



Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

NGO with special consultative status in the **Economic and Social Council** of the United Nations since **2013** and with the **Department of Public Information** since **2006**.

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RSHM at the UN

August 2019

In this special issue we focus on the experience of participation in the 68th UN Civil Society Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah from 26 – 28th August. Our RSHM NGO delegation was made up of Sr. Patricia Connor RSHM, Dr. Yvonne Styles, the Chief of Staff and Director of Counselling Services at “A Place Called Home”, Los Angeles and myself. We joined many faith-based NGOs from New York and some 4,000 people from 138 countries around the world in this historic occasion, - the first time in the UN’s seventy four year history that a UN conference has been held in the US outside the UN HQ venue in New York.

68th UN Civil Society Conference - Utah



With a focus on the theme “**Building Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and Communities**”, special attention was given to SDG 11 and the unique ways in which cities are working to implement policies that strengthen sustainability and inclusion. There were plenary and thematic sessions as well as some 250 Civil society led workshops over the course of the 3 day Conference. Youth played a key role in planning and leading sessions and more than 40% of the participants were under the age of 32.

In the opening Plenary the **Mayor of Salt Lake City Jackie Biskupsi** highlighted some of the ways in which her city strives to be inclusive and sustainable. “*Salt Lake City’s track record for defending individual human rights, taking action to address the global climate emergency and protect the health of our people and our environment is*

undeniable.... As Mayor, I offer you my unwavering commitment to the ongoing work of our vibrant civil society and to the inspiring youth who play a central role in mitigating the effects of climate change and building a sustainable world.”



An outcome document stressed the resolve of Civil society participants from across the world to play an active role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – inclusive, sustainable and peaceful cities - by 2030 and their vision for government and private sector accountability. The declaration offered concrete suggestions and commitments for action. For the first time, the youth participants drafted and adopted a stand-alone climate compact

➔ [Watch the short video....](#)

I was challenged by the stories of those who have been left behind. Many wonderful people from every part of the globe are obviously passionate and strongly committed to building inclusive and sustainable communities so that NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND. There is a lot of work to do, but I felt a great deal of hope at the UN Civil Society Conference that together we can do it.

Patricia Connor RSHM - WAP

“The beautiful city, the kindness and warmth of its citizenry and your energetic leadership has made this an unforgettable experience. I will always cherish the joyful bonds we made with so many likeminded friends. We laughed and experienced hopeful messages together. I deepened my commitment to building inclusive and sustainable cities and communities. I learned a lot and will take what I have gained and share it with our community and staff.”

Yvonne Styles – A Place Called Home

Some local initiatives taken by Salt Lake City to address sustainability

- ❖ The city has committed to providing **100% Renewable Energy Electricity Supply** by 2030. They aim at **reducing the community carbon footprint by at least 50%** by 2030. ➔ [Watch the short Video](#)
- Salt Lake County has **resettled and provided homes for 60,000 refugees** who come from places as diverse as DRC, Syria, Bhutan and South Sudan. Somalia and Nepal.
- An innovative “**housing first**” program has been successful in getting chronically homeless people into supportive housing, with the ongoing support of counselors who help the new residents get off drugs and find jobs. The city is working with transit companies, **promoting electric vehicles**, and building the charging stations needed for people to move around using electric vehicles.



Responding to Human Trafficking at the US Mexico border

In an informative workshop **Dr. Ana Nogales** addressed the issue of human trafficking at the **US / Mexico border near Tijuana**, noting how it has increased as immigration policies have hardened under the current US administration. Her outreach to girls and women who have been subjected to domestic violence and trauma included the establishment of “**Casa de la Familia**” which provides trauma counselling services, community-based education and workshops. She believes in the power of drama to raise awareness on the problem of human trafficking and has written and directed a play called “**Don’t call me baby**” which educates and engages audiences in the issue.

Climate Change : Small Island states



Seilina Neirok Leem is a youth climate activist from the Marshall Islands. She was the youngest delegate - only 16 - when she attended the Climate Conference, **COP 21, in Paris in 2015**. . Now aged 20, she shared her story in a panel on **“Climate change : Cities and Communities in Action”** at the NGO conference in Salt Lake City, introducing herself as *“small island girl with big dreams”*. Speaking of the urgency of addressing the issue of rising sea levels that already affects the Small Island Developing States, and where many of the 34 atolls and islands that make up the Marshall islands are only 1 m above sea level she shared her experience of dramatic king tides that had forced her family to take refuge on higher ground and the resulting impact on fish, to crops, broken sea walls and damaged property. She said... *“If we continue at the current rate of emissions we have only 11 years left”*.

Enhancing the Role of Civil Society in Monitoring Implementation of SDG 11

How can cities be inclusive in addressing the need for shelter of those who are most marginalized? Somediverse experiences were shared:



In India, there is a serious problem of street homelessness. But some progress has been made with the help of **“Slum Dwellers International”** in acknowledging and providing identity to ‘pavement dwellers’, with the issuing of photo ID cards using street codes and clear recognition of their situation.

Habitat for Humanity has started a global advocacy campaign called **“Solid Ground Campaign”**. This focuses on advocacy with local communities and local government to ensure that people in informal settlements have security of tenure of land.



Habitat for Humanity®

➔ [Read about the campaign....](#)

In **Manaus, Amazonia, Brazil**, the **National Research Institute of the Amazon** is developing social technology to meet the needs of people living in situations of exclusion. Examples include *“Hands that speak”* – an app to help deaf people navigate cities and an *“app”* to help people assess and monitor the quality of their water.



RSHM News Briefs : In and around Belo Horizonte



In the early days of August following the **RSHM General Chapter held in Brazil in July**, **Veronica RSHM had a chance to make several visits** to accompany RSHM initiatives in the greater Belo Horizonte area.

She spent 2 days sharing about the **RSHM NGO / JPIC ministry** with the four novices from **Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique** in the **RSHM Novitiate in Belo Horizonte**.



Six months have passed since the tailings dam burst in **Brumadinho**, leading to the tragic loss of 270 lives, affecting countless livelihoods, and causing severe damage to the environment due to the flow of toxic mining waste and destruction of homes and property. The **Brumadinho** dam disaster continues to raise the cry for justice and accountability on the part of the Mining company responsible. **Srs. Pare Moreira, Rosinha Pereira and Veronica** were able to visit **Brumadinho** in early August and meet with representatives of the groups most engaged in outreach and advocacy. We hope to be able to link the advocacy being done on the ground with the processes at the UN in New York and Geneva, as Veronica

collaborates with others in the **NGO Mining Working Group**.

Distribution:

General Council Team; Provincials/ Regionals
JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools;
UN Interest Group
Translation: Maria Luisa Pinho RSCM

Together with **Rosinha RSHM (JPIC Animator Brazil)** Veronica RSHM had the opportunity to visit two RSHM ministries in Belo Horizonte linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. At **Colegio Sagrado Coracao de Maria**, Belo Horizonte, middle school children demonstrated how they had learnt to make three different products based on the principles of sustainability: **hand cream, lip balm and deodorant**. The students now share information and products with their families, raising awareness about the dangers of products that are not sustainable that pose a threat to the environment. In **Projeto Vida, Lagoa**, they had the chance to meet the staff and children and, together with leaders from the local community, see how a community-based initiative had led to the recuperation of a major stream, and the related ecosystem.

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