

KOLPING AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The fourth goal in the Preamble to the UN Charter is to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

The Commission for Social Development was established at the outset in 1945 to insure that the aim of better lives for all is met. To be more explicit, we view social development as including health, education, and the needs of special social groups such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities who are often marginalized. For us NGOs, this means a people centered development.

As you know, Kolping has a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and I have been privileged to serve as the Kolping representative to the United Nations for the past twelve years. During this time I have come in contact with many other Non Governmental organizations, and we seem to have many things in common

- For the most part, we are direct service providers with networks on the ground
- We represent the interests of civil society
- Many of us are committed to championing the interests of those often excluded, particularly those living in extreme poverty.
- We collaborate with other NGOs and NGO Committees to work in partnership with governments and the UN in order to insure people centered development agendas.

As evidence of that collaboration and partnership, Kolping has joined three other NGO communities; the NGO Committee on Social Development, the International Catholic Organization Information Centers and the NGO Committee on the Family. I have been in frequent dialogue with each of these organizations over the years in work shops, conferences, think tank sessions, side events and the like working together to help member States develop policies to achieve the mandates of the UN Charter and the various Conventions agreed to in the past years, including the eight Millennium goals. I also use these opportunities to educate people about that five hundred thousand world wide Catholic lay organization we all belong to known as the International Kolping Society.

Speaking of the Millennium Goals, the first of these is the pledge to eradicate poverty. A first step is to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty (incomes under \$1 a day) by 50% by the year 2015. However, it wasn't until last year that agreement was reached to add a subset which postulated that a strong focus on employment and work would be the main vehicle towards achieving this ambitious goal.

The theme of this year's 46th Session of the Commission for Social Development was “**PROMOTING FULL EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL**” provides evidence of that commitment. This nine day session is one of the most important meetings of the year during which civil society gets a chance to express its opinions via written intervention and influence the commission's output document with suggestions and comments to members and staff. It is no coincidence that the five year theme adopted for Kolping families around the

world at last year's International Convention in Alsopahok, Hungary centers on the world of work. The Christian concept of work as espoused in the principles laid out by Father Kolping in his writings and the Catholic Church in her encyclicals indicate that human work is not only a necessity to earn a living, but also an opportunity for self development and a service to the community. The Kolping Society places special emphasis on fashioning a world of work that embraces human dignity.

To this end, the International Kolping Society and the Association of Charities jointly submitted an excellent and well received intervention to the Commission for Social Development. This was the product of a dialogue between member unions of the German Federation of Unions and a working group of the German Commission for Justice and Peace. A statement such as this has to be submitted in writing several months in advance to be considered for acceptance, translated into 6 languages, and then distributed to member states for their consideration. This was accomplished and the statement now sits in the UN records as E/CN.5/2008/NGO/2. Do not bother to write that down since we have loaded the document into the Kolping USA website. You can read it in its entirety at www.Kolping.org and then click on Kolping Society at the United Nations.

The eighteen paragraph statement in summary points out that work promotes peoples creativity, flexibility and self realization; that the "right to work" and "rights at work" are linked to provided decent work; that basic training, further training and a stable social security system promotes secure social peace; that education, subsidized training and access to micro credits will go a long way to easing the problems of informal workers who total almost two thirds of the working population in many countries. Elimination of undue bureaucracy and establishment of legal security leads to the creation of more jobs and makes it easier to enforce core labor standards. Legislatures must make this happen..

Meanwhile, a Civil Society Forum was convened the day before the opening of the session of the Commission for Social Development was to begin. Under the leadership of the NGO Committee for Social Development, we (Kolping and about 200 other members from a variety of NGOs) spent the day listening to presentations and breaking out into groups trying to forge a document that would become the Civil Society Declaration, "**Making Copenhagen Work: Decent Work for a Decent Life.**" On the following morning our statement was read into the record and presented to the Commission as the first order of business. Highlights are as follows:

- We affirmed that when we put people at the center of everything we do to assure full employment and decent work for all, we take the first step in making a decent life possible for every member of society.
- We recognized that employment is not only a response to societal needs, but it also contributes to the well-being of the person, the family and the community.
- We reaffirmed the central importance of employment and decent work to poverty eradication and social integration.
- We proposed that governments alleviate the plight of women in poverty by finding creative ways to remunerate unpaid work such as child care, care of the aging and the critically ill.

- We proposed that governments adopt a consultative framework for dialogue with key stakeholders, including representatives of civil society.
- We called for a strong resolution on the priority theme with a clear, well-defined mechanism for follow-up and accountability including using the ILO's decent work indicators.
- We also recommended that the subject of full employment and decent work be taken up as a thematic debate in the General Assembly.

One other item of significance and interest occurred in the fall of last year. The Vatican invited the International Kolping Society to participate in a "FORUM OF CATHOLIC INSPIRATION NGOs" in Rome from November 30 to December 2. Invitations were extended to organizations that have official recognition or status with one or more inter-governmental institutions, that are Catholic or of Catholic inspiration and that have a global operational or policy building scope. In New York, Kolping's membership in the International Catholic Organizations Information Center and many years of working with the Director of that group, Sr. Dorothy Farley has given Kolping exposure to Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio and the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the UN. Part of the reason for the forum was to foster mutual knowledge and synergy with the Holy See and its representatives.

The Forum was to provide an interactive space for the participants to share their experiences, priority areas and challenges in their important commitment to working for the dignity of the human person in the Community of Nations. Mr. Hubert Tintelott represented Kolping at this unusual opportunity. The idea of how to better improve the dialogue and interaction of NGOs of Catholic inspiration and the Holy See at the international level is still being addressed.

I must admit that in the subsequent meetings that I attended there does not appear to be a readily achieved consensus on how to bring this effort to a successful conclusion. Indeed, the future of the ICO centers also seems to be in doubt. Many of the religious orders who have NGO status are not ready to relinquish their own specific agendas or missions to focus on Church directed objectives. Catholic lay organizations on the other hand do not have the logistics or organization to band together to form a large single voice coalition. Nonetheless, we continue to meet and hopefully, one day, some positive results will emerge.

One of the things that excite me most about my work at the United Nations is that I have many opportunities to talk about Kolping. As a member of the International Board of Directors for the past five years, I have had the unusual opportunity of observing first hand just how amazing the work of the Kolping community is, in so many different countries addressing so many different problems.

For example, this past May we had our International Board meeting in Sucre, Bolivia. Our accommodations were the brand new Kolping hotel situated on the side of a hill at one end of Sucre overlooking the city. The people here are very poor with many of the children offering to shine shoes constantly and others offering little pieces of candy for sale. Even the airport has only one runway and no radar to assist planes in landing. At approximately 7000 feet of elevation, if the pilot can not see the runway, he doesn't land and you wait for the next

day to try again. There are only two flights a day into Sucre. One afternoon we were able to visit the local Kolping training center. We found about 10 women engaged in hair cutting, facial beauty treatments, manicures and the like. Father Roland immediately volunteered to get a free haircut, and he later exclaimed that they treated each strand with reverence! We also visited the rooms where they taught sewing, a meditation room with a golden bust of Father Kolping predominantly displayed as well as religious Kolping literature, and a kitchen where courses in cooking and food preparation were taught. The kitchen was only capable of holding eight people, but an additional 20 people could take a course standing outside and observing, particularly the food presentation. My wife was thrilled with the variety of fingernail designs that were available.

One evening we had a large dinner celebration with a large number of Bolivian Kolping families from all over the country. They were celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Obra Kolping. In attendance were about 25 members of Kolping Switzerland helping share the celebration. It was Kolping Switzerland who partnered with Bolivia all these years and continues to maintain that relationship even today.

I will not bore you with details of our travails regarding luggage, diverted flights, missed connections etc., except to say that some people had real difficulties. Andrew required 4 days to travel from Vietnam and Msgr. Axel was missing the luggage with his vestments, speeches and gift presentations for almost the entire week. Suffice it to say, we flew to Santa Cruz for a ten hour stop before proceeding on to Miami. While there, we had lunch at the Kolping House and were given a room to freshen up in or to take a nap. We chose to visit the Kolping clinic that I had heard so much about. What an amazing sight! Here was this five story tall building with beautiful glass entrance way and a big orange and black letter **K** on top of the building for the world to see. The first door to the right contained a very modern looking facility for eye care and indeed, about eighty thousand pairs of glasses are sold by Kolping there each year. It really is impressive to see so many little translucent envelopes lined up in rows all containing the customers order, all imprinted with the Kolping log on them.

Other offices offered a variety of doctor services. The waiting room contained posters showing the stages of a baby's development in the womb and encouraging delivery and safe birth as opposed to abortion. The doctors only work there a few days a week and then return to their own practices. But they really like to participate because they have access to the lab where blood work can be done. In addition to this facility, there is another Kolping clinic attached to the Kolping House. People are lined up at seven in the morning to get a visit with a doctor. And another Kolping clinic is being built right next door. Remember however that this is Bolivia, so that you still see the 5 gallon can of freshly mixed cement being hauled up several stories via rope and pulley, then lowered again over and over. You can see the outer perimeter between one floor and the other being supported by what appears to be three inch thick tree branches. I have some photos that I brought with me that I can show you later if you wish.

And the most amazing thing is that the cost of a ten minute visit with a doctor of your choice is only 17 Bolivianos, or about two and one half dollars. Of course, depending on the diagnosis, other visits with specific doctors may be necessary at additional cost. This is an extremely successful and well respected operation to the point where I understand that some

Cuban doctors want to come and offer their services for free, just so they can practice medicine

When I meet with the NGO Committee on Aging, and we discuss the rights and needs of that ever expanding population called the elderly, I can relate to them the Kolping facility built in Vienna which not only is a modern facility with wide halls, elevators, wheel chair accessible, and reflecting pools with lots of flowers and greenery, but is also a facility with a wing for single and unwed mothers and their children. This interaction between the young children and the elderly benefits both age groups and is delightful to witness.

When we talk in the UN about the need to communicate better electronically, about being able to view presentations and attend meetings via the internet, I am reminded about the goals father David sets out for his Kolping families, to improve the yield of their farm plots by teaching them about that very latest technological advance called composting.

At the forums or discussions groups organized by the NGO Committee on the Family, I often find examples to offer regarding life skills training in South Africa, the necessity to get the mother and father to agree to let their child be trained, for that child will be different than all the other children in the community. At the conference on the status of women, I support the efforts to fight for the right of women to own property, to be treated with dignity and not as chattel. I support efforts to outlaw gender mutilation, the selling of young girls into sexual slavery. I talk about the Kolping success stories with micro credit in India, the stories of young women learning to sew and ultimately hire others to help them with their small business. I talk about fathers in South Africa who were unable to be successful with micro credit loans while their wives were successful. I talk about the special efforts made by the Kolping families to provide counseling to these fathers to hold the families together.

Earlier this year I was approached by a Jesuit priest teaching at the University of Loyola, Father Tom was on sabbatical for a year to write a book about the history of Catholic NGOs at the United Nations and had heard about the Kolping Society from the ICO center He wanted to interview me regarding our history and work at the UN, so one day, we spent an entire morning together; Father Tom asking questions, taking copious notes and me telling him the Kolping story from inception to today. If and when the book makes it into print, Father Tom has promised to send me a copy.

Later on this year at the invitation of Sr. Dorothy Farley I will be speaking to the Dominican order of nuns at their convent regarding the life and times of Father Kolping and the work of the International Kolping Society.

I have been truly blessed to see first hand the great work that God does through the hands of his servants, the community of the Kolping brothers and sisters. I am honored to be able to share these experiences with you. Thank you for allowing me to do so.

John Reitter