



## Welcome

We have all heard and read media reports of the disappointments of Rio +20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Critical reactions lament the lack of ambition in the Outcome Document. At the same time, the results are the world's new benchmark. As Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Former Prime Minister of Norway said: "... *with this imperfect text, we have to move forward. There is no alternative.*" May we, as Sacred Heart family, continue to witness hope and courage in the new year as we dialogue and act for greater social and eco justice.

## Calendar

**6-15 February 2013** – Commission for Social Development

**4-15 March 2013** – Commission on the Status of Women

**20-31 May 2013** – UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

## Website

Have you looked at our website lately? We have posted the following articles since August 2012:

- [MUNSOPHICAL 2011 – Ideas for a Better World](#)
- [Indigenous Forum 2012](#)
- [Newsletter Issue 5](#)
- [World Habitat Day](#)
- [General Assembly holds its annual General Debate](#)
- [Human Rights Council Adopts Guiding Principles](#)
- [Reflections on migration from a historical perspective](#)
- [Preventing Environmental Exploitation in War](#)
- [International AIDS Conference](#)
- [The UN Alliance of Civilizations](#)
- [Not all Women's Migration is Free](#)
- [A Call to Action](#)
- [Prayer for International Migrants Day](#)

## A Wake Up Call

by Joan Kirby rscj\*

In 1988 the International Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, first warned of the disasters to come from global warming. Our use of the earth has to change. For years, we have worried about the Small Islands States, the Maldives and Tuvalu and Grenada, which are among the first to be affected by climate change. What will happen to the people and their centuries old cultures when the islands disappear under ocean waters?

We had the beginning of an answer recently when the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, having searched for an excellent example of adaptation, hosted Bishop Bernard Umbali from Bougainville, New Guinea at the United Nations. The Bishop had helped relocate 4000 people to the mainland from the Cartarets Tulun Islands, close to Papua New Guinea, because rising tides, a swelling ocean and coral reef deterioration threatened humans' continued existence on the islands. The Bishop understands well the connection of climate change to religion. He used the power and property of the Church to help the climate-threatened people by relocating them to property owned by the Church on the



mainland. Beyond that he is forming better stewards of the planet, by requiring his people to plant 10 trees with every Baptism, 10 trees with every wedding, 10 trees with every ordination. Bishop Umbali told us in his matter of fact way: "*Communities based on Christian values must include sharing of land. Every place is a sacred site.*"

We are now well beyond the danger only to the Small Islands and low-lying parts of the earth. Other parts of the world – Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, the USA, Somalia, Kenya – are coping with disasters caused by climate change. People living on the coastlines and the poor will suffer most from changes in the ocean. But salt water seeping into staple food crops and world-wide drought are threatening food shortages for everyone.

Three major storms have brought

*Continued on page 2*



Photos by RSCJ Brazil

## People's Summit

While government officials gathered in downtown Rio de Janeiro last June, a People's Summit took place in another part of Rio de Janeiro. It included a vast range of subjects related to the three pillars of development: the environment, poverty eradication and the economy, but seen from the perspective of the people. Thousands of people came together for workshops, seminars, round tables and other opportunities to share and learn from one another.

Three RSCJ from the Province of Brazil were among them: Joselene Barbosa Linhares rscj and Magnânia Cristiane de Souza rscj, two of our younger members, as well

as Margarita Andrade rscj, who worked for another NGO as a translator. Joselene and Magnânia reflect on their experience:

*Each day of the meeting began with a morning of spirituality, organized by different religious traditions. During this time we were in touch with what each religion holds sacred.*

*The material relevant to the Peoples' Summit was accessible mainly in three tents. There were three divisions:*

- *Self-management: reflection on complex themes, round tables and presentation of motions.*
- *The future: experience of alternative practices which are being found effective, such as*

*the cultivation of organic fertilizers.*

- *Cultural: theater, circus, poems, music and dance.*

Margarita Andrade, rscj adds to this:

*At the grass roots we were expecting a different result, especially on the part of governments ... The sea was very near to us, always beginning over and over again with unbelievable patience!*

*In spite of everything the participants were renewed in groups with the sharing of experience and the richness of internationality.*

### WAKE UP CALL, from page 1

the USA to awareness. Hurricanes Katrina, Irene and Sandy have devastated major cities and the shoreline of the USA. New York City is no longer in denial. There is serious talk of building sea-gates twenty feet high and of developing an off shore apron of moss planted with hundreds of oysters to absorb the incoming water.

Because we are not separate from the earth, we have to accept this climate violence as part of ourselves. The earth is entering a period of change that is coming with violence. Fr. Thomas Berry, geo-theologian, teaches that the universe, life and consciousness are all violent processes. Neither the universe as a whole nor any part of it is especially peaceful. Every advance in life has come with violence. And of course, we are

painfully aware of the conflict always threatening the 193 nations struggling for greater access to the goods of the earth. New life emerges and advances through struggles. Our response to these disasters is important – are we in denial, ignorant, too busy to pay attention? Or can we be leaders in the religious response to change in our home, the earth? We are moving from the Industrial Age toward the Ecological Age. Transformation of our lifestyle to respect the integrity of the earth is needed.

*\* Sister Joan Kirby is the NGO Representative for The Temple of Understanding in New York. In June 2012, she attended the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*

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