

Shalom/UN-NGO Newsletter

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Call to Solidarity Inspires *Shalom* Branch Goals by S. Roxanne Schares



Shalom Branch meetings took place on the continents of Africa, Europe, and North America during November and December 2007. Gathering so soon after the 22nd General Chapter provided the *Shalom* branch representatives and contacts the opportunity to begin reflection on the *Call to Solidarity* and exploration of ways to bring life to the new directional statement for the congregation.

In the context of the world reality and issues for each country and geographical area, the *Call to Solidarity* inspired participants in setting their goals. *Shalom* Europe expressed the goal for 2007-2009: ***We follow Jesus in his compassion. We strive to deepen the spirit of gospel solidarity within and among us through theological reflection and to be moved to concrete actions which will promote the achievement of the MDGs.***

Shalom Africa committed themselves for the next two years as follows: ***In response to the Call to Solidarity and in preparation for the 2nd Special Assembly for Africa (the Synod in 2009), we will risk to act in new ways to witness to justice and reconciliation and to educate for social justice. Our priorities for witness and education include care for Earth, empowerment of girls and women, and good governance. We will strengthen our partnership and collaboration with others to meet this goal.***



The *Shalom* North America Coordinating Committee set a goal for the next five years: ***We choose action that visibly flows from the Call to Solidarity, that fosters integration of Shalom in all dimensions of SSND life, that invites participation of all, and that is publicly recognized as SSND Shalom.***

As the branches discussed how to begin implementation of their goals, a growing desire for a more integral *Shalom* way of life and action became apparent.

Human Rights Day around the World by S. Roxanne Schares



Around the world School Sisters of Notre Dame commemorated Human Rights Day, December 10, and the launch of the 60th anniversary year with the theme [*Dignity and Justice for All of Us*](#). Sisters in Strumien, Poland joined in prayer to thank God for those who defend the human rights of all and to plead for sensitivity of heart for leaders to respond to peoples and nations who endure extreme poverty.

In a primary school in Warsaw, Poland, S. Hiacynta Bilas organized lessons on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for children of grades 4 to 6 by involving the teachers of history, religion, and information technology (IT). The students viewed films on the complex situations in various countries and various continents, accessed the UN web pages, studied the text of the UDHR, and expressed chosen articles of the declaration in art form.

In Munich-Au, Germany, S. M. Gisela Hörmann gave a PowerPoint presentation on the “Cry of God’s People” to the students of the Fachakademie für Sozialpädagogik (Academy for Educators). After discussion on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), some wrote letters to German Chancellor Angela Merkel urging stronger engagement of the government to reach the MDGs.

At the African novitiate in Sunyani, Ghana, novices and sisters held a prayer service of Advent Waiting. In this setting, they shared their experiences of human rights being both honored and violated, and they prayed for those in need of hope and courage in the ongoing struggle of promoting human rights.

Vatican Convenes Meeting of Catholic-Inspired NGOs by S. Ann Scholz



The School Sisters of Notre Dame was one of eighty-five Catholic organizations invited to attend the first-ever *Forum of Catholic-Inspired NGOs*. The meeting, held in Rome from November 30 to December 2, brought together a wide variety of Catholic NGOs including humanitarian relief organizations, advocacy groups, new movements in the Church, and religious congregations. Although all clearly shared a common commitment to the Gospel and to Catholic Social Teaching, they represented a variety of organizational missions, activities, issues of interest, and political philosophies.

The Forum, conceived by the [Vatican Secretariat of State](#) and planned in cooperation with selected Catholic NGOs, was designed to provide an interactive space where participants could “share their experiences, priority areas, and challenges in their important commitment to working for the dignity of the human person in the Community of Nations.” In addition, planners hoped that participants would find ways to increase collaboration among Catholic NGOs and with the Holy See.

The meeting included an audience with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on December 1. In his [speech to the delegates](#) ([Italian](#), [Portuguese](#), [Spanish](#)), the Holy Father remarked about how, despite their different backgrounds, the NGO delegates share “a passion for promoting human dignity. This same passion has constantly inspired the activity of the Holy See in the international community.”

Johan Ketelers, Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission, had the daunting task of trying to synthesize the results of the meeting. In his address to participants at the closing session, he noted that the forum succeeded “at raising a number of positive considerations, conclusions, questions, and ideas on which to enhance our collaboration going forward. Given the wide heterogeneity of the group, it is all the more impressive what has been achieved.”

While the impact of the forum remains to be seen, some decisions were made. Firstly, participants expressed a desire to convene a second meeting within the next two years. Secondly, they decided to enlarge the working group that organized the initial meeting to make it more representative. Finally, participants charged the new working group to further digest the outcome of the forum and explore specific areas for future collaboration.

Care for Victims of Trafficking by S. Terezija Hostik (SI)

School Sisters of Notre Dame participated in a seminar on the care of the victims of trafficking, organized by Caritas Slovenia on December 3, 2007 in Celje, Slovenia. Consolata Sister Eugenia Bonetti from the National Counter-Trafficking Office of the Union of Major Superiors of Italy (USMI) was the main speaker.



S. Eugenia spoke to representatives of several religious congregations about the urgency to help young women and to break the chains of slavery. “Religious must be in solidarity

with the victims and act not only against the traffickers and exploiters, but also against unjust structures.” Two kinds of poverty are connected here: the material poverty in the countries of origin and the spiritual poverty in the rich countries where the women are exploited. There would not be an offer if there was not a demand.

Approximately 4 million women throughout the world have been sold into slavery; this is an evil that deeply damages human dignity and freedom. Religious were called to accept the responsibility to protect the lives of young people. Youth must be sensitised to and informed about the reality of and reasons for trafficking.

Sr. Eugenia also spoke to invited guests: representatives of Caritas, of religious congregations and lay organisations, of the Slovenian government and the welfare system--all who are involved and concerned with the problem. “We are strong if we are together to help the victims of trafficking and to give back hope and human dignity.”

The general secretary of the Caritas Slovenia reported on the project “Care for the Victims of Trafficking, Safe Accommodation.” He thanked the sisters for their accompaniment of the victims. In the evening, everyone gathered for a church service celebrated by Caritas Director Bishop Dr. Marjan Turnšek. They prayed not only for the victims of trafficking but also for the traffickers, the exploiters, and the clients--all need the redemption and love of Jesus Christ. On the following day S. Eugenia met the superiors of several women’s religious congregations in Slovenia. This seminar can certainly influence the way SSNDs answer the call to solidarity.

Bali Climate Change Conference Reaches Successful Conclusion by S. Ann Scholz



Delegates to the [UN Climate Change Conference \(Spanish\)](#) required an extra day and an extra push from the President of the host country and the Secretary-General of the UN, but they finally agreed to a roadmap that will lead to a new climate change agreement. The UN Secretary-General called the *Bali Roadmap* a pivotal first step towards an agreement that can address the threat of climate change, the defining challenge of our time.

After almost two weeks of marathon debate and a good deal of high drama, delegates agreed on both the agenda for future negotiations and a 2009 deadline for completing it. The agenda outlined in the roadmap requires governments to negotiate agreements on: taking action to adapt to the negative consequences of climate change, devising ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, finding ways to deploy climate-friendly technology, and financing adaptation and mitigation measures.

The Bali Conference also produced ground-breaking decisions. The roadmap includes the launch of the Adaptation Fund and decisions on technology transfer and on reducing emissions from deforestation. Four major meetings are planned for next year to implement the *Bali Roadmap*. Negotiations are scheduled to conclude with a major summit in 2009 in Copenhagen. More information is available at the [Gateway to UN Systems Work on Climate Change](#) in the official UN languages.

Shalom Clubs Flourish in Africa

During 2007, new *Shalom* clubs were established in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia through support and leadership offered by the SSNDs. In the five countries where the sisters of the District of Africa are present, a total of eight *Shalom* clubs have been initiated in secondary schools; the first in 2004.

The presence of the sisters, their focus on education, and commemoration of various international days: women, fight hunger, environment, peace, AIDS, and human rights inspire students and

teachers to join together to address issues pertinent to their reality. *Shalom* club members pray for peace; reach out to those in great need; discuss and act issues about women, care of Earth, and poverty. In Sierra Leone, *Shalom* club members, a majority of whom are Muslim, begin meetings with Christian and Islamic prayer, study the Earth Charter, and visit and help the sick and elderly in nearby villages.

In Kenya, SSNDs collaborated with the Justice and Peace Commission of Kisii Diocese to establish peace clubs in 12 secondary schools in 2007. From these clubs, nearly 90 students received training to be peer educators and peacemakers.

SSNDs Send Delegates to 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) by S. Ann Scholz



This year's delegation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame to the [52nd Session of the CSW](#) will include students and faculty from [Mt. Mary College](#) in Milwaukee, WI. Nine students and their professor have spent the past four months preparing for the meeting, which will consider the theme "financing for gender equality."

The students' preparation has focused primarily on the importance of national budgeting processes to achieving girls' rights, particularly their right to quality education. They hope to convince government delegates to the Commission to include the needs of girls in their deliberations and to ensure that the negotiated outcome requires national governments to target girls' concerns in their budgeting process and spending programs.

After a day-long orientation at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, CT, SSND delegates will join NGO representatives from around the world at the February 25 to March 7 meeting at UN headquarters in New York. In addition to attending plenary sessions of the Commission and briefings by government delegations, they will have the opportunity to participate in various NGO meetings and caucuses.

This year's delegation will also include School Sisters of Notre Dame Joan Connelly, Maureen Fleming, Ethel Howley, Eileen Reilly, and Ann Scholz as well as NAMA Communications Director Julie Gilberto-Brady.

Plan to Participate in Education for All (EFA) Week Scheduled for April 21-27



EFA Week is a world-wide advocacy campaign organized each year to remind the international community and governments of the six goals adopted at the [World Education Forum](#) (official UN languages) held in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal.

Organized by the [Global Campaign for Education](#), (contains links to Spanish and German sites) the campaign is intended to mobilize support for the promise to achieve Education for All by 2015. Teachers, pupils, parents, civil society organizations, schools, and international organizations are encouraged to participate. [Planning materials](#) are available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

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