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A demonstrator holds up a sign at an Oct. 1 Fridays for Future climate strike in Milan, Italy, ahead of the Oct. 31-Nov. 12 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland. (CNS/Reuters/Flavio Lo Scalzo)

by GSR Staff

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Editor's Note: *The issue of climate change is vital to our world and life as we know it. Through their ministries, Catholic sisters are witnessing the effects of climate change and the impact on people around the world.*

As such, Global Sisters Report is committed to providing coverage of COP26, the U.N. climate change conference, from Brian Roewe, environment correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, who is in Glasgow, Scotland, to report on the event for GSR, NCR and EarthBeat.

To supplement his coverage during COP26, which opens Oct. 31 and runs through Nov. 12, GSR will publish updates and dispatches sent to us by sisters and/or congregational representatives attending COP26 in person or virtually.

The following is contributed by Beth Blissman, who currently serves as the United Nations representative for the Loretto Community. She has been a co-member of Loretto since 1995.

Nov. 15: COP26 Ends - Signs of Hope

As COP26 wrapped up Nov.12, I wondered… might one only hear some mainstream media headlines focusing on what was not accomplished despite everyone's best efforts? It's true that the outcome document (see: https://unfccc.int/news/cop26-reaches-consensus-on-key-actions-to-address-climate-change) was not nearly as strong as we had hoped, but I wish to offer a counter-perspective to any despair.

Progress was made at #COP26, with many countries agreeing to phase out coal, drastically reduce methane emissions and ensure new cars are net zero emissions by 2035. Countries committed to increasing climate education, exploring climate justice and made initial financial commitments to support progress.

Some advances that look very helpful, such as a declaration to protect forests endorsed by over 140 countries (see: https://ukcop26.org/glasgow-leaders-declaration-on-forests-and-land-use/), will need to be carefully tracked to ensure justice for Indigenous communities. The ambition was not high enough to ensure limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but it was a good start in that direction. In addition, it quickly became clear that there were actually two COPs going on: one

inside the Blue Zone (the official negotiation area) and one outside the event, in the Green Zone (the public area) and beyond. For example, the COP26 Coalition hosted a People's Summit on 7-10 November, and kept us updated with brief YouTube episodes called "Inside Out" (see: https://youtu.be/ouFnaQRlyaM)

Truly, it was a time and place where innovation and creativity were on display, calling us as a species to tap into our best possible efforts.

Several of our favorite programs included:

Climate justice, education and gender equality: targeting the connections

https://youtu.be/h4bg5gJO1nc

This event, organized by the Malala Fund, illuminated the links between climate change, girls' education and gender equality.

Creating youth-led solutions: Sharing stories & insight with YMCA

https://youtu.be/Pl3om2fbaVk

Organized by YMCA Scotland, this session reviewed the Youth-Led Solutions initiative, which was created to mentor, train and support the development of young people's solutions to issues of climate justice, employment and mental health.

Call to Earth: A message from the world's astronauts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT9Na_84zGo

This video is for pure perspective – and inspiration.

Going forward, our challenge is threefold:

First, to maintain hope and embrace stubborn optimism. An excellent resource on this journey is to join Christiana Figueres, the Costa Rican diplomat who presided over the Paris Climate Agreement, at her website.

Second, our challenge is to lift up and support the voices of the youth, especially young women, who are directly affected by the climate crisis.

And finally, we are called to embrace the Laudato Si Action Platform , which officially launched on Sunday, Nov. 14. A session entitled "Catholics at COP26" provided an

excellent overview of how to best respond to this challenging moment. We need to change our cosmo-vision (i.e. our worldview) to embrace both environmental and social justice.

As we continue to educate ourselves - and others - in order to hold our governments accountable, may we maintain the hope and faith that comes from being people of the resurrection.

Nov. 9: A reflection on food systems at COP26

The following is contributed by Beth Blissman, who currently serves as the United Nations representative for the Loretto Community. She has been a co-member of Loretto since 1995.

Who could resist a session entitled "Helping Everyone Eat Better"? This Green Zone (i.e. public access) session (found here) was sponsored by Sainsbury's, the second-largest grocery chain in the United Kingdom. It started out rather dry, with reviews of corporate promises, some data and reminders that we can all choose to eat more healthfully (at least two different vegetables at every meal, try for at least 80% plant-based, etc.). The section on global food waste (found about 30 minutes into the program, led by Ruth Cranston, their group head of corporate responsibility and sustainability) was particularly inspiring for those who are new to this issue, and could easily be used in a classroom or a local community setting to raise awareness.

I noticed a few interesting patterns.

First, it was intriguing to me to see distinct gender roles appearing, which I have also noted in other corporate presentations. More women are involved, yet there are still invisible barriers. Women promoted the sustainability, product/packaging innovation, and culture-shifting parts of the presentation, which included most interactions with the public. Men were handling the energy usage data and carbon tracking portions of the work, outlining the different ways in which carbon was used throughout the supply chain. Sainsbury's also presented a brief video from their suppliers and farmers, all of whom were male.

Second, when I visited the front page of the company website, I saw "the supermarket partner of COP26" featured alongside results of market share gains, annual reports and fiscal statements — this was definitely a for-profit enterprise. Sainsbury's says they believe that "good food should be accessible to everyone" and

their stated interest in COP26 is the opportunity to "collaborate … with world leaders, climate experts and businesses who are at the centre of decision making."

As someone deeply concerned with the long-term viability of U.S. food systems, and how they impact (both human and ecosystem) health, ecological sustainability and solidarity with those living on the margins of the "wealthiest" country in human history, I'm curious about what we might learn from this example. Are Sainsbury's efforts outlined at COP26 sincere efforts at corporate responsibility? Or a huge helping of greenwashing? The verdict is still out. …

Overall, this provided a good example of a company, filled to the brim with well-intentioned people, that has been working on its carbon footprint for well over 15 years. Presenters noted that they've reduced their carbon footprint by nearly 50% while growing the company over 40% -- taking pride in busting the myth that continual growth needed a higher carbon footprint. However, they were still talking about net zero, and goals for success were often set too far ahead (2030, 2035 or 2040). One of the younger female presenters, who had already lost her voice from a week at the climate talks, acknowledged that they needed to move more quickly and collaborate more.

Let's hope we can all do the same.

Nov. 5: COP26 energizes us, raises voices of the vulnerable and advocates

The following is contributed by Sheila Kinsey, a member of the Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, who currently serves as the coordinator of the International Union of Superiors General's campaign Sowing Hope for the Planet.

COP26 is a very energizing experience. This year, the goals are more observable, allowing for clearer accountability and follow-up for consequent results. I am certainly looking forward to the following up on specific commitments through advocacy efforts with religious and their connections. I have listened to many of the conference webinars and have found enlightening yet concrete ideas that address issues and invite a compassionate response. There is so much pain, and yet to see the resilience to the impacts of climate change is inspiring.

The discussion of the need of providing reliable funding to meet these new situations is welcome and rewarding. The themes explored are that people need a voice in plans that affect their lives, agency with policy and systemic change, and evidence that documents change; and that the time for action for climate justice is now. This is reflected in the advocacy efforts of our own religious men and women who are engaged in realizing the goals of *Laudato Si*'.

It is energizing to see women in financial areas mapping the inclusion and advancement of women in the workplace. With women as participants, inclusivity has increased and attention to relational connections has become more important. It is important to include all voices, especially those of the vulnerable. Our religious have been involved in ethical investing in their advocacy efforts all over the world. We have members in the United States, Japan, Peru and Bolivia who are working on divesting from fossil fuels, influencing corporate policymakers to make more humane use of their funds, and supporting reforestation and protection of biodiversity efforts. In these ways we hope to network with and inspire others.

One moving session featured the Inuit who discussed the challenge of food security to their people brought about by changes in climate patterns. With a decrease in winter time of up to six weeks in areas of the north and higher than normal temperatures, there has been less food security in both harvesting and growing crops, and more accidents with snowmobiles, their major mode of transportation, due to terrain instability. They also reported that the native animals are forced to cope with changing weather patterns, changing their habitats and leading to lower populations. This affects both land and marine species and directly impacts the Inuit food supply as well as the local biomes. Our religious have also been at the forefront of the issue of food insecurity arising from climate change. Our advocates are working in the Philippines, India and South America to help farmers adapt with more sustainable practices, and working with refugees and migrants to find resources. The poor and the Indigenous are more vulnerable in the struggle to adapt to climate change. Other advocacy work that we are engaged in includes accountability in holding nations to their promises to help poorer nations with these burdens. This is important work and we are striving to create networks to help advocates share information and resources to address this crisis.

COP26 has been exciting and is an opportunity for us, as religious, to unite and hear the voices of the vulnerable as well as those of other advocates. We are not alone, and we can stand together to work towards solutions for a sustainable future.

Nov. 3: Focus on Finance

The following is an excerpt from a newsletter by Darlene O'Leary, Darlene O'Leary, Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, who is with the For the Love of Creation/United Church of Canada COP26 Ecumenical Delegation. Reprinted with permission.

The focus of the day has been on finance. The day started with United Nations' special envoy on climate action and finance, Mark Carney's announcement that the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) has received commitments of $130 trillion US capital from global financial institutions to help with the transformation of the world's economy toward clean energy. It is certainly an important shift. However, the GFANZ does not require signatories to end funding to fossil fuel, coal, and other carbon intensive industries…..

….An initiative to watch from Costa Rica and Denmark that would end funding of oil and gas development and redirect support to clean energy has the support of 20 countries to divert funds starting 2022.

….Stories, Impressions, Reflections…

Today, our delegation continued to navigate the ups and downs of COP26. There have been large scale announcements that sound promising but are often lacking important targets and clarity. There have been the wonderfully inspiring initiatives taking place on the ground globally, in spite of barriers, to support those already being hit by the impacts of the climate crisis. There has been the challenge of wading through language that can be understood and used in different ways that makes it easy to get caught in cynicism or frustration.

A seven-year-old boy, the son of an Imam who spoke at one of today's sessions, called on world leaders to allow him and his friends to enjoy the blessings of nature. He lifted my spirit. We must find our sources of inspiration, and there are many. We must respect our impatience and well-earned skepticism. And we must keep moving forward together – in hope and love and solidarity.

Nov. 2: Minding the GAP at COP26

The following is contributed by Beth Blissman, who currently serves as the United Nations representative for the Loretto Community. She has been a co-member of Loretto since 1995.

One perspective to take on the current climate talks in Glasgow is to follow the Women and Gender Constituency. The key demands of the Women and Gender Constituency not only promote the Gender Action Plan (or GAP), but focus on human rights, ecosystem integrity, women's land rights, gender-just climate action and transitions to a regenerative economy. (Please be aware that they also call for women's reproductive health and rights as one demand of nearly a dozen.) The Women and Gender Constituency's demands also promote rights to water and sanitation in all climate action, and protecting oceans, coastal ecosystems and local communities.

If you follow social media, the two best hashtags to seek out are #FeministClimateJustice and #ActOnTheGAP.

In November 2017, at the Climate Change Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change announced a Gender Action Plan, which officially recognized the role of women in climate action. The plan integrates a gender perspective into all the work around climate policy — both nationally and internationally — ensuring that women can influence climate change decisions, as well as equal representation of women and men in all aspects of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change.

If you are new to the intersection of gender and climate change, here's an article that explains how and why the threats of climate change are not gender-neutral. (It's an older article, but it has a list of links to relevant U.N. entities and also spells out the need for gender-responsive climate projects.)

For more on the GAP and other relevant topics, feel free to follow Loretto at the UN on Twitter @LorettoattheUN or on Facebook.

Oct. 30: A call for prayers from JPIC Roma

The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the International Union of Superiors General and the Union of Superiors General has the following message:

> As COP 26 (31 October to 12 November) is approaching, we also begin our process of prayer and involvement through the different activities that congregations and the Catholic World are doing around the world. Let's pray together for the conference and especially for the political leaders to arrive to concrete agreements that they will comply. You can find some prayers here.
>
> Stay tuned to COP26 YouTube Channel.

The commission also has a list of online events.

Oct. 30: Maryknoll Sr. Marvie Misolas on the power of prayer

Misolas, representative of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns at the United Nations, reminds us of the power of prayer. She writes in an email to friends:

> COP26 is crucial for Earth's future. I would like to suggest that even though none of us will be in Glasgow to physically participate in the advocacy efforts and visits with Member States to push climate agenda, we can still powerfully influence the negotiations so that national leaders will take COP26 work seriously and work out a plan to mitigate the rising global temperature and keep it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
>
> If you have not joined a prayer rally for the COP26, may I suggest that we organize an intentional prayer circle of energy for the intention of a successful COP26 outcome. This is our power that we contribute to the COP26.
>
> Please set aside a half-hour in your own daytime/nighttime hours to pray for this intention wherever you are in the world.
>
> October 30th — eve of COP26 start
>
> October 31st — November 12th — Praying on your own time for the intention of COP26
>
> Please join an interfaith dialogue.

Advertisement

Oct. 30: How to participate in COP26 from afar

Below are excerpts from the Sisters of Charity Federation newsletter by Sr. Teresa Kotturan, who represents the federation at the United Nations. For the vast majority of us who can't go to Glasgow, Kotturan provides a comprehensive guide on how to participate.

Engage virtually at COP26

1. Secure net-zero emissions by 2050 by phasing out coal, curtailing deforestation, switching to electric vehicles.

2. Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats — protect and restore ecosystems. Build defenses, early warning systems and resilient infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods and lives.

3. Mobilize finance.

4. Work together to deliver — finalize Paris Agreement Rulebook; accelerate action to tackle climate crisis through collaboration among all segments of society.

Everything you needed to know about COP26:

Sir David Attenborough's speech to the U.N. Security Council: Watch video.

COP26 schedule: View/download PDF.

The formal opening of COP26 takes place Oct. 31. The U.K. prime minister has invited heads of state and governments to attend the Nov. 1-2 World Leaders Summit, a part of the high-level segment.

What is happening in Glasgow for your virtual engagement?

Talanoa Dialogue: Oct. 31 (Sunday) following the arrival of pilgrims from Scotland, the U.K., Sweden, Germany and five other countries. The aim of Talanoa Dialogue is to form a binding community. Leaders of UNFCCC [the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change] will be joining the dialogue, which will include group work on different topics and a service.

There will be two meetings with interfaith groups at COP26 and a service halfway through the COP. Register for the informal interfaith gathering that will take place both in-person and virtually for the Talanoa Dialogue: in-person registration (Eventbrite) and online registration (Zoom).

What is Talanoa Dialogue? "Talanoa" is a traditional word used in Fiji and across the Pacific to reflect the process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue. The purpose is to share stories based on three questions — Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? — to build empathy and to make wise decisions for the collective good. It is a traditional method of solving differences in the Pacific.

Confrontation and criticisms of other participants are forbidden, and roundtables abound. The presidencies of COP22 (Morocco) and COP23 (presided over by Fiji and held in Bonn, Germany, in 2017) were mandated to employ the dialogue process.

Other links and resources:

1. Prayers & Meditation for a Beneficial COP26 (by Bishop Philip Huggins, Mrs. Sarwat Tasneem & Prayer by Lindsey Fielder Cook)

2. The Interfaith Liaison Committee's Facebook and Twitter accounts will be updated with the Talanoa Dialogue flyer and information for registration.

3. Christian Aid provides information, dialogue, and prayer opportunities.

Other resources:

- Faith for the Climate
- Faith for Climate Justice
- Faith Plans
- Water Spirit offers weekly meditation for Earth
- Glasgow Multi-faith Declaration for COP26
- Sign up to receive the COP26 newsletter
- BBC plans to cover COP26 extensively through its U.K. and global services

This story appears in the **COP26 Glasgow** feature series. View the full series.