



One Page (monthly bulletin of the Carmelite NGO) **April 2017**

Report from Dennis Kalob, Chief Administrative Officer and NY Representative of the Carmelite NGO.

March is a particularly busy month at the United Nations in NYC. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meets for two weeks. Associated with this event are dozens of side events that bring together governments and representatives of civil society to share information, concerns, ideas and programs of action with the goal of moving forward toward justice for women worldwide.

The side events I attended mostly had to do with human trafficking and/or the refugee crisis. The refugee crisis will continue to increase the vulnerability of people, particularly girls and women, to human trafficking. There are currently 65 million people displaced either internally or as refugees, the most since WWII. At the same time, it has been estimated that the number of trafficked and enslaved people to be about 30 million worldwide, with some experts claiming the number to be much higher. We likely have more slaves in the world today than at any other time in human history and the situation is getting worse.

We learned at the UN that there are many people, organizations, and governments working to combat the problem across the globe, but more needs to be done, both in terms of criminal prosecution and help for the victims and survivors.

The busy month of March also featured a High Level Meeting on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda. Though much of the information presented painted a bleak picture of the threat now posed by climate change, including how it will continue to be a drag on progress in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, there was, at the same time, reason for some degree of optimism. Here are some quick takeaways from the gathering:



*Scene from the High Level SDG Action Event
Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda
United Nations Headquarters, New York, 23 March 2017*

- The oceans are in worse shape than previously realized. Their warming and increased pollution are disrupting and destroying marine life. Future sea level rises may be greater than expected. The warming and rising oceans will contribute to more severe storms and flooding around the world.
- 2016 was the warmest year on record and indications are that we are losing precious time before the worst impacts of warming will become inevitable. We need to halve greenhouse gas emissions every 10 years for the next 50 years in order to meet important targets that will minimize the impacts of climate change.

- 92% of the world's population now breathes unhealthy air. Every year, millions die as a result.
- Positive developments include significant progress toward the reclamation of degraded land. It has been estimated that ¼ of global agricultural land is severely degraded, but a number of countries, most notably Niger, have been taking steps to reclaim millions of hectares of land, increasing food production, reducing poverty, and reducing carbon emissions at the same time.
- The world is seeing a significant shift toward renewable energy sources. They are getting more affordable every day, especially solar. They are now competitive with the far more polluting fossil fuel options.
- Investors and businesses are now coming on board as never before. They understand the need for sustainable energy and development and now see movement in that direction as inevitable.
- Action on climate change and sustainable development is intensifying. There is no turning back. Progress is, indeed, inevitable! However, will it be sufficient and will it be fast enough? That is the question right now.



A person learns a great deal at the United Nations. I would say, however, what I learned the most from these and other visits to the UN is that the world is filled with decent human beings working in governments, in civil society organizations (including an array of Catholic groups), and in the private sector. We sometimes lose sight of that fact. Frustrations with particular governments, particularly harmful world leaders, or destructive corporate behavior can cause us to miss so much good that still remains in the world. From what I see at the UN, on balance, is a world of concern, compassion and a genuine desire to improve the human condition and create a sustainable future.

The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged, either because they are differently abled (handicapped), or because they lack adequate information and technical expertise, or are incapable of decisive political action. Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment. The poorest are those who suffer most from such offenses, for three serious reasons: they are cast off by society, forced to live off what is discarded and suffer unjustly from the abuse of the environment. They are part of today's widespread and quietly growing "culture of waste".

--Pope Francis
Speaking at the United Nations
New York, September 2015

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