



Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) and the United Nations

"Working for a more humane, just and sustainable world".



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Ten Years at the United Nations seen through the eyes of the five UN Representatives



Evanne Hunter



Doryne Kirby



Marilla D'Souza



Anne Kelly



Cecilia O'Dwyer

In 2003, The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto/Loretto), in seeking to enhance its global presence and impact, established a non-governmental organization (NGO) to work with the United Nations in New York on issues pertinent to the mission of the IBVM. The IBVM at the UN represents the interests of the global IBVM network, including its regions on six continents, associates, current students, teachers, parents, communities and the more than 1 million alumni of IBVM schools. The work our NGO

*"The decision by the IBVM General Leadership to allow Sr. Pat Murray to pursue and eventually apply to the United Nations for official status as a non-governmental organization (NGO) was the successful beginning of our IBVM presence at the United Nations".
(Doryne)*

has done in the past ten years with the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI) has assisted IBVM in its various missions throughout the world.

While the daily responsibility of working as the IBVM's Representative to the United Nations falls to just one person, in reality the single Representative has the backing and support of the entire IBVM network.

The General Leadership of the IBVM, which appoints the Representative to the UN as well as appointing the NGO's Advisory Committee, is the umbrella under which both the international network and the NGO fall. In turn the Advisory Committee supports and advises the Representative while monitoring the progress of the NGO's work plan. In addition contact persons for the NGO provide critical links for communication between the Representative in New York and the entire IBVM network. Finally, the NGO Representative serves as the face of the organization at the UN, engaging with civil society, transmitting information between the UN and the network and running the New York office.

Effective communication between the New York office and the rest of the network is key. The communication infrastructure of our NGO allows contact persons within the network, along with schools, the Justice and Spirituality Center and the Development and International Offices, to get updates and other information from the NGO Representative. This information is disseminated to local

networks, sponsored ministries and NGO partners as appropriate.

Information also flows back to the NGO Representative from the IBVM network on news, initiatives and projects in the local provinces, as well as national conferences related to UN issues. The Representative is also tasked with gathering information that will help the IBVM network to locate resources for IBVM initiatives.

*Two significant highlights - the establishment of an **Advisory Committee** to guide and support Loreto's UN representative and the creation of the position of **UN Contacts**, responsible for communication with the UN representative - have brought the role to a new level.*
(Anne)

Within the network, justice issues identified at the local level can progress to the national level; such progression would include formation and the initiation of advocacy possibilities. Relevant aspects of each issue can be handled by the Representative as she sends out information or makes requests in response to IBVM contact persons based on the needs of our network. It's in this way that the Representative can connect justice issues at the local level to those on the global level.

While working with the UN, the NGO has focussed its attention on the following areas: the Millennium Development Goals, gender equity,

"Students and teachers were enthusiastic about the education of global citizens for our 21st Century and some hoped to work with the United Nations. It was a particularly exciting because we focused on the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs mobilized us as an International Institute within the greater world-wide community."
(Evanne)

human trafficking, HIV and AIDS, and innovative financing for development and environmental goals. Each of these areas fall within the organization's primary interests of human rights and environmental stewardship, and our work for systemic change in the status of women and girls—especially in regards to economic and social inequality—as well as our desire to understand the factors underlying systemic injustice.

To accomplish our objectives on the ground, the IBVM Representative attends United Nations meetings as a member of civil society and works with NGO commissions, committees and working groups. Panel discussions, report launches, briefings and special events pertaining to the work of the Department of Public Information, the Social and Economic Council (ECOSOC) and meetings of the General Assembly working groups are an important part of our work.

One of the NGO's committees is the Working Group on Girls. This advocacy task force researches and authors intervention on violence against women and girls, and conducts advocacy visits to missions of Member States.

As a member of the Committee to Stop Trafficking in Humans, the IBVM's NGO focuses on the sexual and labor exploitation of children and its attendant issues. We also led a highly successful workshop on the prevention of human trafficking for the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).



As part of the Commission on Social Development the NGO writes and researches interventions geared toward social development. Past activities have included breakfast meetings with Ambassadors to the United Nations, which present opportunities to advocate on behalf of IBVM's interests.

"One of the specific roles of DPI Associates is to provide the possibility of connecting the members of Civil Society, the Human Community, and their concerns with the agencies and works of the United Nations. The intention is to improve the ability of each and every citizen, of every country, to live in dignity and justice". (Doryne)

The organization cooperates with other religious NGO's involved in the interfaith dimension of the United Nations. We participate in RUN ("Religious at the UN") and have facilitated advocacy workshops for members of RUN as well as planning a reflection day for RUN members. We have been part of the NGO committee on financing for Development since its inception, when the need for adequate financing of the Millennium Development Goals was addressed.

Working as the IBVM UN Representative entails engaging with civil society within the United Nations system as well as communicating with and educating IBVM members in the two major IBVM network languages, English and Spanish. Since its inception, IBVM's NGO has had five representatives living and working in New York. Evanne Hunter, Doryne Kirby, Marilla D'Souza, Anne Kelly and Cecilia O'Dwyer have each served as individual Representatives for the organization.

"Our first task was to create greater awareness about the United Nations, its values and our role in the system. I was invited to give workshops on the United Nations in Mauritius, South Africa, Ireland, England and Spain. In these countries, members, friends, students and teachers had the opportunity to learn about the UN and our NGO within the system. I was also invited to address the CJ/IBVM Education Meeting held in Loyola, Spain". (Evanne)

Each representative has brought a unique skill set and past experiences to bear during her time as the NGO's Representative to the UN. The first Representative from Canada, **Evanne Hunter**, explained that in 2003, the primary tasks of the newly formed NGO were to create greater awareness of the NGO within our network, to explain its value to IBVM and to elucidate the role the newly created NGO would play in the large IBVM system. Evanne gave explanatory workshops about the United Nations in a number of countries including Canada, Mauritius, South Africa, Ireland, England and Spain. She worked diligently to elaborate on the role and value of a relationship with the UN, what the UN does (such as work with governments) and what it does not do (such as provide funding). Evanne explained the advocacy role

of the UN and hosted about 45 visitors to the NGO in New York. She also worked to create contacts for the NGO, including the Ambassador to the UN Mission to Kenya, who was a past pupil, and the Ambassador to East Timor thanks to an IBVM colleague.

After Evanne's time in New York, another Canadian, **Doryne Kirby** took up the mantle of the mission. She also remembers the beginnings of IBVM's NGO and the initial

"The various ministries of the IBVM worldwide, through education in its various forms and other activities devoted to improving the lives of people in many ways are both praiseworthy and impressive. In these ways IBVM is part of the greater whole. But the challenge to connect these good works with the UN is, I believe, very difficult, not least because our Sisters are mostly unaware of what is happening at the UN and how they can connect with the UN". (Doryne)

meetings with Religious Congregations already involved with the UN as NGOs. For Doryne, the NGO was an extension of the IBVM's various ministries worldwide. Devoted to improving the lives of people, one of its main challenges was to connect good works done locally with the work done at the UN, no small task given many members' unfamiliarity with the UN process. Doryne was consistently impressed with the work achieved by the United Nations and she felt it imperative to educate our membership on the interconnectedness of issues at the UN and within the network, as well as to facilitate more active participation of IBVM members in the NGO. Doryne believed in the value of internships to the organization and hoped for local UN Representatives to further connect the NGO to international offices.

Marilla d'Souza from India, served as IBVM's 3rd representative. For Marilla, a

"I never hesitated in moving forward to interact with delegates....I realized that each of them at heart is a good person and like me would have liked to see greater positive action at the UN but then, as members of a delegation, their stand was often different. I was part of the Advocacy group in the lead up to the Commissions and so had met quite a few delegates on visits to their Embassies".(Marilla)

tough part of her job was deciding which of the many excellent daily opportunities to attend at the UN and NGO committee meetings. She worked fearlessly, interacting with delegates as part of advocacy groups and made it a priority to disseminate and share information. She found a lot of good hard copies of informative materials—so important to parts of the world where access to technology is limited. During her NGO tenure she felt the need for another person in New York. Having interns would help with the daily work at the office and create a body of persons with experience at the UN— experience which in turn would be helpful with the work performed on the local level.

The NGO's 4th Representative, **Anne Kelly**, hailed from Australia. Anne spent three years working to promote IBVM at the United Nations. During her stay in New York, she leaned on her time working in Uganda with South Sudanese refugees and in the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste post-independence. Anne came to realize through daily interactions that "girls hold the key to development: educate a girl for

longer, care for her health, protect her from violence, human trafficking, early marriage, [female genital mutilation] FGM and other forms of abuse and the entire community benefits.” Anne felt proud of the human rights victories achieved during those years, including the creation of *The Day of the Girl* on October 2012, the resolution condemning FGM by the General Assembly in December 2012, and the UN’s effort to involve global consulting in drafting the new Post-2015 Development Agenda. During this time interns began to work with the NGO. Clare Condon from Australia, Cecilia O’Dwyer from Spain and Pat Hanvey from Zambia all served as interns. Not only did the interns gain valuable experience with the United Nations but they also helped with the day-to-day running of the organization. It was also during Anne’s term that the NGO underwent two important changes: the establishment of the NGO’s Advisory Committee and a special focus of UN Contacts to facilitate communication between the Representative and the IBVM at large.

“Working with likeminded colleagues to bring these issues to the attention of policy and decision-makers at the UN was both challenging and rewarding. We rejoiced at the creation of The Day of the Girl, celebrated for the first time in October 2012; the resolution passed by the General Assembly in December 2012 universally condemning the practice of FGM; and the efforts by the UN to involve wide global consultation in formulating the new post 2015 development goals.”(Anne)

Cecilia O’Dwyer is our network’s current Representative. She arrived in New York in May 2013. At the time of her arrival, the UN received near constant media attention for its inability to achieve consensus in the Security Council, which led Cecilia to view the UN in terms of a human family trying to organize itself so that each member might live with dignity in a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world in spite of the



difficulties involved. In the slow work of creating this world, there were moments of clarity during which world leaders came together for the benefit of all. Since the beginning of this century in particular, one such occasion was that of the Millennium Declaration, which gave rise to the Millennium Development goals, which mobilized the international community around concise, measurable objectives. The IBVM made a commitment to working on the MDGs and has done so in a variety of ways

throughout the world in our diverse ministries. Regardless of success, the MDGs have led to increased awareness of our reality as a human family. Cecilia has seen an increased willingness by the UN to include civil society as a source of valuable and complementary knowledge, experience and expertise in dealing with issues. In fact, the United Nations is currently “imploring” the global community to participate in

information gathering for debate in continuing the Global Post-2015 Agenda. Among those voices that still need to be heard are the elderly, the young and the vulnerable.

After 10 successful years in New York, it's an exciting time for the IBVM NGO. The NGO has been commended for its Annual Reports to the United Nation's Department of Public Information. And members of the network have attended and conducted workshops at the Annual DPI conferences. The NGO has established good working relationships with a number of the local UN agencies that overlap in our international communities, as cooperation with these agencies serves to further enhance the network's impact on relevant issues. In addition, the rollout of the next set of development goals, the Post-2015 Development Agenda, has created the potential for further positive impact in the IBVM regions.

The Annual DPI Conference was a special time here. Members of our network came to the conferences. We took part in events and offered some ourselves.
(Evanne)

For IBVM, having a Representative at the United Nation provides an unparalleled source of opportunity to energize our vast network while promoting the Loreto's mission of social justice, human rights and environmental stewardship through advocacy.

"To move along together and transcend a limited focus to embrace a global vision and understanding of who we are, is a patience filled journey. Today many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when" it seems that something is on the way out, and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble. –"
Václav Havel, president of the Czech Republic.

(Cecilia)

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