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Carmelite NGO: United Nations Advocacy Project of the Carmelite Family

English

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I attended three sessions of the CSW70 (Commission on the Status of Women). The first was “Ending Trafficking Together: Good Practices for Girls and Women,” that was sponsored by the missions of Ireland and Kenya as well as the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking Persons, Soroptimist International and the Loreto Sisters. During this session I learned that the Irish chapter of Soroptimist helped mobilize Irish legislation to combat trafficking through a campaign called *Hidden in Plain Sight*, which emphasized the importance of engaging civil society agents and institutions in addition to governments, such as educators and even airlines that may unknowingly be complicit in human trafficking.

One important civil society group that stood out was the *Talitha Kum Youth Ambassadors* program developed by the Loreto Sisters of Kenya. Named after the Aramaic phrase from Mark’s Gospel (5:41) meaning, “*Little Girl Arise!*”, it promotes community ownership of the problem of human trafficking by empowering survivor leadership and youth-led awareness campaigns that highlight signs of vulnerability of potential victims so that preventative measures may be taken to end trafficking within communities.

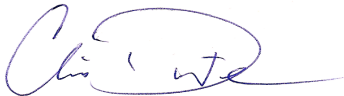
Another idea that stood out came from Chris Segona, representing the U.N. NGO committee, who argued that we must focus on the financial root causes of trafficking and attempt to “Bankrupt the Business” by demanding more accountability from banks and more proactive measures are taken by courts and law enforcement regarding seizure and return of laundered monies, as well as educating. The U.N.’s 4 precepts for ending trafficking are: (1) prevention, (2) protection, (3) prosecution & (4) partnership. While all four were mentioned during this session, prevention clearly stood out as the most important focus for those involved in the struggle to end human trafficking.

The next session I attended was “Women of Excellence: Leading Transformative Change for Shared Sacred Flourishing,” hosted by the group *Religions for Peace*. The main speaker was Madame Cissé Hadja Mariama Sow, president of *Religious Leaders for Health, Development, and Peace* in her home country of Guinea, who was one of three recipients of RfP’s ‘Women of Excellence in Multi-religious Action Award.’ Previously nominated for a Nobel Peace prize in 2005, she spoke of her struggle to empower women in her nation in both the political and religious spheres. As a Muslim herself, she had left politics in 1984 to organize amongst religious groups. By convincing Christian and Muslim male religious leaders to allow women to take on more leadership roles within their communities, Mme Sow initiated gender equity projects that she said now span all sectors of civil society in Guinea.

Finally, I attended an event organized primarily by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America along with the missions from Greece and Latvia, entitled: “Strengthening Access to Justice for Women & Girls: The Role of States, Courts, Community & Youth.” All of the presentations on this

panel were very strong, with an overarching emphasis on the “invisible barriers to justice” that women face as a result of culturally embedded neglect of their plight. Azza Karam, a professor of human rights at Occidental College and former head of the Global Women of Faith Network of *Religions for Peace*, arguing that while the world has now come to learn that not only weapons but also “words can wound,” we must now come to understand the “violence of silence.” Arguably the most impressive talk of the panel, if not the day, was delivered by a 17-year-old high school student named Irene Maria Zografos, who has been working at the U.N. as a delegate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese as part of its Girl Delegate Program since she was 14 years old. Highlighting the fact that less than 10% of young girls come forward about violence perpetrated against them, she said that for young women, justice is not primarily about which laws have been enacted but about feeling safe to speak about what has happened to them and to trust that authorities will actually listen. She also spoke about the need for young women and girls to be educated about such laws when they are enacted saying that, “when legal literacy is inaccessible, justice becomes a privilege not a right.”

Peace,



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