



UN Indigenous Rights Committee New York – by Sharon Joslyn

The COVID 19 virus has had a disordinate impact on First Nation Peoples across the globe. In a first virtual meeting of the Indigenous Rights Committee, members reported on the state of some communities in the Americas. We were referred to the WECAM (Women's Earth and Climate Action Network) webinar: Indigenous Women on the Frontlines who spoke were: Ecuadoran Kichwa leaders Patricia Gualinga, and Helena Galanga; 18 year old, Brazil activists Sonis Bone Guajara, and Daiara Tukano. Brazil and Ecuador being two of the nine nations comprising the Amazon Region telling their struggles to defend human rights with the onslaught of large agro-farming, mining and multinational's deforestation projects. All leaves them with a greater vulnerability to the virus. Although Indigenous right to Amazon territory is written in their constitutions, governments are beginning to ignore this under the claim of economic need. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has stated: Where there is Indigenous land, there is wealth underneath it.

The Navajo peoples in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah (USA) have been highly affected with the virus as they have also been impacted by years of living in land exploited by multinationals. They are already breathing toxic air from pollutants, experience lack of water supply and live in overcrowded housing conditions. On the border of Mexico/USA the wall is invading Indigenous territories. Border patrol is not honoring precaution, and some are carrying the virus. The American Indian Community Center in Manhattan is reaching out to their elders who are suffering great anxiety from the ordered isolation. In crisis, their strength is to be together. The center is providing technology and instructions for virtual meetings. The elders are amazed. **They ask at these meetings: "Can you see me?!"** We are reminded of Pope Francis admonition to hear **"the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"**.

Echoes of CSW64

The impact of covid-19 on my CSW64 Back Home Project.... By Liria Tembe (Mozambique)

"I left New York, excited to get home and start to implement my back-home project that would be based in running awareness workshops in my school, my community and in the shelter where I am staying. The workshop themes are: alcohol and drug abuse, sexual and reproductive rights, early marriage, child prostitution and girls' rights. But when I arrived in Maputo, I had to be in quarantine for 14 days and when I finished it, my government declared a state of emergency due for 30 days due to COVID-19. That means no school, no going out. I missed learning in a classroom and interacting with my friends. However, I have been keeping myself occupied by dedicating two days per week to raise awareness about COVID-19 in my community. Two other teenage girls from the shelter where I live and I have been helping other teenagers and elders to maintain safety precautions against coronavirus, although my efforts are limited because I have to be home by 2pm to catch up with my studies. My message to the world is "stay safe, stay at home and follow all preventive measures. Together we can fight and conquer COVID-19". I have hope that after all this ends, I can implement my back-home project that I see be very important for my community".

An almost real dream... By Inês Valador (Portugal)

Hello, my name is Inês Valador, I'm 23 years old and I'm currently doing my master's degree in Women Studies. I've always been sensitive about the world around me and more specifically gender issues, but when I entered the Grail in 2011, I started to think and work about it more deeply. This year I was chosen to represent Portugal at CSW64. Going to CSW has been a dream for me for a long time so from the beginning I felt very happy and lucky, especially in such a special year with Beijing+25. When I first started to read about Beijing Platform, one of the points that stood out was the fact that it's timeless. 25 years later it is relevant as the same problems continue to exist, such as gender violence or the inequality between men and women in decision-making processes, as well as in sharing responsibilities professionally and at home. This is complemented by new critical areas that have emerged, for example with the worsening of climate change. During the process of preparation, Mariana and I always had all the Grail support needed and availability to clarify our doubts. I felt empowered, but also with a lot of responsibility as chaperone for Mariana. I wanted to make sure I was doing everything I could to make her feel comfortable travelling with me.

When I first knew everything got canceled and I would not be able to have this amazing experience I was heartbroken, for all the expectations and because I worked very hard during the past months. Then I understood that sometimes decisions must be made for everyone's safety and there is nothing we can do to change it. I believe in 2021 this



experience will be even more special than ever. I feel very grateful for all the support, a special 'thank you' to Lídia Martins, Ana Costa, Elsa Nogueira, Eliana Madeira, Noella, Abida, Mary Kay and Carolina for always being free to help me. Also, a hug for all the incredible girls and women I didn't have the chance to meet this year, I hope from the bottom of my heart you're all safe and we can meet as soon as possible".



The 2020 **High Level Political Forum (HLPF)** is scheduled to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development and progress towards the SDGs on 7 -16 July 2020. Because of COVID-19, side events and special sessions will be virtual. The outcome of the HLPF will be a Ministerial Declaration based on but not limited to:

- Impact of COVID-19 on implementation of the 2030 Agenda, SDGs, decade of action and delivery
- Leaving no one behind, human rights, addressing inequality and the needs of the most vulnerable, gender equality, social inclusion and the impact of COVID-19
- Means of implementation, financing (including debt relief, combatting illicit financial flows, multilateral trading system), scaling up health spending, technologies, digitalization, capacity building, technical assistance, data, science-policy interface, innovation, impact on society.

This year, 50 countries will present their National Voluntary Reviews to the HLPF. The Grail countries giving NVRs are Ecuador, Kenya, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea and Uganda. You can participate in any of the virtual meetings.

HLPF link for side events and others: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020>

Continuing the testimonies of Grail sisters who attended the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 95)

By Pia Zuccolin: MY PARTICIPATION IN THE "NGO FORUM ON WOMEN" in Beijing



Thanks to the 1993 International Grail Assembly which I had attended, I heard about the Global Conference on Women that the UN was preparing for 1995 in Beijing. In Italy there was not much talk about it but in the winter of 1994/95, I saw a column in the

paper about "A Country of Women – Women By Train to Beijing" which caught my imagination. Initially it seemed an impossible feat to me, but slowly things started to fall in place. And then there I was, at the end of August, in Berlin, where I met up with other participants and the organizers. About 300 women from all over Europe, some American. In Moscow we were received at City Hall by women of various association.

I especially remember the mothers of soldiers who died in Chechnya, where fighting was ongoing. We spent 6 days on the Trans-Siberian Railroad getting from Moscow to the Chinese border: about twice a day the train stopped and we were greeted and celebrated by the women in the towns we passed through, who had been notified by Moscow and welcomed us with bread and salt, traditional symbols of hospitality. Meanwhile, on the train, there were fervent meetings between the groups, facilitated by the presence of a car designated specifically for that purpose.

At the Chinese border, we took another train all the way to Beijing. From the station, cars took us to Huairou. I chose the cheapest housing option where many women of different nationalities were housed together.

I clearly remember that first evening, when I had the "Schedule of Activities" in my hand, with hundreds of meetings that would take place during that week. They were organized around 12 themes: Economy, Politics, Human Rights, Peace and Security, Education, Health, Environment, Spirituality and Religion, Science and Technology, Media, Art and Culture, Race and Ethnicity, and Youth. It wasn't easy to choose which ones to attend. I opted for some meetings on Spirituality and Religion (those organized by the Grail were part of this group), then Economy, Education, Media. The meeting with Marita Estor, one of the current leaders of the Grail, made it easier for me. Besides her, there were also other Grail sisters from Australia, Germany, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Portugal, South Africa, Uganda and the United States present.

It was very powerful to see 30,000 women from around the world gathered. The meeting leaders were expert and wise in making explicit the motto of the Forum: "Looking at the World Through Women's Eyes". There were moments of conflict, such as when the pro-Government Chinese women crowded the hall where a meeting was being held on the problems of occupied Tibet, but there were also other moments of unity, as during the large demonstration of women-in-black against war. Among the booths was a large "tent of silence", where we could gather. There was also a meeting



of Italians who 'found' each other. Among them were the trade union representatives for women, with whom I did public presentations in Milan reporting back on our experience.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, government delegations met and drafted a Declaration and Action Plan, which set out the objectives which all governments had to comply with over the years and which served as a reference point for the annual assessments by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

I came back with two keywords: GLOBALIZATION and EMPOWERMENT. I was just starting to become aware of globalization, but it was fueled by the experience at the conference, where women from all over the world, from Mexico to the adolescents of the Vanuatu Islands in the Pacific, talked about having been exploited in their work and negatively impacted by globalization. It was positively highlighted by the fact that women from all over the world came together in Beijing. I witnessed the EMPOWERMENT of the many women experts and organizers at the conference, but it was a key word for all. **After 25 years, many of the problems still exist or have gotten worse, but women are gaining visibility and are increasingly present in many sectors, particularly in the struggles around the environment.**

By Marita Estor (last of 3 parts, continued from March /April Newsletter)



In contrast to the very secular world of Copenhagen, the Women World Conference in Nairobi (1985) took place in quite a different atmosphere. The Kenyan Government strongly resisted having the NGO-Forum parallel to the government conference. Therefore the 16,000 participants had to meet before the Conference and only the last two days overlapped with the Conference. A number of Grail women from South Africa, Zimbabwe and United States attended the NGO-Forum: Cathy Stewart, niece of Anne Hope, Mary Imelda Buckley, Emilia Charbonneau were among the NGO people. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a Network of Women Researchers from the Global South came with a new approach that linked global feminist understanding of human rights and economic globalization. DAWN in Nairobi started to talk about gender and used this as a key concept in the fight for women's rights as human rights. It was a hard fight to adopt "The Forward-Looking Strategies" because many governments were not only male-dominated but also against real equality of rights and participation of women. Power in the political, economic and social world anyway was held by men.

Not only weren't governments in favor of the 5-year rhythm of World conferences, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the communist empire faced the global world with challenges that set aside the fight of women for their rights. Only China used their growing international presence and offered to host another World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing. At that time CSW resided in Vienna (Austria), where it didn't receive much attention neither from the governments nor from the NGOs. Sometimes the Women of Bethany who worked in Vienna took part in the meetings. When during its meeting in 1993, the proposal was voted on to hold another World Conference on Women in Beijing, the majority voted in favor as did also the German delegation of which I was a part. Since it was Africa's turn to present a General Secretary for this Conference, Gertrude Mongella, a member of the Tanzanian Parliament was appointed. It was quite a surprise when we were informed that the CSW was moved to the UN-Headquarters in New York---more a sign of distrust than one of upgrading. But we immediately understood that this was a chance for more involvement of the Grail because of its presence in New York!

I was put in charge of a new Department of Youth, Women and Social Affairs in the Government and charged with much of the coordination of the preparation of the Beijing Conference. This meant 12 Working Groups of NGOs according to the 12 areas of concern and getting the relevant contributions of all the Government Departments for drafting the National Report. It also included the cooperation with the international institutions: Economic Commission of Europe (UN), EU, OECD, Council of Europe, and the International Labor Office to name the most important ones. The positive aspect was, that all had to reflect on the situation of women and the lack of adequate policies. Negatively was the lack of staff and the political will to mobilize the necessary legal and institutional changes. Our new very young female minister who had grown up in the German Democratic Republic: Dr. Angela Merkel urged me to continue with the work however I decided being on the International Presidency Team to be enough so retired from the government job in 1994.



YWLTP – support and promote young women leadership

The Young Women’s Leadership Training Program (YWLTP) is still happening BUT is now a one- year program! Yes! One more thing affected by the coronavirus. This new program will be challenging but together we can do it. Basically, it will be a combination of virtual meetings, some face-to-face meetings in local Grail communities, reading documents, writing and sharing what participants are doing. Briefly, this is how it will take place:

- Google classroom: a platform where we can share and learn during the virtual stages.
- Videoconference platform: The group will meet at least twice during each virtual stage
- Meetings at Grail centers: once or twice during each stage participants and Grail women will have the opportunity to meet and share experiences, stories and knowledge.
- Face-to-face meeting YWLTP 2021 (Cuernavaca, Mexico): After working and growing together, the face-to-face meeting will happen.

We envision 3 or 4 participants from each country, ages 18-28, who are open to learning new skills as well as engaging in challenging topics. All will be part of the first four stages, and, two participants, chosen from that group, will attend the Mexico meeting. **The deadline** to receive applications is **July 15th**.

The program itself has five stages:

Stage 1: September-November 2020: VIRTUAL MEETINGS covering introduction to the program, Grail orientation, community building, learning how to use the various virtual technologies, etc.

Stage 2: December 2020 – February 2021: Sharing resources, materials, reading assignments, meeting(s) with local Grail group, etc.

Stage 3: March-May 2021: VIRTUAL MEETINGS going more deeply into the chosen topics.

Stage 4: June-August 2021: More resources, materials, readings, meeting(s) with local Grail group, closing of this part of the process. Decision on which two participants will attend the meeting in Mexico.

Stage 5: September or October 2021: face-to-face meeting in Mexico (Remember: in addition to considering contributing to the cost of flights, we ask to participants/countries to cover costs of visas and local transportation).

The New Secretary General of Religions for Peace




Do you remember this woman? She was at our last IC meeting in Kisekibaha, Tanzania 2019 via zoom, where she highlighted the importance work for all women of faith as we ovrk together on the SDGs, which we have adopted (IGA 2017) as a way to organize our work in our local communities. We are pleased to present **Prof. Azza Karam, the New Secretary General of Religions for Peace.**

Following is an excerpt from her first communication:

Here we are, in the midst of a world teeming with uncertainty over a virus that knows no borders and spreads voraciously, where children and adults still sleep hungry in spite of tons of food going to waste, where communities across the globe are ravaged by ongoing conflict, and where the very air we breathe and the water we drink is threatened. Nevertheless, it is with a sense of deep gratitude that I am able to commence my responsibilities as Secretary General of Religions for Peace this week. On our shared journey towards peace, each of you carries the wisdom of ages with dignity and grace. The responsibility you have entrusted to this organization for decades, and your committed leadership to cultivating and sustaining the peace we seek is palpable. (...) Since our meeting in Lindau, you gifted Religions for Peace with a consultative process where you shined a bright light on our shared strategic priorities. You have thus identified the milestones for this movement for the next 5 years. We will do our best to honor your aspirations and wisdom, uplift your work and support respective and collective efforts. Above all, please pray for all of us.

Yes, we are all part of an organization called Religions for Peace. But I believe, strongly, that we are all part of this earth as a movement that is fully dependent on one another, to bend the arc of history towards justice

With respect and infinite gratitude, 

Note: Religions for Peace (RFP) USA is the **largest and most broadly-based representative multi-religious forum** in the United States, with participants from more than **50 religious communities**, representing each of the major faith traditions. The organization identifies shared commitments among religious communities in the U.S., enhances mutual understanding among these communities, and facilitates collaboration to address issues of common concern.