

## **Dominican Sisters International and its relationship with the Dominican Leadership Conference UN/NGO Representative**

### **A recent history**

In November 2009, Margaret Mayce, OP (Amityville – DLC NGO) and Mary Ellen O’Grady, OP (Sinsinawa – DLC Executive Director) met with Sr. Fabiola (International Coordinator of DSI) and the Coordinating Committee of DSI to suggest the possibility of DSI’s sponsorship of the UN/NGO position. The feeling was that this would better reflect the international focus of the position, as well as help Sisters feel a greater sense of ownership of our UN presence. It was agreed that this would be brought to the DSI Assembly in May 2010. The Assembly agreed to work towards sponsorship, and also agreed to contribute to the support of the position with \$20,000 annually.

Margaret then spoke with people at the UN about changing the name of our Non-Governmental Organization from DLC to DSI. A simple “name change” was not possible. DSI would have to submit its own application for non-governmental status. Toni Harris, who was at that time DSI’s International Justice Promoter, submitted an application requesting NGO status on behalf of DSI. However, the application was denied, because DSI did not have its own legal identity in Italy. (This would be equivalent to 501-C3/non-profit status in the US). It then became clear to everyone involved that DSI should work towards recognition as its own legal entity in Italy. This would make it possible for DSI to apply for NGO status at the UN, and, perhaps most importantly, DSI would be able to have its own bank account and apply for grants on its own.

Sr. Fabiola then contracted with two lawyers – a canon lawyer and a civil lawyer. In Italy there is a “*concordat*” between the Church and the State. For a religious organization in Italy, canonical recognition is required before establishing civil recognition. So DSI then worked towards receiving canonical recognition. This was discussed at the DSI Assembly in 2013. The canon lawyer explained that DSI would need to form a “*Confederation*,” which could then petition for canonical status. At that time, several Congregations were not in favor of canonical status, for fear of too much interference from Rome. The lawyer explained that all that was needed was a core group of Congregations who would be willing to form a Confederation to get the canonical status in place. Membership in this could be open-ended; people could decide at a later date to join. Ultimately, the Assembly gave Fabiola the go-ahead to start the process.

For a number of reasons, including the transition from Fabiola to Marie Therese Clement as International Coordinator, the process dragged.....

Finally, I believe, it was in February 2019 that **Dominican Sisters International Confederation (DSIC)** was granted canonical status by the Holy See. The Assembly in May 2019 was the first Assembly of DSIC. At the time of the Assembly, about 63 Congregations had agreed to become part of the Confederation. In order to join, Congregations needed to submit proof of their aggregation to the Order. However, many Congregations could not find their proof of

aggregation; and many Congregations apparently did not understand that only those who were members of the Confederation would be able to vote at the Assembly. Since May, several other Congregations have become part of the Confederation, and we continue to reach out to others who need greater clarity as to the benefits of membership.

**Regarding DSI/DSIC's legal identity in Italy** – I would become the legal representative of the organization as International Coordinator. However, due to COVID-19, the process and paperwork I needed to do to secure my residency in Italy was severely delayed. Now that I have residency and permission to travel freely, we can complete the legal piece. I hope that this will be done before the end of this year.

**Regarding DSI/DSIC and Non-Governmental status at the UN** – an organization must prove that it has been in existence for 2 years as a non-profit organization. So DSIC cannot apply until 2 years after receiving its legal standing in Italy.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Mayce, OP ( International Coordinator of DSI)  
15 August 2020