

REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MINISTRY AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Mark Koenig and Ryan Smith

The 2016 report of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations to the World Communion of Reformed Churches' executive committee meeting features elements of the ongoing witness in the name of Jesus made possible by an ongoing presence at the UN in New York. This is not an exhaustive report.

This report covers the time period from March 2015 through March 2016. Much of the work referenced remains ongoing.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) holds special consultative status as a non-governmental organization with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. This allows the church to speak to a truly global audience and to contribute to its agenda by attending international conferences and events sponsored by the UN, making written and oral statements at these events and taking part in advocacy and networking. This recognition secures accreditation for specific consultation and participation at UN Commissions and with individual Programmes and Agencies.

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations represents the Presbyterian Church (USA) within the UN community. Policies of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (USA) guide the work of the ministry. Staff members consult with colleagues in appropriate programs and ministries of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Office of the General Assembly in this work. PC(USA) mission partners are also consulted.

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations represents the World Communion of Reformed Churches at the United Nations.

The ministry's work falls into two broad areas: to equip individuals and communities to engage in global discipleship and to advocate for justice and peace in the name of Jesus Christ, based on policies of the general assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Rev. Mark Koenig serves as the director of the Presbyterian Ministry to the United Nations. Mr. Ryan Smith serves as the Presbyterian representative to the United Nations.

Rooted in the Reformed tradition, we affirm that God, Creator and Sovereign of all, so loved the world that Jesus the Son was sent with a message of justice and peace, redemption and reconciliation. God calls us to serve as Christ's ambassadors, working for peace, justice, and reconciliation in a world where humanity and creation are wounded, broken, and in need of healing.¹ Together we seek life in all its fullness by:

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

1. Raising concerns for an end to violence, for justice, and for peace in meetings with representatives of Security Council member states arranged by the NGO Working Group on the Security Council, where Ryan sits on the steering committee. Countries of ongoing concern are **Colombia, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Israel and Palestine** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. Other countries and issues become the focus as the needs arise. Partner churches provide information that guides the implementation of PC(USA) policy and shapes the concerns for which we advocate. The protection of civilians, without regard for their religion, race, ethnicity or any other factor, is a central ask in all our advocacy work.
2. Hosting the Rt. Rev. Peter Gai, moderator of the **Presbyterian Church in South Sudan and Sudan**. The Rt. Rev. Gai met with representatives of the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, staff of the US Mission to the United Nations, and our NGO colleagues. Our work for peace in South Sudan included hosting a meeting of South Sudanese living in diaspora to talk about how they might support efforts toward peace.
3. Working with the NGO working group, **Ecumenical Women**, to pursue gender justice. The Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand is a member of Ecumenical Women. Our work for gender justice includes encouraging individuals and congregations to observe an Orange Day on the 25th of each month to witness and work for an end to violence against women and girls.
4. Engaging the **60th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (Commission)**. The main focus of the session was women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development. Our participation takes place in partnership with Ecumenical Women. Ryan co-chaired Ecumenical Women this year. Ecumenical Women's joint ecumenical statement to the Commission and the advocacy talking points that centered on ending violence against women and girls; addressing poverty, inequalities and climate changes as they impact women and girls; ensuring access to quality education, decent work, and decision-making for women and girls; ensuring full access to reproductive health and informed decision-making. In partnership with Ecumenical Women, and recognizing the historic Reformed emphasis on education, the PC(USA) focused on education as a way to empower women for breaking free from poverty and participating in sustainable development.

Highlights of our presence at this year's CSW include:

- Ms. Veronica Muchiri served as a member of the Presbyterian delegation.
- A parallel event on *Breaking Cycles of Poverty through Education: Models from Presbyterian Churches*. Speakers were: Ms. Wanda Beauman, vice moderator for justice and peace concerns, churchwide

coordinating team, Presbyterian Women Inc., in the Presbyterian Church (USA); the Rev. Carol Grant, United Nations convenor, Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand; Ms. Veronica Muchiri, National Women's Guild organizer/secretary, Presbyterian Church of East Africa; and Mr. Frank Dimmock, catalyst addressing the root causes of global poverty, Presbyterian World Mission, Presbyterian Mission Agency, Presbyterian Church (USA)

- The Presbyterian Church (USA) had the opportunity to make a statement during a meeting of the Commission.
5. Taking part in the NGO working group on **Israel-Palestine**. Mark served as co-chair of the working group. The working group partnered with the Permanent Mission of Malaysia and the Permanent Mission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to hold an Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Gaza. Arria-formula meetings are informal, confidential gatherings that allow Security Council members to meet on a specific topic and hear from people who normally would not have the opportunity to speak at regular meetings or consultations of the Council. The working group raised concerns with the UN General Assembly over proposed relocations of Bedouin communities both in the Negev and in Area C, specifically Susiya. The working group expressed its concern to the secretary general that the annex to his *14th Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict* failed to identify Israel's armed forces and armed Palestinian groups for committing grave violations against children in the occupied Palestinian territory. This failure came despite the recommendation of the special representative of the secretary general for children and armed conflict for their inclusion. Special attention was given to the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria and Palestinian children in military detention through educational events and advocacy.
 6. Participating as an NGO observer to the **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People**.
 7. Advocating for peace on the **Korean peninsula** and for the reunification of the peninsula. During the Commission on the Status of Women, our ministry organized an ecumenical witness at a parallel event that sought to deny that the experience of "comfort women" during World War II involved sexual slavery.
 8. Hosting **seminars** for 11 groups on topics such as human trafficking and the refugee crisis.
 9. Arranging presentations to the NGO community at the UN by Mr. German Zarate of the **Presbyterian Church of Colombia**; the Rt. Rev. Peter Gai, moderator of the **Presbyterian Church in South Sudan and Sudan**; PC(USA) mission co-workers Dr. Daniel and Ms. Elizabeth Turk on their work with the **Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM)**; the Rev. Sargez Benyamin,

synod executive of the **Evangelical Church of Iran**; the Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega Suárez of the **Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba** and the Rev. Daniel Izquierdo Hernandez of the **Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba**.

10. Offering worship resources for the **International Day of Peace** (September 21), **United Nations Day** (October 24), and **Human Rights Day** (December 10).
11. Partnering with UNICEF and the United States Fund for UNICEF to work on behalf of children. Encouraging participation in **Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF** that provides funding to support children worldwide. Encouraging participation in the **UNICEF Tap Project** that provides funding for clean water. Participating in US Fund for UNICEF's annual meeting focused on building a movement to put children first.
12. Promoting the **Red Hand Campaign** to establish an international consensus that children should not be used as soldiers. It asks states to ratify the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*—an international treaty committing states to address this issue. Three member states ratified, and one, Myanmar/Burma, signed the treaty in the time covered by this report.
13. Participating in the UN observance of **World Interfaith Harmony Week**. An interfaith seminar for youth from the Westchester Youth Alliance was held.
14. Promoting the work of the **Nonviolent Peaceforce** as a way to reduce violence and protect civilians in situations of violent conflict.
15. Working on issues of **human trafficking**. We continued to promote the Broken for You resource through social media and directly to groups who come to our office. We partner with ECPAT-USA on local business commitments to stop the commercial sexual exploitation of children and with the Freedom Network USA on a human rights based approach to trafficking. We also partner with the US Department of State, the US Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and the US Fund for UNICEF.
16. Addressing issues related to **international religious freedom** through participation in the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief and work with the Office of International Religious Freedom at the US Department of State.
17. Participating in the NGO Working Group on **Food & Hunger**, including briefing the chair of the Committee on World Food Security on the food and hunger concerns addressed by our partners. The working group held public events to educate the UN community about the global food policy and how it relates to women.

18. Advocating that human rights be honored and justice and peace pursued in **Colombia, the Philippines, and Nigeria**, in addition to the countries previously mentioned. Ryan attended the World Council of Churches consultation on the Democratic Republic of the Congo where members of other reformed churches in the DRC were present.
19. Participating in UN meetings and forums on **environmental justice**, including the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Presbyterian Church (USA) staff colleagues take the lead in this area.
20. Developing **young adult leaders**. Seven seminary students and four college students served with the ministry during this time period. A young adult volunteer, part of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Young Adult Volunteer program, will be with the ministry from August 2015 through July 2016.

We give thanks for all who have been partners in the work described above and who support the ministry through prayer, participation and financial gifts. We are particularly grateful for the ecumenical community at the UN.

A note for the **future**: we held conversations with Veronica Muchiri about the possibility of a representative of the World Communion of Reformed Churches attending each session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This seems an idea worth pursuing.

Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations social media presence:

- Web page: www.pcusa.org/un
- Blog: www.pcusa.org/blogs/swords-plowshares
- Twitter: [@PresbyUN](https://twitter.com/#!/PresbyUN)
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/PresbyterianMinistryUN

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