

Welcome and thank you

As we end another tumultuous year, it is time to look back at what has happened and what has not, and to look ahead at what is coming. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change has entered into force, a new Secretary General will take the helm at the United Nations in January, the fight against violent extremism continues, the search for peace in Syria and Yemen remains a top priority, and lasting solutions for the unimaginable stream of people on the move are still to be developed, to name just a few.

For me personally, the moment has come to say a heartfelt thank you before I move on in the coming year. After nearly 14 years spent establishing and developing the NGO

Office, I will be passing the baton to Sr. Sheila Smith, RSCJ in early 2017.

Thank you to each of you – my sisters, and members of the larger Sacred Heart family – for allowing me to represent you at the United Nations. It has been a true privilege and joy to get to know you and work with you, bringing our Sacred Heart values, experience and contributions to the international table in New York. You are doing awesome work – I have seen it with my own eyes in many places – and I am convinced that under my successor’s able guidance the NGO Office will soar to new heights. Be assured of my prayer for this new stage that is about to begin.

I wish each one a Happy Christmas



Photo: Imma DeStefanis, rscj

and a blessed 2017. May each of us give birth to Christ every day in our own lives, and may our mission at the United Nations, one of our newest ‘frontiers’, flourish in the years to come.

Heal the world

by Cecile Meijer, rscj

One of the earliest conferences I ever attended at the UN was about poverty and I remember vividly a comment by an NGO colleague: “It was a great event, but where were the poor people themselves?” As October 17th, the *International Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, rolls around each year I smile at the answer I can now give: some people who live in poverty are right here with us today at the United Nations, taking the microphone and telling their stories.

This year again, they were the Masters of Ceremony and fantastic speakers who gave powerful testimony about their humiliation and exclusion simply because they are materially poor. Sparch Shah, a young musical phenomenon, brought the audience to their feet by



Photo: Cecile Meijer, rscj

his enthralling rendition of Michael Jackson’s *Heal the World*. Where else would we find a more apt place to plead for peace and raise our voices as one: “Heal the world, make it a better place, for you and for me and the entire human race. There are people dying. If you care enough for the living, make a better place for you and for me.”

What struck me most this year was that no one seemed to be in a hurry! Whether diplomat or UN staff member, nobody had to run to the next meeting or grab a cup of coffee in-between. We all re-

joined in the presence of those whose cause we say we embrace in too many documents. “Heal the world.” On October 17, 2016, that cry was louder than ever at the United Nations.

A new Secretary-General

by Cecile Meijer, rscj

António Guterres from Portugal will become the UN's new Secretary-General on January 1, 2017. His name may sound familiar and indeed he is no stranger on the international scene. He was twice Portugal's Prime Minister in the 1990s until 2002, and from 2005 to 2015 he served as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The selection process has been more transparent, more open and more inclusive than ever before, giving diplomats and civil society several opportunities to raise questions and interact with the thirteen candidates. That is significant progress. He was appointed by the UN General Assembly by acclamation.

Although some of us are disappointed that the ninth Secretary-General will not be a woman, Mr. Guterres is hailed by many as a man of solid political experience at the national and international levels, who combines his political



Lebanon / Syrian Refugees / UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres meets with Syrian refugees in the Fayda informal tented settlement in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, on Friday 14 March 2014. / UNHCR / A. McConnell / March 2014

instincts with compassion and a strong sense of solidarity. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his remarks after the appointment of the Secretary-General-designate, said that his successor "is perhaps best known where it counts most: on the frontlines of armed conflict and humanitarian suffering." Good luck and God bless, Mr. Secretary-General-designate, as you assume your new responsibilities in these stormy times.

Website

Have you looked at our website lately? We have posted the following articles in 2016:

- Newsletter Issue 9
- A new High Commissioner for Refugees
- Bringing Popular Education to the United Nations
- Voices from the Field
- It is Good for Us to be Here
- United for the Earth, our Common Home
- Handbook for Persons Living in Extreme Poverty
- Interfaith dialogue in action
- World Refugee Day 2016
- Sapporo Sacred Heart United Nations Study Tour
- Large movements of refugees and migrants
- Paris Agreement enters into force
- Secretary-General's message for October 17
- Peace prayer in Kampala
- Civil society response to New York Declaration

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Paris Agreement enters into force

The Paris Climate Change Agreement, concluded in Paris in December 2015, entered into force on November 4, 2016. Two thresholds had to be reached before this new legal reality could become true: ratification by more than 55 countries who together account for more than 55% of the global greenhouse gas emissions were required to make this happen. On October 5, 2016, these two thresholds were reached, paving the way for the agreement's entry into force thirty days later, on November 4, 2016. This is truly historic.



Photo: U.S. Department of State