



# FINAL REPORT

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**As I put pen to paper to write this final report/reflection as the Executive Director of Mercy Global Concern (MGC), one word keeps rising to the surface: *Gratitude*. My final paper is not a list of meetings attended, statements submitted, books published or workshops organized, but rather a short story about a journey, and the people on the journey who continue to make Mercy Global Concern the one place in the world where the Mercy Family can meet to make a difference.**

Little did I know, when I accepted the invitation to come to New York City and the United Nations, what lay in store for me. I come from a city with two names – Derry and Londonderry – a place of great hearts, generous and creative spirits, but also a place which has known deep sadness, a city that has borne its fair share of the Irish Troubles. And so, on October 1, 2001, I left behind my family, community, friends and wonderful Ministry of Education to embrace the great unknown. I crossed the Atlantic Ocean with some trepidation and arrived to a city in turmoil. It was just a few weeks after the horrific events of 9/11. I felt strangely at home in the chaos!

The United Nations has always represented the embodiment of the “world’s conscience” and is the place where governments assemble to enshrine their legal

and moral commitments. It is the home of international rules that, if followed, would breed great peace and security and, if it was up to the task, could challenge the barbarism and lawlessness of our times. When I arrived to take up my position, I realized very quickly that if I was to be effective as a player in this system, I had to *reach out and bring the outside in*. And so began my journey as the representative of Mercy International Association at the United Nations.

So many people, so much to learn in a steep learning curve. I focused immediately on the Mercy Public and so began our series of booklets to educate, engage and inform our Sisters, associates and friends about the great issues of the day, and the potential we have at our fingertips right here at the UN to engage with governments all over the world. There is no time for silence here!

Over the years, I have observed that our justice-doing as religious women is notoriously naïve and ignorant about the systemic nature of poverty. Most of the work we do on poverty eradication is mere tokenism. We give generously to poor people and in so doing, we exonerate governments from addressing what is primarily a political problem. Teaching advocacy skills is key to addressing this issue.

One of my first commitments was to join Religious at the UN (RUN), which turned out to be one of the most effective organizations in place here. RUN works as a





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creative network, operating in a consistent and collaborative way with a quality of engagement and monitoring that puts many governments to shame. I am deeply indebted to the men and women religious with whom I have worked and walked the corridors of the UN for the past ten years.

I also learned very quickly that to work at the UN one needs to have a clear and strong vision of what is possible; to be open to discovering what gives life; to dream the impossible and design and reconstruct another world view, or to think outside the box with a boldness that is about destiny and empowerment for all. It is to create the space to think differently or, as professional photographer Dewitt Jones says so eloquently, "Creativity is the ability to look at the ordinary, and see the extraordinary." Embracing the idea of Universal Citizenship is key to working in a collaborative way in the socio-political environment of the UN. The Irish poet John O'Donohue describes it in this way:

*...The industry of distraction  
Makes us forget  
That we live in a universe  
And we become converts  
To the religion of stress  
And adore its deity of progress,  
That we may have the courage  
Not to stay lost  
In the familiar places  
But come to kneel down  
Before the poor  
To discover what we must do  
To turn our anxiety  
Into righteous anger,  
And find our way home.<sup>1</sup>*

As I began to live my life in ever-widening circles, my worldview widened. Through meeting or visiting with our Mercy Family all over the world, I no longer felt just a citizen of Ireland and gradually adopted the concept of becoming something bigger and more inclusive. As I interacted and met our members, I came to know that many of our Sisters live fully – though not in the glare of the spotlight – what we are supposed to be about as Sisters of Mercy. For me, they have continuously represented the living witnesses who bring the Beatitudes to life; they respond to Mercy and our Christian endeavours with integrity and a passion for life. At times, when I have felt discouraged or lonely, I remember those of you in the classrooms, clinics, hospices, slums and *barrios* who bring energy and receive energy, renaming and claiming the truth about God. When I think about what you attempt to do, I am reminded what Irene Claremont De Castillejo says:

1. John O'Donohue, *A Book of Blessings*, Transworld Publishers, London, 2007, pp. 163-164.





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Only a few achieve the colossal task of holding together, without being split asunder, the clarity of their vision alongside an ability to take their place in a materialistic world. They are the modern heroes... Artists at least have a form within which they can hold their own conflicting opposites together. But there are some who have no recognized artistic form to serve this purpose, they are the artists of the living. To my mind these are the supreme heroes in a soulless society.<sup>2</sup>

Many memories flash before my eyes as I look back with gratitude on these past ten years. The "Bridging the Gap" conferences and the brave new world which

so many desire await our creative engagement. The Mercy women who travelled across continents and oceans to be part of eight "Gap" teams ignited a flame of interconnectedness by offering each other a creative way of engaging with and imagining the conditions required for transformative change to happen.

When schools and colleges came to visit our Mercy office at the UN, young minds and hearts, filled with the passion of youth, offered and challenged MGC to think about developing and linking with this unique opportunity to create a vision of networking with agencies and organizations committed to transformative justice. I know that many of our young people were invited to step out of the comfort zones of the local, the national and the confines of our various structural configurations, into the international global arena, where the values of the Reign of God confront us in those who are displaced, unwanted, hungry and deprived in a world of plenty.

As I close the door of Mercy Global Concern for the last time, I do so with a heart full of gratitude.

2. Irene Claremont De Castillejo in *The Heart Aroused* by David Whyte, Doubleday, 1994, p. 1.





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- To the women and men who have become my colleagues and friends at the UN, thank you.
- To the people in the UN Systems who never forgot their roots as members of civil society, especially Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary General of Asia Pacific and former Executive Director of UNIFEM, for her example, wisdom, advice as a member of the MGC advisory board and especially for her friendship. Thank you, Noeleen.
- I thank my friend Carol Rittner, RSM for her friendship and support over the past number of years. Thank you, Carol.
- To Ellen Vopicka, the faithful friend of Mercy Global Concern, who supported and financed many of the creative initiatives which set MGC apart as a place of advocacy and learning. Thank you, Ellen.
- To Pat Hartigan, for having the vision and foresight over 30 years ago to get the Sisters of Mercy ECSOC status, and who again and again found ways to support and encourage the many projects we delivered over the years. Thank you, Pat.
- To all of YOU who took part in the "Gap" programmes and other MGC seminars, internships and activities for your wisdom, commitment and sense of dreaming. Thank you.
- I thank Anne Walshe at Fraynetwork Multimedia for her careful editing of the hundreds of pieces which I sent every week and for her faithfulness to the story.
- I thank Don Mullan, Glen Powell and Wendy Whitworth for their help over the years.
- I thank the members of Mercy International Association over the years for their support and encouragement.
- I am grateful to the MGC advisory team who were always at the end of the phone and travelled many miles, leaving aside their own schedules, to support the work of Mercy at the UN.
- I thank very specially all my family and friends especially Moya, Ann, Assumpta, Deirdre Mary, Michael, Cartherine, Teresa, Nellie and Paschal for their calls, letters, emails and encouragement over the years. You were constant bridge-builders and your voice and news from home kept me both grounded and connected to the ordinary.
- Finally, I thank the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Ireland, especially the Northern Province, for encouraging me to apply for and avail myself of this unique opportunity to engage with the perils and possibilities of our time.

As I discern the many offers I have for the next stage in this exciting life, I am reminded of the words of author and philosopher Howard Thurman: ***"Don't just ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and then go do it, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."***

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