

## **My Experience at the United Nations by Bro. Brian Halderman, S.M.**

I had the distinct honor of attending two and half days (Feb 8, 9 and 12) of the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development at the United Nations. Sponsored by the UN Department for Economics and Social Affairs (ECOSOC), this year's theme was, "Promoting Full Employment and Decent Work for All." My attendance was made possible through our NGO, Marianists International staffed by Bro. Steve. O'Neil. We currently hold consultative status with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). Another Catholic NGO (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur) with ECOSOC consultative status sponsored me for clearance to the proceedings.

This was my first experience in such an international meeting and found it to be rather fascinating. I had done my homework, by reading the Secretary General's report to the commission on the topic of employment, this gave the background for the member states to respond over the first two days of the commission. I heard reports filed by Turkey, Russia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Egypt, Mexico, among others. The member states shared about their own realities in dealing with employment for all and how the impact of globalization changes how we look at labor and migration issues.

Much learning occurs at the commission side events during the lunch break from 1 – 3 pm in the afternoon. On Thursday, I attended a session hosted by the International Baha'i Community on *Education: the Key to Youth Empowerment*. I heard about the best practices of youth development programs being funded by the Christian Children's Fund in Mexico and an education program in Guyana funded by a Baha'i foundation.

On Friday, the side event sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Finland,

introduced a new text entitled *Comprehensive Social Policies for Development in a Globalizing World*, it is the work of several economists and development experts on comprehensive development strategies for countries. The deputy ministry for development from Finland moderated the session with presentations from the Development Ministry of South Africa (considered to be a model of comprehensive development), the World Bank, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs



(DESA), a delegate representative from Zimbabwe, and discussants from the governments of Sweden and Germany. It was the most interesting session of my time at the UN.

As reports were filed and best practices presented to the member states, much of my learning from my Masters in Social Work program at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University became helpful. My training even helped me question some of the best practices being presented to the member states, for some of them seemed rather inadequate in having long term impacts at alleviating poverty and creating sustainable employment.

I would encourage others in the Marianist Family with an interest in international development to visit the United Nations and experience the high level conversations that impact millions of impoverished people around the world. More learning occurred for me in the two and half days at the UN than I could ever gain from any book describing the diplomatic actions and exchanges of ideas that seem ever more critical in our shrinking world. The role of the United Nations will continue to play an important role in furthering social and economic development in our world.

Marianists International provides an important voice for the Marianist Family in international diplomatic strategies to rid the world of poverty. There is great potential and opportunity for further growth of our NGO and the ability to impact conversations that effect millions of people who lack a voice. I encourage the Marianist Family to become familiar with the work of Marianists International and be attuned to ways that we can collaborate with Bro. Steve O'Neil in furthering our efforts to build a more just and equitable world.

