Blog
Social Justice



Antonio M. Lagdameo, the permanent representative of the Philippines to the United Nations and chair of the Committee on the Status of Women in 2024, pictured at the podium and upper part of screens addressing the opening of the 68th session of the CSW in March 2024. This year's CSW began today, March 10. (United Nations/Manuel Elías)



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The 69th session of the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women begins two weeks of work on March 10, with a look back and a look forward.

The annual gathering of women from throughout the world will meet at the United Nations in New York to assess women's progress globally since the Beijing Declaration of 1995 affirmed the need for gender equality. The event — which includes political leaders, diplomats, representatives of non-governmental and advocacy groups, as well as Catholic sisters and representatives of women's congregations — will also try to determine what steps are needed going forward.

"It's a significant moment because so much has not been realized for women and girls," said Annemarie O'Connor, director of Passionists International at the U.N.

Among the persistent problems to be discussed at many of the hundreds of planned sessions both at United Nations headquarters and in nearby venues will be the issue of gender-based violence against women — a theme that will be taken up during a number of sessions either sponsored by sisters and women's congregations or with sister participation.



Annemarie O'Connor, director of Passionists International at the U.N. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

"Violence against women is a huge issue," O'Connor said in an interview — both on the domestic front and during conflicts, such as wars, but also in unstable social situations like the ongoing violence in Haiti. In fact, gender-based violence in Haiti will be a topic of discussion at a number of CSW events.

"Root causes of violence have to be addressed," said O'Connor, adding that patriarchy and patriarchal systems of injustice that hold women back have to be examined.

"Women can be used and they can be defiled and treated with contempt," she said of thinking that is too common for many men. "That comes from a feeling that men can control women."

In a separate interview, Adrian Dominican Sr. Durstyne "Dusty" Farnan, a representative to the U.N. for the Dominican Leadership Conference, said the two

weeks of U.N. meetings are an opportunity for "women to come together and be stronger, not weaker."

She agreed with O'Connor that patriarchal systems have to be addressed, and that, in the 30 years since the Beijing Declaration, women are still "trying to break loose from being dominated by patriarchy."

Farnan said other topics during the CSW meetings that will be of particular interest to sisters and other advocates are those related to current migration and immigration challenges, and financing programs to help women in economically poorer countries.

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, a U.N.-convened meeting in September 1995 in Beijing China.

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UNANIMA issues new global homelessness study

The United Nations-based advocacy group UNANIMA International has published a third volume in its "Hidden Faces of Homelessness" series.

The new volume, launched Feb. 20, and entitled "Global Insights and Pathways Forward" seeks to "reflect the current state of homelessness globally, especially as experienced by women, girls, children, and other marginalized groups," said Sr. Jean Quinn, a Daughter of Wisdom who serves as UNANIMA's director.

"Global Insights and Pathways Forward" incorporates and integrates studies and perspectives from United Nations member states, as well as U.N. agencies, academics, advocates, grassroots communities "and those with lived experience," the group said in announcing the new study. The group hopes the study can "help policymakers and other stakeholders develop best practices and set better standards for people experiencing homelessness."

At the launch, Quinn, who as a Catholic sister has been working on the issue of homelessness since 1987 — first in her native Ireland — said that when she began her homelessness ministry "there were very few integrated services for people who

found themselves out of the home."

While that has changed, she said, homelessness has become a more serious problem globally. There are believed to be no less than 150 million people who are homeless, meaning that approximately 2% of the world's population "are living on the streets, in temporary accommodation, refugee camps, or in transitory conditions."

Meanwhile, Quinn said the United Nations estimates that some 1.6 billion people — more than 20% of the world's population — "live in inadequate housing and suggests that more than 100 million have no housing at all. It is believed that by 2050 that number will reach 3 billion."

Quinn said she and UNANIMA "are hoping that our research and advocacy will promote a paradigm shift where homelessness and displacement are not seen as a personal failure but rather the structural failure and human violation that they are."



A homeless man sits with his belongings along a street in San Francisco May 19, 2024. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

Among the contributors to the study is Michal Mlynár, the deputy executive director and assistant secretary general of UN-Habitat, which is the United Nations program for human settlements and sustainable urban development.

He notes that "addressing homelessness and housing exclusion is a prerequisite for fully upholding human rights," as well as achieving the United Nation's ambitious sustainable development goals.

He adds: "There is no single path into and out of homelessness, and addressing people's needs requires a personalized, tailored response, including support for family reconnection, mental health and substance use assistance, vocational training, support in finding employment, as well as psychosocial support."

The 198-page study is available as a digital download here.

The first two volumes of the UNANIMA homelessness study focused on the experiences of families and homelessness.

Salesians mark International Women's Day

Salesian Missions, the U.S. development arm of the Salesians of Don Bosco, was among the church-based groups celebrating International Women's Day on Saturday, March 8.

The annual international commemoration honors "the economic, political and social achievements of women while focusing the world's attention on areas requiring further action," the group said.

This year's theme was "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment" with a call for action "that can unlock equal rights, power and opportunities for all and a feminist future where no one is left behind." A cornerstone of this, the Salesians said, "is empowering the next generation — youth, particularly young women and adolescent girls — as catalysts for lasting change."

The Salesians said that their missionaries living and working in more than 130 countries "are focused on empowering young women and girls with targeted programs." Education and job training programs that lead to a livable wage are among their priorities.

Among the programs is support for the María Auxiliadora Formation Center in northwestern Ecuador, which held training initiatives for more than 270 people in 2024, more than double the number of participants in 2023.

Most of the training, the Salesians said, was aimed at women who face unemployment, lack of resources, gender violence and abandonment, or who are heads of household. The training was taught by three lay professionals and includes 12 courses over six employment sectors.

The training has allowed women to gain employable skills to become self-sufficient, with some finding jobs after completing the training while others start businesses of their own.

The center was launched a decade ago in the San Rafael Valley, in the province of Esmeraldas, as a collaborative effort between the Salesian Ecuador Project and the Salesian San Juan Bosco Community in Esmeraldas.

Salesian Missions is based in New Rochelle, New York, and is part of the Don Bosco Network, a worldwide federation of Salesian non-governmental organizations.