refugees from Iraq now suffering humanitarian crisis at the Syrian-Iraqi border.

From Rome, JP Contact, Sr Annunziata:
Likewise in Italy, Sr. Annunziata, took responsibility to forward the World Cup campaign signatures to the German Ambassador in Italy. Mr. Adamek, Councilor for Foreign Affairs to the Federal Republic of Germany explained how German authorities are dealing seriously with "forced prostitution and are envisaging all means possible to combat effectively these crimes which deeply violate human dignity and offend so tangibly the fundamental ethical principles of our society". While the language is diplomatic and does not deal holistically with the legality of prostitution, we hope these efforts gather strength to begin to transform the structures that exploit women.

From Malaysia, JP contact Gloria Bon:
Malaysia shares the news that the process of abolishing the Death Penalty in Malaysia has passed a crucial step by the passing of a Resolution for Abolition by the Malaysia Bar Association. According to Amnesty Int., over half the countries in the world have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

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News notes prepared by
Congregation of the Good Shepherd
See this newsletter on the website at:
http://www.buonpastoreint.org/index.htm

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Please distribute to all communities, programs and Good Shepherd Friends in your province. Thank you.

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