In this reflection on my time at the United Nations DPI Climate Change Conference and Mercy Global Concern Conference, “Bridging the Gap”.

I would like to begin by underlining some of the statements which made an impact on me, beginning with the affirmation of the bible text:

**MERCY & JUSTICE SHALL MEET**  
Psalm 85

*A Community of Conscience, organised and compassionate, will not go away.*

Fergal Keane, BBC Correspondent.

*There’s a time. RECOGNISE THE KAIROS MOMENT.*

Denise Coughlan RSM

1. **The needs of the poor takes priority over the wants of the rich;**

2. **The freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful;**

3. **The participation of the marginalised takes priority over the preservation of political order.**

David Hollenbach SJ

The experience in New York certainly reaffirmed my commitment to seek mercy and justice in every aspect of my ministry which, in the context of Sudan, is hardly to be taken for granted. I came to realise fully what a force the Mercy Congregation is, as Fergal Keane put it, *A Community of Conscience, organised and compassionate indeed,*

I came to understand how pertinent to our mission is the awareness of climate change; whereas previously I had viewed it as completely separate from the service of the poor. Yes, I had seen and been impressed by Al Gore’s Inconvenient Truth as affecting my personal lifestyle, but now I see it within the context of standing alongside the poor, giving them a voice when their very survival is at stake. The witness from the far corners of the earth, Salau, Maasai from Kenya, Mikhail from Siberia, Sr. Cecilia from Nigeria with others from Samoa and the Pacific, Indonesia and Australia, and from Newark on the doorstep of the UN, all testified to Mother Catherine’s dictate:

*The poor need help today.*

As Achim Steiner of UNEP emphasised in his presentation, the least responsible, individuals as well as nations, are the most vulnerable. *All affects all.* I took note, as an educator in Africa, how low levels of education, not to mention the complete lack of it, undermine awareness of this as of so many other important issues.
Among the presenters who impressed me most were those from the ARAVA Institute, Israel, sponsored by the Jewish Hadassah Foundation. Although there was much technical evidence and discussion concerning the water scarcity affecting their area, the overall message was one of joy at the opportunity to work together, - Arab, Israeli, Muslim, Jew and Christian from Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Syria - to find solutions. Just like Marilyn Lacey RSM launching her Mercy Beyond Borders Project, they had concluded that neither the problem nor the solution could be confined by national boundaries. These are not the voices we are used to hearing from conflict zones: a case for lobbying our reporters to look beyond the politicking and fighting.

Facts increase knowledge; imagination increases understanding, we were reminded by the New York journalist who summed up the Climate Change Conference for us with a poem, worthy of St. Francis, featuring Mother Earth.

I agree with him and was reminded in turn of words which struck a chord as we welcomed in song the new millennium almost seven years ago:

... Make us see what our stewardship must be:
All the gifts of your creation shared out equally.
... Like a living stream let MERCY flow;
Like a mountain high let JUSTICE grow;
Let the reign of God from sea to sea set captives free.

It was not then so difficult to make the transition from UN Climate Change to Mercy's Bridging the Gap. Indeed one of the first presenters, Martha Milner RSM, involved in projects like Mercy Housing, made us aware of the on-going devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Coast and the need to be there with the poor as they struggle to recover and to claim their rights from the hard-of-hearing authorities.

As I listened day after day in the building across the road from the UN, where the work of "monitoring the heart of UN" goes on, and saw their works of Mercy, was it pride to be one of these women, or horror at the challenges facing us around the world, which took first place? I found the involvement of Associates, like Ellen Vopicka, the challenge to our complacency and to our Church authorities over issues allowed to pass un-noticed, the courage of Angela Hartigan to face authority, the intellect of Carol
Ritner to comprehend and record, the initiative of Pat Griffith at home, Denise Coughlan in Asia, Margaret Farley and Eileen Hogan in Africa, to be totally inspiring.

*Such women answer the question,*

*"Who'll take my hand,*

*Who'll take a stand;*

*To give each a chance*

*In life's special dance?" by their every action.*

*And we know that they have prayed,*,

*Please, break my heart, o God*

*With what breaks your heart, o God.*  
*Compassion Song - Daughters of God - OCP Pub*

Even at the weekend, I found myself making connections which I will always value. On separate occasions there were demonstrations in the United Nations Plaza and nearby Dag Hammershod Park. I found solidarity with Burmese students drawing attention to the plight of Ahn Sang Su Ki and their families and colleagues at home and how much I have thought of them in the weeks since as the momentous events unfold there. I was happy too to be there as two Sudanese received an Olympic torch from an American Olympic Medal Winner and walked with protesters from the Sudanese Mission to the Chinese Mission appealing to China to acknowledge the spirit of the Olympic Games they are so keen to host and to bring that dream to Darfur.

The second week ended appropriately enough with a presentation by Jordi Llopart, European Coordinator of the Millennium Campaign: a return to facts and figures, the latest update on the *MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2000 - 2015.*

The picture is not rosy and there is little cause for complacency; many countries have fallen far behind in the commitment made on behalf of their citizens to reach out to the rest of the world, to act as one to address the consequences of inequality in rich and poor, male and female.
Jordi argued the need for people power to hold governments to account. He believes that action such as the Make Poverty History Campaign does really make a difference giving willing governments the mandate to meet their commitments while embarrassing the tardy.

He urged us to be aware of and to support forthcoming events like STAND AGAINST POVERTY, October 16 - 17, 2007, when campaigners throughout the world will be seen to stand up and be counted.

So has the gap between policy and practice in achieving the Millennium Development Goals been bridged? Has the time spent together in New York by twenty five Mercy Sisters from around the globe made any difference? Our awareness has certainly been sharpened and we have found strength in the mutual support of Mercy worldwide. It is up to us now to make it make a difference.

That the world be made new,

Keep your Gospel people true.

MAUREEN LIMER RSM

ENGLISH FEDERATION & SUDAN

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