

# WELCOME

"There is still too much discord, hatred, division, conflict and violence in our world here at the beginning of the 21st century. A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dream of. ... It is so easy to break down and destroy. The heroes are those who make peace and build."

These are historic words of Nelson Mandela, spoken in Soweto, South Africa, only three years ago on 12 July 2008. How are we builders of bridges and peace? Interfaith dialogue, gender equality and the struggle against hunger are just three examples of where our mission as RSCJ intersects with the purposes of the United Nations.

# Society of the Sacred Heart

# at the UN

JULY 2011 | Number 4

## Interfaith Dialogue Going Forward



by Cecile Meijer, rscj

This past spring I put together the Society's application for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. It was at times a difficult process because of the strict page limitations, which seemed to make it impossible to mention the many stellar JPIC projects we engage in around the world. As I analyzed the data, which included information gleaned from our international website, my 8-year email correspondence with provinces, as well as personal learnings from visits to various countries, I was struck by new red lines that seem to weave through the international Society of today, new ways of engaging with the world from the depth of our spirituality as Religious of the Sacred Heart.

One of those new red lines I saw so clearly

was interfaith dialogue. Whether it is teaching a predominantly non-Catholic student body in Japan; lecturing at the Islamic College in Jakarta, Indonesia; operating an ashram in Austria; living interfaith dialogue on a day-to-day basis in Chad; engaging in literacy and language classes with migrants in various countries in Europe; or advocacy for a Decade for Interreligious Dialogue at the United Nations – many of us are effectively DOING interfaith dialogue in profound ways, walking in Sophie's footsteps as educators for transformation and peace based chiefly on respect and relationships.

Isn't that what the General Chapter 2008 invites us to in its option for *Dialogue toward Communion: Walking with Humanity?* An open dialogue that learns and enters into another religion because "dialogue is the way for the world today", through which

rscjinternational

Have you looked at our [webpage lately](#)? We have posted the following articles since February:

- [World Interfaith Harmony Week](#)
- [Poverty and Climate Change](#)
- [Haiti: Brushstrokes](#)
- [World Day of Social Justice](#)
- [Launch of "UN Women"](#)
- [International Year of Forests – 2011](#)
- [Water for Cities](#)
- [Right to the Truth](#)
- [A Civil Society Perspective](#)
- [Celebrating Mother Earth](#)

we perceive "the possibility of communion in a profound experience of God" (p. 17-18). This calls to mind two recent UN resolutions.

The first is a General Assembly resolution of late 2010, which proclaimed the first week of February of each year as *World Interfaith Harmony Week*. Sponsored by the government of Jordan and twenty-seven other Member-States, the resolution encourages "the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, based on love of God

*Continued on page 2*

## Nelson Mandela International Day

On July 18, the world commemorated for the second time Nelson Mandela International Day, acknowledging his "contribution to the struggle for democracy internationally and the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world." July 18 was also his birthday – Nelson Mandela has turned 93 this year.

For more information about this important new day, please see [this UN webpage](#) where you can find a chronology of Mandela's life, useful quotes, multimedia resources, as well as messages from the UN Secretary General.



*‘Gender equality is a norm not a dream, not a gift but a right long since earned’*

by Irene Cullen, rscj

In February 2011, I attended the meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. I met committed, thoughtful, women working for the betterment of humankind through empowering women through education. I was humbled by these women, inspired by their commitment and energized to continue contributing to this endeavor.

I experienced a whirlwind of female energy focused on assuring that ‘gender equality is a norm not a dream, not a gift but a right long since earned.’ There were offerings by women leaders from many countries: grassroots organizations, NGO members and UN officials. We grappled with how to influence national governments and UN structures. Building on the Beijing Platform of 1995,



the Millennium Development Goals, the conclusion of Consultation on the Status of Women, CSW 51, this CSW 55 session focused on girls’ access to and participation in science and technology. One project of my Mission Support Office these past years has been collaboration between USA Partners in Mission and the high school administration in Kalungu, Uganda, for the improvement of its science/math/technology program by providing computers and training, funding the construction of a science building, providing instruments,

supplies, equipment, and bringing over a science mentor from the University of San Diego to expand science teaching methodologies. Sitting with representatives from other countries who struggle with a similar concern to improve female participation in science and technology gave me a new perspective on my efforts.

This experience was educative, uplifting, and gave me much hope. I recommend that other RSCJ and members of the Sacred Heart family consider attending a UN conference.

*Society of the Sacred Heart at the UN*



406 East 80th Street  
New York, NY 10075  
Phone (212) 737-7231  
Fax (212) 737 7235

Cecile Meijer, rscj  
cmeijer@rscj.org

Sacred Heart interns  
and volunteers:  
Carolina Cordon-Bouzan  
Fiona Hogan  
Kasia Rymar  
Elizabeth Wilcox  
Maria Willhoit

Layout & Design  
Isidoro S. Baradi, IV  
SHIFT Foundation,  
Philippines

© Society of the Sacred Heart

## Interfaith Dialogue

*continued from page 1*

and love of one’s neighbour or on love of the good and love of one’s neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”

The second resolution was

adopted in March 2011 by the Human Rights Council. In this resolution, the Council recognizes “the contribution that dialogue among religious groups can make towards an improved awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all humankind.” Interfaith efforts and human rights education are considered essential steps

towards peace.

Before embarking on my spring project, I knew we were doing a lot of interfaith work, but I didn’t realize the vast extent of it. Knowing this now, I wonder how we can build on this remarkable commitment and share it more visibly. Is there a way to connect the commemoration

of the International Day of Peace (21 September) and the International Day for Tolerance (16 November) with the global interfaith agenda, which intersects with our charism of recognizing and being the Heart of God in the world? How can we harness the current momentum as another February rolls around in 2012?

## DVD Tip!

**Momentaufnahme** (“*Snapshots*”) is a thought provoking short video about poverty and Earth, reminding us that hope lies in the small and multiplying actions of ordinary people who are committed to change. The film can be viewed **on-line in eight languages.**

## Resources

The following are excellent resources and are available in multiple languages:

- The [EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011](#) by UNESCO is entitled *The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education*. The report details the challenges to education in conflict-affected poor countries and sets out a comprehensive agenda for change.
- The report [Agro-ecology and the right to food](#) presented by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, to the Human Rights Council on March 8, 2011.
- At [www.1billionhungry.org](http://www.1billionhungry.org) you can sign a petition to end hunger.