



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**.

News from the UN # 143

RSHM at the UN

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Commission on Social Development - CSocD 62.

The United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) is a Commission within the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) composed of 46 Member states. It meets in February each year. The Commission plays an important role in promoting social policies that support the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN with special focus on the eradication of poverty, increasing social inclusion, and ensuring decent work for all. This year the Commission addressed the priority theme: **"Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication"**. The NGO Committee on Social Development, of which our RSHM NGO is an active member, was involved in the planning and carrying out of a range of events including the **Civil Society Forum**. In this issue of News from the UN we highlight a few sessions in which we participated and share a reflection by **Sr. Jacquelyn Porter RSHM**. [➔ Watch a short video....](#)



Social protection – Social Justice

Social protection systems are fundamental to preventing and reducing poverty and inequality at every stage of people's lives, through benefits for children, mothers with newborns, persons with disability, those who are unemployed and elderly people. It relates to national policies and systems that provide and facilitate access to goods and protects people from deprivation and social and economic exclusion. At a session to commemorate the

World Day of Social Justice on 20th February the Assistant Secretary General for Policy Coordination noted that Social Protection is a human right and that *"developing social protection measures is the cornerstone of a human-centered approach to social justice."* The recently formed **"Coalition for Social Justice"** already includes 125 Governments, UN agencies and international NGOs as partners. [➔ Watch the short video....](#)

Fast facts on Social Protection

- **4.5 billion (53% of the global population)** lack access to basic social protection coverage
- **Only 29% of people from marginalized groups** receive social assistance globally
- **1.6 billion people** make their living in the global informal economy with little or no social protection
- **3.3 billion** live in countries that spend more on debt repayment than on health care
- **At current rates, 575 million people** will probably still live in poverty in **2030**.
- **For 80 million students** distance learning not an option



De-commodifying People, Place and Planet

On February 7, NGOs organized a side event during CSocD62 entitled **"De-commodifying People, Place and Planet"**. The event was sponsored by the government of Ireland and featured speakers from UNANIMA International, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, and ATD Fourth



World. Focusing on the international housing crisis, panelists argued that while there is often an excess of space, especially in big cities, the monetary value of those spaces has become more important than providing shelter to individuals and families. Panelists emphasize the

importance of governments taking a human rights center approach in **order to provide quality support to affected communities**. The panel stressed that the **ones who** are bearing the brunt of the high levels of poverty and the housing crisis are women and girls, and they should be at the forefront of policy development in this field. One speaker also highlighted the commodification of women's bodies. The rapid rise of social media and digital technology has led to easier ways to traffic young girls. Another speaker noted that it is important to rethink social policies so as to not create policies that leave developing countries accruing debt. The current policies are continuing the cycle of poverty in these countries and reinforcing pre-existing inequalities. The importance of public spending for public good and questioning the underlying assumptions in current fiscal policies was stressed.

[➔ Watch a short video](#)

Promoting the Care Economy



Unremunerated care work, is estimated by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** to represent 9% of global gross domestic product (GDP), or \$11 trillion. However, although it is of immense importance to human wellbeing, especially to the most vulnerable, it has never been included in the official accounting of nations! This invisibility and undervaluing of care work has a direct effect on gender equality since women and girls carry out 3.2 times more care work than men and boys. After days of difficult negotiation, the **Commission for Social Development** approved by consensus a draft resolution entitled **“Promoting care and support systems for social development”**. This calls for measures to be taken to ensure the rights and wellbeing of caregivers and care recipients as well as the creation of support systems and environments that recognize and redistribute care work among men and boys as well as women and girls.

“Still Left Behind: SDG Implementation Seen from the Grassroots”

This was the title of a virtual side event featuring short videos and written responses from 25 countries and organized by our Grassroots Task Force during CSOCD 62. We are happy that several of our sisters and novices contributed their responses to a survey in writing and that the event was selected to be featured on the **UN DESA Website**.

➔ [Read more about it](#) and watch the recording.



A reflection on the Commission on Social Development - Sr. Jacquelyn Porter RSHM

This February I participated in the **62nd Commission for Social and Sustainable Development** that brought together U.N. leaders, analysts from related fields and grass roots participants from around the world. Its purpose may at first sound sweeping or simply aspirational: the eradication of poverty in its relation to social and planet injustice. Yet the underlying methodology of the commission brought these goals down to earth. Six high level panels that were open to all brought new knowledge and data to bear on structural barriers to equity and rights of all people on this shared planet. Closely related to these panels of experts were 50 “side events,” “smaller meetings in which diverse groups of member state representatives and NGOs discussed and shared their related projects and experiences. An unforgettable theme ran through every conversation: the right of each and every person to equity and social justice must drive us toward the change needed for a future in which *“nobody is left behind.”*”



At this point you might rightly wonder what I was doing there. I brought little practical experience or knowledge of the world beyond Europe and the United States or of the people at its peripheries. I was there because I wanted to learn more: a need enlivened by the writings of Pope Francis and the Synod as well as the reflections of many on the mission of the RSHM as we enter a transitional phase. This conference engaged people beyond abstractions; it involved encounters with others who have struggled even under unjust systems to find their voices, to provide opportunities to provide some security and growth to themselves and others.

Space is limited here, and I will just cite two examples of such meetings on wide-ranging topics. I attended a session from a Working Women’s Forum with a telling title: **“Empowering for Equity: Women’s role in Cooperatives as Catalysts for Transforming Social Inequity and Patriarchal Practices.”** Nandini Agad, a leader from rural India described her group’s efforts and achievements within the country’s agricultural economy. The women shared with a modest joy how they had learned to get loans and build a record of successful debt management. Their success not only gave greater opportunities for themselves and their families but improved agricultural production and distribution in their area.

Another side event included a few members of other NGOs of religious congregations that focused on root causes of inequity. The title, **“De-commodifying People, Things, and the Planet”** took on the increasing tendency of today’s economies to treat these people, places and things as objects to be bought and sold. The ever-intensifying tendency of such commodification, according to Sr. Winifred Doherty RGS, has been to lose sight of their intrinsic value.

The day-long **Civil Society Forum** demonstrated the organization’s realism and capacity for self-critique. Most nations lag behind in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in time for the 2030 deadline (*though Portugal gained a shout out for having done its homework*). One could sense that people in the room felt a renewed sense of urgency. At the same time they heard in the background the drumbeat of war with its violence and increased military spending. **Fergal Mythun**, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN, put it succinctly: *“Without peace there is nothing and nothing is anything without peace.”* Yet there was energy among the diverse participants who had shared their heartbreaks and successes.

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I found the presentation by **Dr. Katroina O’Sullivan**, an author and lecturer at Maynooth, Dublin, particularly moving. She startled the audience as she told the story of her life, standing at the panel as a visibly successful expert with a satisfying life. She then moved the story backward to her beginnings of a life of seemingly little worth. As a child of poverty, abuse, alienation from school and an early pregnancy she seemed destined to be one of those nobodies left behind, burdens to themselves and others. Yet somehow the world turned and she was placed in an excellent social program with mentors who recognized her intelligence and underlying dignity. Eventually she returned to school and then received a Doctorate in Psychology from Trinity College. Dr. O’Sullivan has led a distinguished life, fulfilling her own dreams and inspiring others. In that conference room she opened up a space for hope, one that had been shared by so many others in their local efforts.



RSHM Briefs.

Although the U.N. faces daunting challenges today, the global awareness it embodies sustains the dream of a more connected and just world. One reflects there on the structures that impede the eradication of poverty, the pursuit of fulfillment, the restoration of the planet, One cannot visit there often and remain an observer. It is a place for people to join one another in a globally connected world extending to its little known margins. From near and far one observes how people have contributed in diverse ways of contributing to development and the life of the planet, whether through advocacy, prayer and discernment for moral conscience, collaboration with others or the very activity of sustaining hope. advocacy, prayer and discernment for moral conscience, collaboration with others or the very activity of sustaining hope.



★ The opening speech at “**SAGRADO MUN 2024**” Model UN conference in was disturbing and provocative. Carolina Guibarra, a student at Colegio Sagrado Coração de Maria, Lisbon, quoted Pope Francis at



World Youth Day, challenging the student delegates representing different countries to *"turn their dissatisfaction, sadness and indignation at all the injustices and distortions we witness in our society" into "an opportunity to courageously participate in building the world we dream of"*. She went on to challenge the

students as to how they were using the knowledge they have developed in classes and in projects like the Model UN programme to serve others and *"take part in building God's kingdom - where there is peace, justice, charity and, above all, life in abundance for all."*

★ At the end of January, **Marymount Manhattan College** student, **Iliana Mejia**, started interning with our **RSHM NGO**. Iliana is currently in her second year of her Bachelors program where she is working towards a degree in Politics and human rights and international studies. Though Iliana has many interests, her key focus areas of research and advocacy include climate, education, and the rights of women and girls as well as people with disabilities.



★ During the month of February we were happy to welcome two RSHM to the UN. **Sr. Jacquelyn Porter** attended several sessions during the Commission on



Social Development as well as the full day programme of the Civil Society Forum. On February 22nd, **Sr. Luisa Almendra RSHM** (Portugal) spent a day at the UN. As well as a visit to the UN and the Church Center at the UN she attended a Security Council meeting which included briefings on the situation in the Middle East and the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

★ During her time in Lusaka, Zambia, **Veronica RSHM** spent a morning with the 7 RSHM novices, introducing them to some of the core elements of our **RSHM JPIC NGO Ministry**. Reflecting on the current challenges that they recognized in their home countries and well as in Zambia today, she challenged them to see our involvement in ministry as closely linked to our call to justice *so that All may have Life*. The SDGs express concrete ways in which all nations are committed to working for a better quality of life, recognizing the humanity and dignity of each person and the need to work to protect our common home. The novice were invited to make the connections during their forthcoming ministry experience.



Distribution

Institute Leadership Team; Area Leaders, JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools; UN Interest Group
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