

Around the Global Roundtable

By Ryan D. Smith, Presbyterian Representative to the United Nations

If you are a Presbyterian, you are probably used to being involved in advocacy. Whether it is a congregational committee, a session, a Presbytery, a Synod, or in your local town, state or federal government, you have probably been involved in advocacy for quite some time. You know that you must adapt your advocacy to the particularities of each new issue. Advocacy for your session is different than advocacy with your state representative, and advocacy at the United Nations is different too.

When you advocate, you usually do so as part of a constituency. At the United Nations, constituencies are a bit different. The principal organs of the United Nations System include the Trusteeship Council, the Security Council, the General Assembly—which oversees funds and programmes of the UN, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. Each of these bodies makes decisions differently. Each UN Member State has a vote in the General Assembly. General Assembly resolutions show a broad global consensus but have no binding nature to them. Security Council decisions are made in a fifteen-member body, five of whom retain a veto power. Security Council decisions are globally binding.

Advocacy in each of United Nations setting is specific. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and the Department of Public Information (DPI), part of the United Nations Secretariat, accredit nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for their work. Accreditation with DPI allows groups to help the United Nations system disseminate information. DESA and ECOSOC accredit specialized NGOs to speak to the United Nations at a variety of levels on a variety of topics. There are three levels of ECOSOC accreditation. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) holds special status with ECOSOC.

Through our ECOSOC status, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is able to submit statements to commissions and work of the Council reflecting priorities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is through the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s General Assembly policy that the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations advocates. The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations focuses our advocacy priorities based on PC(USA) General Assembly policy.

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations also equips and inspires Presbyterians for global discipleship. One such opportunity for global discipleship is to experience the United Nations system through our seminar program. Groups can arrange a seminar on a variety of topics and learn from UN speakers as well as tour the United Nations. It is through this education that Presbyterians are better able to advocate within their constituencies for issues they care about at the United Nations.

Another advocacy avenue available to Presbyterians are campaigns such as the Red Hands Campaign. The Red Hands Campaign is an international effort to advocate with United Nations member states to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention

on the Rights of the Child, which commits world governments to stop the use of children as soldiers. The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, in partnership with the Office of Child Advocacy and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, make it possible for individuals, groups or congregations to create Red Hands and join the campaign. The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations then shares the Red Hands that we receive with representatives from world governments who have not committed to the Optional Protocol.

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations also engages with the broader NGO community at the United Nations. Guided by PC(USA) General Assembly policy, the Ministry takes part in NGO working groups on Food and Hunger, the Security Council as well as other issue and country specific groups. Working together, the coalitions have a broader reach to change UN policy and make our global community livable.

One way that Presbyterians have been very active in advocacy at the United Nations is through the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW meets annually to make a set of concrete recommendations for action on women's rights by governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, to be implemented at the international, national, regional and local level. Each year, the Presbyterian delegation to the CSW grows and gains momentum in affecting change to support women's rights within the United Nations. The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations works with our ecumenical partners to bring Christian women's voices to the forefront of these global negotiations.

I encourage you to contact the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations to learn more about the work that we are doing, ways that you or your congregation can get involved. May our work in global discipleship bring forth a new time where compassion, peace and justice are recognized globally.