



# **Dominican Sisters International Delegation to the United Nations 63<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)**

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## INTRODUCTION

Each year, Sister Margaret Mayce, the UN Representative of the Dominican Sisters Conference as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), facilitates the participation of Dominican Sisters from different world sections in the annual conference of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In addition to 86 ministers and 2000 Member State delegates to the Conference, there were 5,000 representatives from civil society organizations and other international entities that included Dominican Sisters International (DSI). We were there!

## OUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Our Dominican delegation stayed at Mariandale Retreat Center in Ossining, NY. This is in Westchester County about 35 miles north of New York City, along the Hudson River.

Mariandale originally was founded by the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor in 1879. They purchased the property in 1950 and in 1976 it was converted into a retreat and conference center

by its Dominican founders: Amityville, Blauvelt, Caldwell, Newburgh, Ossining and Sparkill, with Province of St. Joseph.



Welcoming Prayer Service in the Chapel at Mariandale

It is the headquarters of the Dominican Sisters of Hope, formed in 1995 by Dominicans of Ossining, NY, Newburgh, NY, and of Fall River, MA.

A beautiful prayer service entitled "Women Who Are Working Towards Justice," had been prepared by Dominican

Sisters living in the area to welcome the delegation to the Center on Sunday, March 10.

The group commuted by train early each day to Grand Central Station, taking in the beauty of the Hudson River, and then walked to sessions at the United Nations and in nearby satellite venues where nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) representing civil society presented sessions related to this year's theme: "Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls".



The first day, we stood in a long line to obtain our CSW63 badges that allowed us to attend sessions held inside the UN. Satellite sessions at four different sites outside of the UN were open to the public but mainly attended by the CSW63 participants. Each day, one could choose from among 10-15 concurrent sessions, most 1.5 hours in



length with a 30-minute break between sessions. The sessions began at 8:30am and ran until 8:00 pm most days. Our group normally met at Grand Central Station to take the 4:15 pm train for the ride back to Ossining for our evening meal at 6:00. The meal was followed by a debriefing session from 7:00 to 8:30 most nights. Yes, the days were very full!





The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women globally through policy making. The Commission was established by ECOSOC in 1946 with a mandate to prepare recommendations on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil social and educational fields.



Every year, representatives of UN Member States, UN entities and non-governmental organizations gather at United Nations Headquarters in a consultative status with ECOSOC. The ten-day sessions provide the opportunity to review progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, identify challenges, set global standards and norms, and formulate policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. The sessions also provide the opportunity for policymakers, advocates, researchers, and



activists to network and strategize together.

The very fact of being at the site of this global forum was a great privilege. The delegates toured the UN and its courtyard,

observed the monuments to peace and justice, and walked the halls where world leaders have met for decades.

## MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

Although there were many and varied special events and sessions each day, bringing new connections, insights and shared stories, we list the following as major highlights:

1. Being with Dominican Sisters from around the world and experiencing the Dominican spirit lived out in many ways.
2. Experiencing how, as part of civil society as an NGO, the Dominican Sisters Conference has a voice on the global stage to express and share its values.
3. Attending the session with the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, was especially profound. He shared with us his three main internal priorities: 1-Parity, 2- A zero tolerance policy and 3-Elimination of sexual exploitation by UN staff. His two main external priorities are: 1- Elimination of violence against women in conflict areas and 2- Emphasis on the Human Rights question.



Pelagie, Lyn, Angele, Eileen, Fresia, Tere, Inma, Judy, and Selena outside the UN

His support for women's parity, equality and leadership were evident in his



sincere address to participants. He listened carefully and respectfully to the voices and pleas of women from around the world and promised action to address their concerns.

4. Being with 7,000 women from around the world who are struggling for justice,

parity, dignity within systems, services and sustainable infrastructure that will lead to gender equality.

5. Experiencing how the United Nations works. Though not a perfect body, especially because it is unable to enforce global compacts, it remains a place

where nations can come together to debate, propose and formulate policy that could lead to peace, justice and equity. It's the only global stage we have to meet and exchange ideas and take action.

6. Attending sessions on a variety of global themes that touch women's lives and feeling one with women's struggles and yearnings.

7. Learning from the session on the shadow reports related to the Universal Periodic Review that will inform our work as North American Dominicans redacting our own shadow report to the UN from our research and perspective.



### INSPIRING SESSIONS

Throughout the sessions, the importance of working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals was evident. To date, the United States has not offered its assessment of progress on the Goals. For US Dominicans, this is cause for great concern, and we are exploring ways in which to bring US engagement with the SDGs to the public eye.

One of the sessions we attended was a screening of a film about the power of



women's collective voices. The Irish mission, in partnership with Peace is Loud, offered this poignant documentary, *Women, Peace*

*And Power*, and then led a discussion session with some of the women featured in the film.

*Women, Peace And Power* follows the stories of female activists, politicians, and ordinary citizens in Afghanistan, Liberia, and Northern Ireland as they try against all odds to influence peace talks. While some of these peacebuilders use sit-ins



and mass rallies to push for change, others win elections to negotiate at the peace table. All face challenges to their authority and legitimacy as they attempt to steer their countries away from war.

Many of the parallel sessions outside of the UN building were held across the street at the Church Center for the United Nations. Off the lobby to the left is the chapel of the church. Time spent there in meditation and prayer provides a unique and powerful experience of the unity of people seeking peace and justice for all humankind.



One session we attended at this Center was “Leave No One Behind! Migrant Women’s Access to Social Protection.” This event highlighted cross-sectoral approaches feminists might take to affirm social protections, labor rights and access to social services for women in migration and all women. It was important to note that the term “women in migration” includes women who remain in their home countries when their husbands or children are forced to migrate because of the effect that this absence creates on the woman left behind.

In December of 2018, governments of the world had met in Marrakesh, Morocco, to adopt the first-ever international agreement on migration management, the *Global Compact on Migration*. At that meeting, the Women in Migration Network presented the *Marrakech Women’s Rights Manifesto*, a document from civil society that calls on governments to put women and girls at the center of migration policy, ensuring their full, equal and meaningful participation at local, national, regional, and global levels and guaranteeing their human rights. As participants in the “Leave No One Behind” event, we were able to read and sign this *Manifesto*.

## AGREED CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the two-week meeting, known as the “Agreed Conclusions,” adopted by Member States, puts forth concrete measures to bolster the voice, agency and leadership of women and girls as beneficiaries and users of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

Some of the key recommendations from the “Agreed Conclusions” are:

- Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work by ensuring access to social protection for unpaid caregivers of all ages, including coverage for health care and pensions;
- Guarantee the availability of safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene, in homes, schools, refugee camps and other public places;
- Ensure that transport policies and planning are sustainable, accessible, affordable, safe and gender-responsive, taking into account the different needs of women and men, and adapted to be used by persons with disabilities and older persons;
- Promote the full and equal participation and leadership of women and women’s organizations in policy dialogues and decision-making relating to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure;
- Strongly condemn the impunity and lack of accountability rooted in historical and structural inequality that accompanies pervasive violence against women.



Let us turn our weapons  
into plowshares

## STATEMENT FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN WOMEN

The Executive Director of UN Women, which serves as the CSW Secretariat, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, said:

*This annual gathering has never been bigger nor more significant for the women and girls of the world. The Commission’s recommendations pave the way for governments to engage and invest differently, involving women in policy dialogue, and targeting initiatives that go to the heart of the largest barriers to the empowerment and voice of women and girls.*



## Dominican Sister Participants



**Front Row (left to right): Pat Farrell, Inma Sanchez-Garcia-Muro, Fresia Martinez, Selena Wilson, Jill Shirvington**  
**Back Row: Angele Molha, Lyn Kirkconnell, Tere Auad, Margaret Mayce (NGO Rep), Ragnhild Bjelland, Eileen Breen, Judy McDonnell, Pelagie Kpogue**

From March 11th to 22nd, Sisters Patricia Farrell and Judy Lu McDonnell, with Co-Promoter of Justice, Peace and Care of Creation, Lyn Kirkconnell, accompanied the nine Dominican Sisters representing congregations in eight countries at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The 9 delegates were:

- ✚ **Inmaculada (Inma) Sanchez-Garcia-Muro** is from Madrid, Spain, where she lives out her ministry.
- ✚ **Pelagie Kpogue** is from Benin, West Africa and works in Cameroon. Her Congregation is Spanish (Madrid). French is the majority language of Cameroon.
- ✚ **Angele Gusemu Molha** is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and works in Rwanda where French is the language. She is in the same congregation as Pelagie.

- ✚ **Fresia Martinez** is from Peru, works in Chile and is in the same congregation as Pelagie and Angele. The three sisters met for the first time at this CSW63.
- ✚ **Tere Auad** is from Bolivia and is a Sinsinawa Dominican currently ministering in Cochabamba, Bolivia.
- ✚ **Jill Shirvington** is from East Australia where she lives and ministers.
- ✚ **Ragnhild Bjelland** is from Norway and is a member of the only Dominican Congregation in the country.
- ✚ **Eileen Breen** worked for years in Mississippi and is now back in NY. She is a Dominican Sister of Hope.
- ✚ **Selena Wilson**, originally from Virginia, is an Amityville Dominican ministering in Camden, New Jersey.

The words that Margaret Mayce shared with us as we began our journey together, became more and more a reality with each passing day until, at the end, they were our own:

*The invitation for us is to share our gifts, our anxieties and our hopes--- just as the women who went to anoint the body of Jesus. These women, sharing the little they had, expected to find death; but, instead, encountered life. During our days together, we will learn of the harsh reality faced by women and girls throughout our world. But we will also hear stories of hope and great courage. We will in some way experience a sense of resurrection in the midst of darkness. And we will also experience a great sense of solidarity with women throughout the world---because, in some way, we all share the same reality.*

