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Carmelite NGO: United Nations Advocacy Project of the Carmelite Family

English

March 29, 2026

I represented the Carmelite NGO at the annual United Nations conference on women's rights and wellbeing held in March at UNHQ in New York. This was the 70th annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women and so, was known as CSW70. It is also the largest gathering of NGOs at the UN each year.

Much of the action for NGOs happen in the very large number of side events and parallel events held over the two weeks of CSW. These events allow for dialogue between NGOs, UN agencies, and governments on a range of topics related to gender. The side events typically occur at the UN and/or virtually. The parallel events are off-site and can be in-person and/or virtual.

The main business of the member states of the Commission was to debate and vote on proposed "agreed conclusions" that form the basis for action in the coming year that is designed to further the cause of gender equality.

This year, there was some unusual drama as the United States put forward many last-minute amendments, demanded a recorded vote (rather than a voice vote to emphasize consensus), and then ended with being the only government to vote against the final document. The U.S. made clear, in defiance of much of the world, that it was not in favor of pushing for gender equality or for diversity and inclusion, in general.

Here is a press release from UN Women (the lead UN organization dedicated to gender equality) following the adoption of the agreed conclusions (diplomatically avoiding the U.S.-led drama):
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2026/03/csw70-conclusions>

My experience at CSW70 consisted of attending a number of side and parallel events. There is much I could address, but since this is only supposed to be "one page" (sorry I won't quite make it), I will be brief.

First, I learned about RENATE, Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation. This group has 300+ members and are doing incredible work to combat human trafficking. These efforts include research, education, advocacy, and direct services to survivors. For more information: <https://renate-europe.net/>

The Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden—have been leading the way for many years when it comes to gender equality. They were certainly very visible at this year's CSW, engaging with NGOs and promoting policies designed to further the cause. (According to Georgetown University's *Women, Peace and Security Index*, the five nations that are the best for women are the five Nordic countries. The U.S. is ranked 31st.)

These nations pointed out that when women's equality is prioritized, countries, in general, are elevated. They are stronger economically, safer, and socially more advanced and secure. Overall health and wellbeing is better in such societies.

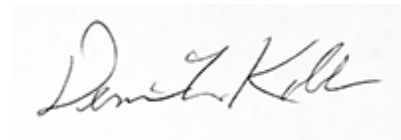
The role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) was recognized as being critically important. We know, of course, that religions and believers can act in ways that are detrimental to the cause of women's rights and human rights, generally. However, there are many FBOs and religious (including Catholics) who have been and are at the forefront of the rights movement and quite a few attended CSW70. I attended some of their side/parallel events and was inspired by their commitments and their actions.

One young Catholic activist said that she saw "advocating for rights as a spiritual practice." Indeed, the Church reminds us of the importance of the dignity of the human person. Fighting for the human rights of all people regardless of gender, race, nationality or religion is to serve God in a deep and profound way.

Finally, I have been to CSW almost every year since 2015. What I heard many times this year—and what truly disturbed me—were references to the "anti-rights movement" that is in ascendancy in the world today. Not simply minor pushback against this right or that right, but a powerful movement designed to repeal a host of rights for women and for many others, including racial, ethnic and religious minorities. Many people are fearful of what is happening and the ramifications for their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

As was pointed out at CSW70, FBOs can be a powerful force for good, maybe THE most powerful force, especially when working in coalition with others: A partnership for human rights and for the dignity of all persons! What a marvelous way to serve God at this critical, frightening time.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis Kalob". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Dr. Dennis Kalob, Ph.D.
Chief Administrative Officer of the Carmelite NGO