

**ANNE KELLY**

**UN Webinar 26 October 2023**

*As time zone differences have made it difficult for Anne to join us, she has asked me to speak on her behalf.*

I was the IBVM representative at the UN from May 2010 until June 2013 and therefore had the good fortune to follow in the footsteps of Evanne Hunter and Doryne Kirby. Both women forged strong relationships with their counterparts from other NGOs, including faith-based ones, which proved invaluable.

In terms of global tensions, this a relatively hopeful time to be at the UN. As members of civil society, we were treated with respect and included in key events and commissions. We were also encouraged to invite speakers to what are called 'side events' to highlight the issues of concern to us. As human trafficking was and still is a key focus of our advocacy, I invited Ana Stakaj, an Albanian colleague of Imelda Poole, to take part in the Commission on the Status of Women. Her firsthand testimony about this particular form of exploitation was far more powerful than any document or written resolution could have been.

Part of my work involved visiting the UN embassies of countries where our sisters live and work. To my great surprise, many of these highly educated people had little or no knowledge about human trafficking and even less about the scourge of FGM.

Because I had worked for six years in northern Uganda and Timor-Leste before taking on the UN role, I had a particular interest in girls' education and found it heartening that so many of my colleagues shared the same passion, in particular the Working Group on Girls. What numerous reports and research findings were making clear at this time was the link between a woman's education and the economic and social empowerment of her community. For example, the longer a girl can remain at school, the more likely her own daughters will be educated, and the more likely she will be able to earn an income, however meagre. A fact that is obvious to us now but was only just emerging then.

I also had the good fortune to be in New York when the decision to proclaim the International Day of the Girl was made. At a gathering of NGOs and girl advocates in 2012, I asked one of the girls why they had chosen 11 October as the date – a date referred to in the US as 10/11 – and she explained that for millions of girls things start to go seriously wrong once they hit puberty at 10, 11 or 12.

And finally, a major highlight of my final year in New York was the decision to draft the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals, a hope-filled initiative that absorbed the energy and attention of my very capable successor Cecilia O'Dwyer to whom I will hand over now.

Thank you. *(480 words, 3 minutes at normal speaking pace)*