



Update: March, 2016

MEET OUR NEW INTERN:

The **Daughters of Wisdom** have sent their first intern from the Province of Great Britain and Ireland. **Jean Quinn**

DW is pictured here at a UN

Department of Information briefing on



the refugee crisis. Let Jean introduce herself, in her own

words: "Last June I completed ten years as Province Leader and was given a year's sabbatical. I decided that UNANIMA would be part of the experience for me as with this group I found a 'home space.' I wanted to understand the filter by which issues get dealt with at the UN. Working in the area of justice for over 30 Years I wanted to be part of creating a more just and caring world! I also feel we are more than individual congregations, we are members of a worldwide group with a Global Vision. I want to be working for personal and systemic change for people and the earth. I see the experience as an adventure in Faith, Hope and Love." *(And in the opinion of the whole UNANIMA staff, Jean is a great asset to our office!)*

Call for Intern Applications for Fall: March 31st is preferred date for deadline!

NGO FORUM:

Before the UN Commission on Social Development, our NGO Committee on Social Development holds a Forum for civil society; it was very successful this year. The planning committee had made great efforts to engage participants from all over the world, and the energy level was high! This year the Forum was extended to two days, and several new features (e.g. an orientation, regional breakout sessions, and a reception) were added. UNANIMA staff helped with registration, served as recorders, moderated briefings, and served on a variety of committees that planned and executed the day. The spirit of the day has been captured in a YouTube video which can be accessed through this link: https://youtu.be/ah_5VBwUzIU .

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

Officials at the UN and civil society were watching this Commission with great anticipation. It was the first major UN event scheduled after the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were passed in September, and the UN



Paris Climate Change conference in December. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said "This is a crucially important time for humanity. The delivery of our mandate (from the SDGs, Paris) begins this year." After the excitement of the Forum, there were some disappointments in the Commission itself. This was a "policy" year so some resolutions were passed to be sent to the General Assembly, but—unlike at other commissions, we did not get access to the documents until they were already completed (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csod-social-policy-and-development-division/54th-session-of-the-commission-for-social->

development-csod54/csod54-draft-resolutions.html)) and there were limited opportunities to speak from the floor. However, there were some positive highlights: two women from civil society (Anna Martinez de Luco—a former UNANIMA intern and Vedruna sister!—and Cristina Diaz of ATD 4th World) gave stunning panel presentations. Our NGO committee presented a good *Civil Society Declaration*, centering on Inequality, to the Commission. And see the great banner we made to hang on the UN gates? To read the *Declaration*, go to the committee website at <http://ngosocdev.org/> click the *What We Do* button, and in the drop-down menu find *Commission for Social Development*. The *Declaration* is in English, French, and Spanish.

UNANIMA submitted a written intervention for the Commission. It is UN document number E/CN.5/2016/NGO/6 entitled "*Climate Change and its Impact on Social Development Today*." The entire office staff played a role in its writing, and we used an "on the ground" example from one of our interns. It was submitted jointly with the Dominican Federation, because collaborative documents are more likely to be accepted! You can find it on our website at <http://www.UNANIMA-international.org>

MOVING AHEAD WITH THE SDGs:

Much work has been done to mobilize around the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, but in many ways the hard work starts now. Our part is to be pioneers, advocates, implementers, campaigners, and watchdogs – and to ensure over the coming years that the promises made in 2015 are achieved. Last year we engaged in a series of meetings on how civil society should mobilize around the sustainable development agenda. Thanks to a group of NGOs, the building blocks of a strong and inclusive [global platform](#) have been established to support and

connect civil society's activities on sustainable development at local, national, regional and global levels. The platform will enable people to understand, engage, learn from each other and challenge decision-makers to be accountable for their sustainable development commitments. This platform is open to all members of civil society and is currently being facilitated by four global networks – [CAN International](#), [CIVICUS](#), [GCAP](#) and [IFP](#), over the coming months. You can read the [Action Plan](#) and engage on this [specific timetable of activities](#).

STILL FIGHTING FOR WATER:

After years of legal argument, Jessica Ernst, UNANIMA International's 2011 Woman of Courage, recently began a battle before the Supreme Court of Canada with a powerful Canadian energy regulator. Her case asks if a government agency can prevent a citizen from raising concerns about groundwater contamination, and suing it for damages. Eight years ago, Ernst sued the Energy Resources Conservation Board and Encana, one of Canada's largest unconventional gas drillers. She claimed her well water had been contaminated by fracking and that government agencies had failed to investigate the problems. But the regulator argued that it couldn't be sued, called her a "criminal threat" and barred all communication with her. Her case is being closely watched by Canada's oil and gas industry; in fact, Jessica's case is in the "top 10" list of important judicial decisions affecting the energy industry. Jessica is making legal history because the Supreme Court has never heard a case about human rights within an environmental context.

WHAT THOSE GIRLS ARE DOING:

With the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW60) coming up soon, the Working Group on Girls (WGG) has been busy preparing for girls around the world who will gather in New York for the

Commission. The WGG hosts a Teen Orientation, side events on girls' rights, violence, education, and advocacy, and makes an oral intervention--written and delivered by girls. WGG and other girls' groups strongly believe that to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality, girls must be empowered. This year, much of WGG's advocacy focuses on giving girls a seat at the table in negotiations and planning for the implementation of the 2030 agenda. Girls are the future, 2030 is their time, and their voices deserve to be heard and respected! UNANIMA has arranged for two of the girls to get passes to CSW60.

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submitted by Tori Larson

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2016:

This year the theme will be focused on how to build momentum ("Step It Up!") for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals—especially those dealing with gender equality ("Planet 50-50 by 2030!"), women's empowerment, and human rights. It's always an exciting day at the UN, full of energy and strong women! **Celebrate Tuesday, March 8!** We will tell you about this year's Commission on the Status of Women in the next issue of *Update*.



CLIMATE CHANGE:

After the Paris Conference we might want to raise our personal consciousness of climate change, so in the next few *Updates* there will be a series of short notes on this topic. For example, did you know that agriculture is among the greatest contributors to climate change? It emits more greenhouse gases than all cars, trucks, trains, and airplanes combined—largely from methane gas released by cattle and rice farms, nitrogen from fertilized fields, and carbon

dioxide from cutting forests. For Lent, some of us could examine our use of beef and foods / products that require the destruction of tropical forests (for example, read the ingredient labels on food to see how many packaged / processed foods contain palm oil.)

RESOURCE:

Two NGO groups with whom we work have produced a wonderful resource: a handbook on "*Making Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty.*" See

<http://franciscansinternational.org/handbook/>

There you will also find links to an introductory video with subtitles in English, French, Spanish, and German. For 2016 they are considering pilot implementation / trainings in six countries, tentatively: Benin, Kenya, India, Philippines, Argentina, and Bolivia. They will be very glad to hear any feedback or suggestions for increasing the dissemination and use of this resource.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES OF OUR MEMBERS:

One of our UNANIMA goals is to give our "grassroots" sisters an opportunity for input to the United Nations. Here are two examples of recent opportunities:

- Last fall and again this spring we invited our communities who have sisters in Haiti (**Daughters of Wisdom, Sisters of St. Anne, Religious of Jesus and Mary, Sisters of Providence, Carmelite Sisters of Charity Vedruna, Handmaids of the Sacred Heart, Holy Union Sisters** and **Society of the Holy Child Jesus** sisters) to submit



testimonies about their sisters' experiences of Human Rights for their country's Universal Periodic Review in Geneva later this year. Thank you to all the communities who sent us

information.
sisters in Haiti).

(Pictured are some **Vedruna**

- In preparation for our NGO Forum this year (see article above) the NGO Committee for Social Development tried something new: a regional meeting for civil society in Bucharest, Romania. UNANIMA communities with sisters in Romania—the **Sisters of the Divine Savior** and the **Congregation of Our Lady of Sion**—were notified, and some of their sisters did try to participate by webcast. This was a first attempt at a regional conference, and technological problems kept them from participating, but we congratulate them on trying! The conference was so successful that the NGO committee will try more regional gatherings next time. We will try to inform members in advance so that you can participate.

FLASH POINTS:

- Sister of the **Society of the Holy Child Jesus** Eunice Onuoha is involved in a wonderful « Bolgatanga Donkey and Cart Project.» The sisters or a donor donate a donkey and cart to a group of about 16 women who do various services for a village. They carry food, water, building materials or other necessities, and people pay them for jobs. With the money they earn they can pay for children's school fees, health insurance...The donation also includes weaving materials, which they convert into crafts and use the donkey to take them to market. The older women especially appreciate their new conveyance. The pictures Mary

Akinwale **SHCJ** sent were lovely, but—sorry—are not in a form that we can copy.

- We continue to reflect on the stories sent us from Aleppo by the **Religious of Jesus and Mary** in Syria. Many of the stories reflect the reality of the continued siege and its effect on women. They tell us that many men take advantage of the war conditions to abuse women and girls, like Mr. G, who beats his schizophrenic wife—not acknowledging her illness—and has fathered a son with a Muslim woman. When he is drunk he rapes one of his teenage daughters. The sisters try to intervene with him, to get the wife medicine, and to protect the three children.

- The **Congregation of Our Lady of Sion** in Canada are signing petitions, writing letters, having prayer services, and demonstrating outside government buildings to ask the Canadian government to send aid to Syria, and to simplify the application process for refugee status. An elder of a First People's tribe proclaimed that Syrian refugees were welcome to his territory, as the whole crowd chanted « Welcome. »



Thank you to all who have been sending pictures; we are using them in our new brochures and other publications!

- In India, Sister Rekha of the **Carmelite Sisters of Charity Vedruna** led a one-day women's training seminar on violence against women and children, for a group of 130 women from four villages. There was a sumptuous meal in the forest, and the women were educated on various issues, like domestic violence, abuse, witchcraft, and rape. The women shared their own experiences, on issues ranging from lack of potable water to alcoholism. There was speaker on child rights and issues like child marriages and orphans; and another on ecological topics like biodiversity. The women went home with the message that women are the channels of peace and healthy living in society.

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