‘Bridging the Gap’ Conference Report: Number 10

Mercy Global Concern
Unfinished Business: Effective Partnerships for Human Security and Sustainable Development
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When you speak, speak boldly!

This was certainly what happened at the Mercy Program Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice and the United Nations DPI-NGO Conference.

Mr. Jan Eliasson President of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly declared,
there can be no development without security…
there can be no security without development…
and there can be no lasting security and development without human respect.

Then I watched him take a glass and sip some water and state that for 1.2 billion people this is a luxury! Take a sip of water now and reflect on those words – for an unimaginable / insurmountable number of our fellow human beings that is a luxury! So Jan’s call to us is that we should be educated on these issues, create public awareness and take action. We are not called to do this alone, in fact we are called to work together, to work in partnership. It is not about those with the resources ‘giving’ to the poor. Such resources belong to all people. We are called to share the world’s resources among all humanity. We are called to live with respect for each other. As we strive to Bridge the Gap Between Policy and Practice, to hear the call, to respond to the call we also need to remember Jan’s words,

Without passion nothing happens in life BUT
without compassion the wrong things happen.

As we do this, do we not also align ourselves with the words of Bertrand Russell ‘three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind’?
I heard the words of the President of Bolivia:

The majority of resources benefit the minority. Everything that human beings produced was “universal property” and should contribute to the betterment of all humankind.

How will this information make a difference to our lives?

In the Session ‘Moving Development Forward, the Millennium Goals and Partnership’, I heard Mal Nuhu Ribadu (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Government of Nigeria) speak boldly of what he believes is required to move forward into the changing future. It is not to live on kindness of others but it is to work together and take responsibility. It is necessary to have structures which establish and maintain order and transparency. Killings, war and diseases will continue if we don’t take responsibility. He stressed the need to achieve this by establishing structures for justice and law and order.

In the same Session, I heard Christopher Sinckler (Caribbean Policy Development Centre) emphasize the desire and the effort to build partnerships in order to ‘build ourselves up, not to pull ourselves down’.

Poverty and extreme hunger are the result of systems. Whose systems? Who is in greatest need? How is this determined? Maybe the question is – Who will respond? Can we change the current situation? Do we want to change it? It was stated that the priority is sub Saharan Africa because of extreme need. One aspect of this extreme need is known because one in four children now live in or are affected by conflict situations. Yes that is what I heard.

I was still hearing but my gut was churning, my eyes were stinging and my heart was pumping. Somehow we sat and moved forward together in hope as we shared the snippets of our own mercy lives and how we respond to the call. We were indeed blessed to attend the Program which Deirdre Mullan with her expertise had so willingly prepared for us. Deirdre ensured the best of speakers would inform, invite and challenge us. As women of mercy we came from many countries and vast backgrounds and what a time we had! In order to come to another new day we needed to walk, sit, share a meal, see the sights of New York and ponder the life with which we have been gifted.

The energy of this Mercy group was very tangible as we discussed ways of addressing issues raised at both sections of our program. We shared our experiences, our knowledge, our hopes and our dreams. Continually returning to the question, “What can and will Mercy do together, throughout the world, to address the Millennium Development Goals?”.

At a seminar, a speaker asked the audience to raise your hand if you are over 45 yrs old. In Sierra Leone no hands would go up. Life expectancy is lower than 45 yrs. Of course there may well be people older than 45 yrs but for Sierra Leone and a number of other countries that is the life expectancy. How old are you? Where were you / will you be when you are 45 yrs?
More than 25 million people have died of AIDS since 1981 and there are more than 12 million AIDS orphans in Africa. Women account for 59% of all adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. How do you feel when you read these ‘statistics’ of fellow human’s lives? What is your response when you read, a pregnant African woman said “I don’t want my womb to be a tomb”?

Women bear a disproportionate burden in life because of AIDS. Global funds to fight AIDS are disappearing. AIDS exacerbates poverty. Only one in twenty people have access to medicine. (In developing countries people are often forced to walk long distances for medical assistance.) Women are powerless to force men to use safe sex as well as being forced to deal with the associated stigma, discrimination and gender violence.

But there are resilient people who find ways forward, people who share their dreams, form partnerships, and take action, bringing and living in hope.

The All-Africa Conference: Sister to Sister project was initiated in 2002 and is coordinated by Srs Margaret Farley and Eileen Hogan rsm. Sister to Sister offers Sisters in sub-Saharan Africa an opportunity to come together to empower each other, to unite in order to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic and to shatter the silence of shame. (http://allafrica-sistertosister.org/) If all (religious) women stood together on this issue… the AIDS situation would be different. We need to be resurrection people.

Margaret and Eileen’s presentation at the Mercy Program Bridging the Gap was inspiring, challenging and exemplified the strength of women working together. As with many of the presentations I wanted more. We watched the film “Yesterday”. The story is of a young mother, called Yesterday, who discovers she has AIDS. Her husband, a miner, who originally gave her the disease, rejects her. Her ambition becomes to live long enough to see her daughter, Beauty, go to school. I highly recommend this film. Your eyes, ears and hearts will surely be opened. (http://www.yesterdaythemovie.co.za/)

Sr Carol Rittner rsm shared her vast knowledge on the issues of genocide, including women and violence, “Beyond the Never Agains – Violence Against Women”. Carol stated violence against women is not accidental. In Rwanda 500,000 women were raped and violated in most extreme ways and many then held as sexual slaves.

I repeatedly heard:
2 billion people…
1 billion dollars…
2.5 billion people living on less than $2 a day
1 billion plus people with no access to clean water
900 + million dollars spent on war
100 million dollars is needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals
Income of the richest 2.7% people = income of the poorest 2 million people
1% of global economy could eradicate poverty overnight
22 million, 900 million etc etc

I repeatedly heard:
water sanitation…
mortality rate of children under five years of age…
malnutrition…
waterborne diseases…
children are unable to learn because of the lack of water and food and the fact that they are constantly affected by conflict…
HIV/AIDS
gender equity
women’s issues
genocide

Do we care so little?

Why is there failure to:
Invest
Protect
Lead… these truly are life and death questions.

In 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders agreed to a set of timebound (2015) and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. Placed at the heart of the global agenda, they are now called the Millennium Development Goals. Commitment is critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Signing is easy! Where are we on Millennium Development Goals since they were determined and agreed to by Governments? Certainly some countries have achieved or are well on the way to achieving some of these Goals. Where will we be by 2015? (http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

The Millennium Development Goals is an agenda of justice NOT charity.

How am I / are we contributing to the imbalance in our world? This question is for all of us.
If we want systemic change it is important to network, form partnerships and together Analyze, Reflect, Plan and Act.

So how do we move forward? Where do we find the vision that sees beyond the ‘what is’? Where do we find the courage to move forward? Real vision can’t be taught; it has to
arise from within, through conscious connectedness with the Source. There is a greater
call now for the prayer of contemplation - the silence of the body and mind which leads
to wisdom.

Let us pray that we do not lose confidence in our ability to heal and repair this fragile earth. May we see with the eyes of God, be
filled with the compassion of God and be moved to action (of God).

I saw and spoke with people from so many countries. I saw people who were longing to
meet, to hear, to experience another way forward, to have someone hear their story,
their struggle, their pain, their grief, their joy and their dreams. I saw collaboration. I
saw the surprised face, the longing look and I saw hope. I witnessed people being
congratulated for their words of insight, encouragement, challenge and understanding.
We move forward together – informed, with passion and compassion and with hope.

Days pass and the years vanish… it is now 2015…

What has been the collective voice of the Women of Mercy?

How has the Mercy vision and action impinged on our world?

My sincere thanks and appreciation to Deirdre Mullan for all she undertakes and enables through
Mercy Global Concern and to all who sponsored this Program.

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