

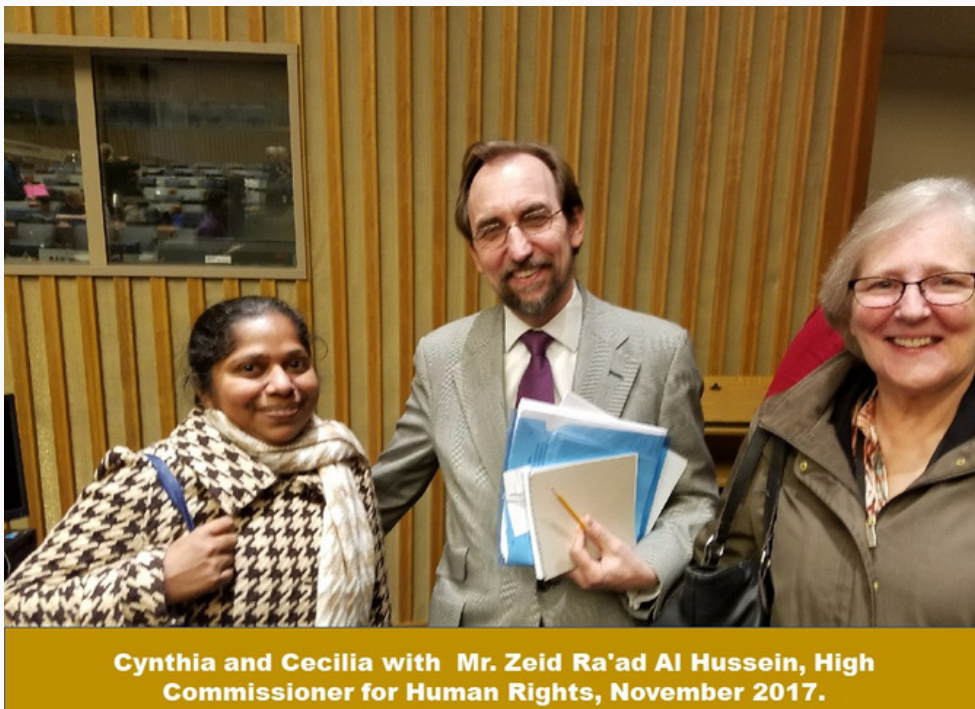
The background of the slide is a photograph of the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York City. The building is a tall, modern skyscraper with a grid of windows. In the foreground, a row of flags from various countries is visible, including the United States, India, and others. The sky is blue with some clouds. A semi-transparent grey box is overlaid on the image, containing the title text.

LEARNINGS FROM SEVEN YEARS AS NGO REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

■ CECILIA O'DWYER, IBVM

Introduction

When I took up my role as Representative in 2013 it marked a significant milestone: we were celebrating 10 years presence at the United Nations. I am immensely grateful to the hard work and dedication of those who went before me, paving the way for us to engage with the UN and amplify the voices of those in need. Evanne Hunter, Doryne Kirby (RIP), Mirella de Souza, and Anne Kelly laid a solid foundation and built the organizational aspects that proved instrumental in our journey. With that background I began what has been an incredible journey. It had an added and significant impetus when Sr. Cynthia Mathew CJ joined me in October 2017.



Lesson No. 1: Understanding the Predictable Behaviors of the Human Family

During my time in New York, I witnessed the formation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also known as the SDGs. It was truly inspiring to witness the collective desire to create a framework that could propel the entire human family towards a more sustainable world. However, alongside this noble intention, there were instances of resistance to change and a lack of awareness regarding pressing issues. As a means to engage the global community, virtual platforms were established to enable input from people worldwide. A list of urgent concerns was compiled, and we were asked to prioritize them. Surprisingly, climate change ranked at the bottom of the list. Yet, today, we witness the far-reaching effects of extreme climate events, a stark reminder of the importance of this issue. This serves as a profound lesson, highlighting the intricacies of human behavior and the need for further exploration.

The document "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," serves as a vital blueprint. It is more than just words on paper; it requires concrete implementation at all levels. As time has passed, members of civil society have questioned whether governments effectively communicated the agenda's goals to different levels of governance and the general public. This realization emphasizes the critical role of dissemination and engagement. On the other hand all are involved in the implementation of the Agenda as specified in the SDGs. As IBVM and CJ communities we have worked on the implementation and connected it with our own charism, spirituality and more recently the Laudato Si Action Plan.



Groups in New York and Geneva

Lesson No. 2: Embracing the Paradigm Shift

The 2030 Agenda initiated another paradigm shift, urging us to transition from linear thinking to embracing the interconnectedness and interdependence of various aspects of life, as depicted in the SDGs. Understanding these principles demands ongoing commitment and profound reflection to recognize their applicability in diverse areas of daily life and governance structures. The universality of the 2030 Agenda necessitates its adaptation to the unique circumstances of each country and region, reminding us of the interconnectedness of everything. As members of the Mary Ward Family on the path to union, our own oneness mirrors the broader interconnectedness of all things. Our journey towards oneness aligns with the decisions made within the United Nations. Over the years, both the IBVM and CJ Communities have actively participated in UN events. Cynthia CJ's appointment as UN Representative in 2017 fostered collaboration between our two communities, leading to the integration of members from the Congregation of Jesus into the UN Advisory Committee, the UN Representatives Network, and various other networks and events. We have become accustomed to working together, recognizing that the more we engage in systemic change, the greater impact we can achieve.



Art contributed to understanding of Sustainable Development Goals

Lesson No. 3: The Important Role of Religions

One particular event stands out in my memory. Towards the end of the negotiations on the SDGs in 2015, the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si* was published. I will forever remember the subsequent negotiations session, where the Kenyan Ambassador, who is not Catholic, held up a copy of the Encyclical to the assembled group and affirmed its significance. He recognized the profound connection between the 2030 Agenda and *Laudato Si*, stating that the Encyclical expressed what we were striving to achieve within the UN. This moment exemplified the alignment between these two frameworks, as they both respond to the critical challenges of our time. The emergence of the SDGs in 2015, followed by the *Laudato Si* Platform for Action three years later, showcased their interdependence. As religious communities and faith-based NGOs engage with the United Nations, they work together to uphold shared values and principles. The formation of the Justice Coalition for Religious (JCOR) brought Catholic Congregations together, forming a powerful network in a remarkably short period. Additionally, we fostered interreligious friendships and collaboration, both within the UN and at global events like the Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto 2018.



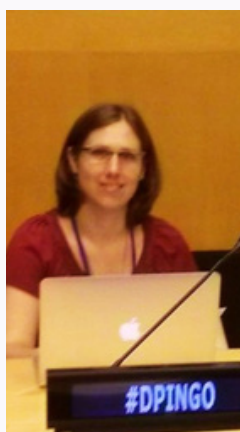
Lesson No. 4: “Show Up and Be Counted”

The phrase "If you want to create change, show up and be counted" encapsulates a powerful idea that manifested during my time at the United Nations. It resonates with all those who physically attended UN events or participated virtually through our networks and digital platforms. The increasing interest in understanding our world and the changes it requires has been powerful. We have been fortunate to witness the presence of an intriguing group of members, colleagues, and friends who took the initiative to learn about our work and the mechanisms underlying it. Their involvement brought forth an amalgamation of work, fun, and enlightening experiences. Noteworthy moments included a visit from the General leadership team in 2016, which provided

vital support in raising awareness about our efforts to create a more humane, just, and sustainable world through UN processes, grounded in our specific concerns and values. Furthermore, inspiring members on immersion experiences, dedicated interns, and passionate youth representatives advanced our work. Youth Representatives contributed particularly to youth involvement and network building. Members from the Mary Ward Family, alongside colleagues and friends, demonstrated their commitment by showing up in New York, Geneva, Nairobi, Santiago de Chile, Korea, and Salt Lake City. The growing interest in the United Nations' work also led to visits from schools, students, staff, and families. On the virtual front, the Advisory Committee, Province Representatives, and Human Trafficking Networks convened regularly, fostering knowledge sharing and integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into our lives and ministries. Webinars served as a platform for collective learning, emphasizing the universal framework of the SDGs that unites us. Through these endeavors, we created awareness, shared our global-level activities, and shed light on the challenges we face as part of the larger human family. Moreover, those of us working in the New York office actively participated in various NGO Committees, Working Groups, and Major Groups, collaborating with compassionate individuals, and forming invaluable friendships.



General Leadership Team



IBVM Members Immersion experience

The most important part of the work happened at local level where so many individuals in schools, ministries, and communities made a meaningful impact. They invested time and energy in understanding the Sustainable Development goals and the meaning of our work with the United Nations, often shaping a visionary outlook. Schools actively participated creating a transformative vision. Their dedication and that of so many in different ministries and projects fueled progress, making them unsung heroes. Together, they embody collective action's power, a symphony of change worldwide. I want to recognize their unwavering commitment, infusing purpose and hope. May their efforts mold a better world.





UN Conference Korea



UN Santiago de Chile



UN Conference Nairobi



Webinar on SDG's

Lesson No. 5: The Power of Communication. “What is not communicated does not exist.”

During the establishment of our Communications Office in Spain in the early 2000s, we embraced the wisdom that "what is not communicated does not exist." This notion holds even greater truth in our present world. Initially, it posed a challenge for those of us accustomed to operating discreetly, ensuring the left hand did not know the actions of the right hand. However, in the second decade of the 21st century, communication became imperative. We established an online presence through our website, social media platforms, and YouTube channel, ensuring information about our work was readily available. Our newsletter, "It's Your World," published 46 editions between 2013 and 2020, reaching Province Offices. We actively utilized Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, witnessing their growth and impact. The YouTube channel featured numerous videos showcasing the contributions of the IBVM and CJ network to the United Nations' endeavors.



Communication! Thank you for taking time to read the newsletters. Thank you for following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Thank you for watching the videos on YouTube. I hope our efforts to communicate and inform were helpful and meaningful.

Lesson No. 6: When the noise dies down, important things appear

When the clamor around the United Nations' imperfections subsides, we discover that it continues to inspire people worldwide. A diverse group of men and women tirelessly work to keep the organization thriving. As mentioned earlier, human behavior remains a complex interplay of successes and shortcomings. Engaging in conversations with members of religious congregations, we often reminded ourselves that our own Church and Congregations, on a smaller scale, exhibit similar effectiveness, dysfunctions, hopes, enthusiasm, and resistances. Throughout my time at the UN and even more so today, I am acutely aware of the moral authority and unyielding efforts of both Pope Francis and the current UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres. Their voices resound in our world, fearlessly calling attention to challenging truths for our leaders and the entire human family.



Amazing contributions from Interns and Youth Representatives

In conclusion, the seven years as NGO Representative provided invaluable insights. I witnessed the predictable behaviors of the human family, recognized the ongoing paradigm shift, acknowledged the importance of religions and our faith-based contribution, embraced the need to show up and be counted, and realized the power of effective communication. As we forge ahead, let us remember these lessons and continue our journey towards creating a more just, Humane, sustainable, and interconnected world for all.

