Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development,
A panorama of the global world reveals a world full of potential, great challenges and changing trends. In its potential, we view and experience a world that is multicultural and multiethnic; endowed with creative, adventurous young women and men; enriched with the wisdom of elderly men and women, home to curious, innocent and playful children; blessed with God’s beautiful creatures and amazing nature. In contrast, our world is characterised by inequality, inequity, forced migration, radicalisation of mainly the young people, child abuse, acts of terrorism, lack of accountability and transparency, unemployment and underemployment, the list is endless. Indeed, we cannot ignore the fact that our world is paralysed and torn apart by divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, age, status, religion and all forms of discrimination. This reflection will pay more attention on the negative realities of our world and our potential to respond in new creative and nonviolent ways.

As consecrated women and members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), how then do we respond to these new realities? In response to this question, the call of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” will form our theological reflection. SDG 16 echoes our Institute’s General Congregation (GC) Call 2 to “Bring those forced to live in poverty to the centre of our life and ministry” (GC Call 2).

Reflecting on these two calls, we recognise our own poverty, the chains that curtail our freedom, and the deep desires to exclude others. Both these calls challenge us to work towards building inclusive communities. Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and ensuring justice for all calls for a movement beyond our comfort zones and a change of negative and oppressive mindsets that...
blur our visions of an alternative world – a world where all can call home. As we reflect on this sustainable development goal 16 and GC 2 call, we are challenged to return to our IBVM charism – responding to the needs of our time and standing with those on the edge of society.

Reflecting further, as IBVM members, we have the onus to critique and address some of the challenges and to some extent violence that hinder development and building of sustainable communities. Some of these forms of violence to societies are the patriarchal systems, harmful cultural practices and myths. How then do we respond to these forms of violence? One main way is by denouncing the unjust systems and structures that we have created among ourselves, our communities, nations and the global world. As IBVM members and in collaboration with other women religious and women from all walks of life, we can create opportunities where the poor, especially women can share their experiences, concerns and perspective in politics and socio-economic development in an environment of respect. More importantly, we need to claim the voices, power and visibility of women despite the entrenched and stereotypical attitudes they suffer in societies. Additionally, women are a locus of unifying cultures and nations and thus have the potential to develop and work towards just, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable communities.

In conclusion, women potentials need to be harnessed in order to build a new culture of nurturance of the human person, other forms of life and also our Mother Earth. We model communities that exemplify the values of truth, freedom, justice, peace and love. The challenge for us as individuals and the Institute as a whole is to engrain these values as part of our DNA. In effort to live out the SDG 16 and GC Call 2, we keep our eyes on Jesus Christ who challenged the unjust structures and made an option to stand with those on edge of society.

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