



# The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – APRIL 2024

## From the NGO Desk

Last month, the [68th Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) occurred at the UN Headquarters. The focus was on poverty (10.3 percent of women live in extreme poverty), urging for reforms to enable countries to mobilize and invest resources in gender equality, specifically related to women and girls.

At the conclusion of the commission, a final [outcome document](#) was agreed to by member states and it highlighted the need for legal gender equality; access to health care, food, sanitation, water, electricity and to digital learning — all of which would improve the quality of life for women and girls. It is recommended that governments take this document home to their countries and work on improving their reality. As one colleague shared, even if countries picked just one area (ex. education) of the document, and gave this their attention and resources, that would be a success.

This was my second CSW, and with slightly more experienced eyes and ears, I learned that not only do we have to overcome political will (or lack of it) in achieving true gender equality, we must also address cultural beliefs, that in many parts of the world, view women and girls as inferior to men and boys.

This is expressed both implicitly and explicitly in practical terms. For example, in some parts of the world, girls cannot go to school because of their responsibilities at home in transporting clean water, among other daily needs. This widens the gap immediately between girls and boys, and research and experience tell us that education is the most important tool to move individuals out of poverty. As an extreme case, in Afghanistan, girls were recently banned from schooling beyond the age of 11.

In Africa, there are countries and regions where women do not have any right to land, and they may experience unexpected housing insecurity if their husband decides to have a new wife. Globally, housing insecurity for women is often directly related to domestic violence. There are also horrific examples of child mar-



riage, sexual violence and harassment, human trafficking, lack of medical care, among other social gender norms that treat women and girls differently.

In the [United States](#), and other developed countries, I do not have to tell you that we are not immune to gender inequality. Just consider the pay gap: Women make only 83.7 percent of what men are paid for full-time, year-long work. In [Canada](#), women make 71 percent of what men make.

Even on our college campuses in the United States, among undergraduate students, 26.4 percent of females experience rape or [sexual assault](#) through physical force, violence, or incapacitation. More than 50 percent of [college sexual assaults](#) occur in a student's first semester. This screams of how we are teaching and forming men to treat women without dignity and equality. What expectations are being set for a college experience? When you consider women who do not experience higher education, they are at an even greater risk for sexual violence for similar and different reasons.

So, where do we go from here?

We can begin by working on the local level. We must challenge and stand up to the conversations, policies, and measures that treat females differently. We need to highlight areas, no matter how insignificant that it may seem, recognizing how it is either contributing to equality of inequality.

We must also raise our voices to institutional leaders in our Church, governments, and political and civic



Women carrying water on their heads, near the city of Tanzania, Dar Es Salaam. Image by RM Photography

leaders, to all of our communities in which we are engaged, to demand something different. It doesn't have to be this way.

We must also advocate for equality on the global scale. The work of the Sisters of Charity Federation reflects practical and successful strategies that some governments are interested in hearing. We must raise our voices, and reflect the voices of those most impacted by this inequality.

Finally, let's keep this concern in our daily prayers. As we raise our collective voices, may we also collectively lift our hearts and spirit. Let us remain open to how we continue to be called to respond with action and love.

## World Social Summit

In 2015, 17 areas of injustice were identified in the [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#). Women and girls are directly impacted in all these goals. The goals were intended to be met by the year 2030, but this will not happen. As a result, the UN is seeking to accelerate these goals and to explore new strategies aimed at social justice, solidarity, harmony, and equality within and among countries.

A Second World Social Summit for Social Development will occur in September 2025 (this is the 30th anniversary of the first Social Summit in Copenhagen). In preparation for the Second World Social Summit, a Summit of the Future occurs this September. The Summit will explore not only the SDGs, but also respond to the increasing global crises. This follows the General Assembly from Sept. 22–23 at the UN headquarters.

## Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

For the next two weeks, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is occurring at the UN headquarters.

JCoR (Justice Coalition of Religious) produced this [helpful guide](#) for virtual participation. Our specific focus is recognizing the government systems of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous youth, financing, and Indigenous women.

During these two weeks, please consider this prayer of solidarity:

*Let us pray...*

*Creator and Sustainer of all life, we lift up the Indigenous Peoples of the world.*

*Guide our efforts throughout the Permanent Forum, as we advocate in solidarity with our Indigenous sisters and brothers.*

*Help us collectively cultivate a global community that recognizes the value of Indigenous wisdom, culture, and tradition.*

*May we pass onto future generations this Earth and all the gifts of Creation that You have provided to us.*

*Let us elevate Indigenous youth for they are the fruit of the prayers of their ancestors. May the ears and hearts of our policymakers be open to youth voices and the messages they share.*

*We especially pray for support for Indigenous youth on their path to lead the communities of our future. Amen.*

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