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GENERAL COUNCIL

IRAN: WAR AGAINST UNVEILED WOMEN

Sr. Maria Cristina Gavazzi CSJ

General Council



Despite silence in the media and global public opinion, repression against women who remove the veil in public is returning in Iran. The international news agency Reuters has confirmed that since last April 13, the day Tehran launched its first direct attack against Israel, the Ayatollahs ordered the morality police (Ershad) to return to patrolling the streets to catch women without the veil.

It all began again with

a video which went viral showing a woman slumped to the ground in Tajrish, a neighborhood in the north of Tehran. The young woman had a panic attack after a loud argument with an Ershad team who, according to witnesses, accused her of not wearing the obligatory veil. "It's war against women" is the new hashtag on social media.

Targeted by the so-called morality police are not only women who show up in the

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Women protesting (source: newspaper La Repubblica)

streets without a veil, but also businesses and individuals who dare to defy Sharia, the Islamic law according to which women are obliged to cover their hair and wear long, loose clothing. The objective is to respond to the demands of devout citizens who are angry about the growing number of women unveiled in public.

"We do not force anyone to become religious, but violating the rules cannot be ignored and the agents must fulfill their duties" affirmed the supreme leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, in his discourse at the conclusion of Ramadan. In the universities, students are once again mobilizing. But the crackdown of the regime puts in the crosshairs, above all, the journalists who are active in human rights. Having refused to wear the veil, the

journalist Dina Ghalibaf was arrested. While in London, the well-known anchorman of Iran International, Pouria Zeraati, was kneecapped. Imprisoned as well was Aida Shaharami, the older sister of sixteen year old Nika Shakarami, killed in the winter of 2023 during the height of the protests for Mahsa Amini.

Announcing the new campaign on state TV, the head of the Tehran police said: "The police of Tehran and other cities will take action against those who violate the law concerning the hijab," as hundreds of police invaded city streets.

For the activists and political opponents, the initiative is aimed not only at imposing the veil but, above all, at discouraging any greater dissent during a particularly

vulnerable time for clerical rulers, also because of the conflict in the Gaza Strip in which Tehran is considered a major player.

The law requiring the veil became unbearable after the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a Kurdish-Iranian student who died while in the custody of the "morality" police in September 2022. That rebellion, put down with blood, led to the death of almost 600.

Nonetheless many Iranian women are not going back. In recent months they have felt free to show their hair in a necessary act of civil disobedience for which, from the prison where she is still held, even 2023 Nobel Peace Prize winner Narghes Mohammadi, a longtime human rights activist, has repeatedly appealed.

REFUGEES: FIGHTING FOR HOPE, SOWING PEACE

Sr. Mariapia Sberna CSJ

Italy



There is a constantly growing number of displaced persons in the world: 117.3 million who, at the end of 2023, were compelled to flee from

their country because of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations; 1 person in 69 at the global level. This has emerged from the last Report on Global

Trends of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN agency for refugees.

At the end of 2023 there were 43.3 million refugees and others needing



international protection. More than 73% of refugees come from only five countries: Syria (6.4 million), Afghanistan (6.4 million), Venezuela (6.1 million), Ukraine (6 million) and Sudan (1.5 million). The dramatic reality that is found in the increase in these numbers is tied to the failure to resolve past global crises, which have been compounded by new conflicts born in an ever more complex international setting.

On the occasion of the International Day of Refugees this year, celebrated every year on June 20, the Centro Astalli organized a symposium on migration with the theme: "Refugees: fighting for hope, sowing peace."

This symposium on migration, was held on June 13, in collaboration with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Pontifical Gregorian University. The speakers were Archbishop Rino Fisichella of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelization and Prof. Tito Boeri, an Italian economist. It was moderated by a journalist of a newspaper which focuses on finance, politics and culture. Fardusa, a Somali refugee, opened the meeting.

Increasingly accustomed and continually exposed "from a distance" to scenes of war, destruction and suffering, we all run the



risk of losing empathy, that feeling which prompts a response to the needs of the other.

As the world order becomes ever more fragile, we are gradually seeing a progressive tightening of the policies of welcome in Europe. This is at the expense of the people fleeing persecution, violence, war and crises due to climate change, who are seeking asylum in Europe.

What is happening should disturb us, in the sense of shaping our conscience. What is in danger is human dignity. The question of migration continues to not be addressed from the point of view of those who set out on the journey: persons seeking hope, freedom, peace, in a "different place" where they meet indifference and discrimination.

At this moment in history it would be more than fitting to think about a policy of welcome able to create opportunities for people to meet, for dialogue and integration, so it will no longer be the weak who bear the burden of a system that creates ever-higher barriers, walls and fences through which the Europe of human rights is being shattered.

"To affirm rights means to not looking away when faced with migrants," said the Italian president, Sergio Mattarella, in his closing remarks.

The 2024 World Day of Refugees was an opportunity to reflect on the protection of human rights for all and on the ways forward together to build a society that is truly free and open to difference, able to recognize and respect diversity.

ADVOCATING AND ACTING IN FAITH FOR OTHERS

Sr. Ann Kane CSJ

USA



The Sisters of the United States Province participate with heart and soul, prayer and presence, penned words and voice, with passionate advocacy and action, in every effort to bring about social justice and equity, throughout the country but especially in the Hartford area of the State of Connecticut. They do this in many ways but especially through their membership in the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA). Through one of our Province's sponsored ministries, the Collaborative Center for Justice, we are a Catholic presence amidst 50 congregations of Faith which include Catholic, Protestant, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Quakers, all of us working through the Connecticut State Legislature to alleviate

the injustices and racism which plague the lives of people who are poor or different.

In a very Synodal process, through this alliance we have participated in one-on-one conversations with people of different skin colors and cultures, listening to the difficult circumstances of their lives. We have hosted and attended House Meetings with groups of people of faith, all the while listening to the concerns that "keep them awake at night," reflecting on the injustices God is calling us to address.

Thus we gather as one Community of Faith, challenged to find a way to bring these issues to the state government where we work through advocacy and action to bring about changes that actually "change" peoples'

lives. We join protests; we write letters; we sign petitions; we show up at the State Legislature and we speak with passion to move the minds and hearts of the Legislators.

Space does not allow me to share all the amazing legislative successes we have had. However, there is one that has touched us especially, because it connected us to our Congregational Call to move forward the work of *Laudato Si*. We helped in the effort to close a trash storage plant, located in an area populated by the more disadvantaged Hartford residents. This plant filled the environment with toxic elements, causing discomfort and disease which adversely affect residents, some, possibly for the rest of their lives. We also



Sisters Ann Kane and Barbara Bozak at the State Legislature

succeeded in moving the State Legislators to “do the right thing” and spend monies appropriated for this area to be used to assist the people in ways that would clean the air and better their lives.

We are very happy to

be a part of a Faith Community such as the Greater Hartford interfaith Action Alliance.

A number of our Sisters have participated in various ways and two of the Sisters, Sister Elaine Betoncourt and Sister Ann Kane serve

on the Collaborative Center for Justice’s GHIAA Core Committee. We are honored and committed to working with other people of faith in working toward social justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

NEW SAINTS

Sr. Judith Ann Shaffer	84	USA	28.06.2024
Sr. Maria Theresa Caon	101	Brazil	04.07.2024
Sr. Stella Maria Da Fonseca	91	Brazil	15.07.2024
Sr. Cecilia Pichorim	92	Brazil	21.07.2024
Sr. Maria Consuelo Benetti	97	Brazil	29.07.2024
Sr. Maria Aparecida Fogassa	84	Brazil	13.08.2024

GOSPEL-ORIENTED IN FINANCES, CREDIBLE IN LIFE

Congregational Statement on Ethical and Sustainable Investment

Sr. Mariaelena Aceti CSJ

Italy



Exclusion of any form of investment in companies which do not respect human rights or are connected to the sale of fossil fuels or arms trade. No participation with those in the gambling industry, with media that disseminate violence and pornography, with liquor or tobacco companies, and with all industries that pose risks to the environment or human health. Attention must be given to the protection of human life, meaning “no” to embryonic stem cell research, abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty.

The long list of exclusion criteria in the Statement for ethical and sustainable investment of

the Congregation is binding for the financial investments of all the provinces, regions and missions. The document, prepared in the four languages

of the congregation, will be circulated in September by the International Finance Commission (IFC), during the Extended Council.





The statement, fruit of an almost year-long synodal process, aims to develop a critical awareness in our members of the implications of finance in the areas of justice, peace and the protection of creation.

The first draft of the document, developed by the IFC and the general council with the help of an international finance consultant, Benjamin Kille (of Wealthspire), was sent in December 2023 to the provincial and regional councils for discussion. Between January and April 2024 the IFC met with the provincial/regional councils and finance commissions by language group or geographic area. During the seven Zoom sessions there was adequate time for clarification and discussion of the most

debated ethical questions, and significant amendments.

In today's market economy, things are rarely simple. At times we must make decisions that have negative side effects. This is the case, for example, with companies that invest in contraceptives. To exclude such companies from the portfolio penalizes the scientific research on some hormone therapies. In the statement, the leaders recognize that "some contraceptive medicines have a dual purpose and are prescribed for specific medical conditions that are unrelated to the prevention of pregnancy."

In fact, other biotechnologies were discussed in the international session at the beginning of June that led to the final draft of the

document. Thus, in reference to the exclusionary choices in the guidelines of the Bishops' Conferences, the document affirms the need that such choices "be supported by a pastoral approach attentive to persons and situations and in line with the charism of unity and reconciliation of the congregation."

The statement is both a public affirmation of responsibility by the congregation and an urgent invitation to the members to make financial choices that are an expression of evangelical credibility. Underlying it all is the conviction that ethical investments are the engine to orient the economy to the common good and the "life in fullness" envisioned by the gospel.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Sr. Rosemary Wrinn CSJ

USA



Early this year I was invited to participate in a new mission called “Cut Out Cancer”. Sharon O’Brien, director of the mission, explained that the goal of the program is to serve people

who are undergoing cancer treatment by offering spa and salon services to ease their pain and to make them feel pampered.

The monthly services are free and given by skilled

practitioners. Massages, acupuncture, facials, art and music experiences and sound-bowl listening are among the relaxing activities available to help those who are dealing with cancer. Delicious refreshments



Sr. Rosemary (center) present at one of the tables

are enjoyed at round tables where our guests gather.

Sharon asked me to come and be present to people sitting at these tables. Every third Monday I visit and bring my presence to the “Cut out Cancer” mission. There is a lively buzz of conversation with people listening to and encouraging each other. I have the privilege of listening to wounded healers uplifting

and inspiring other wounded healers. At times a few participants leave the tables to receive other services and new arrivals fill the empty places at the tables.

Some participants make greeting cards with the abundant art supplies on the tables. Cheers from her tablemates were given to a woman for the beautiful thank you card she created for her

daughter. More cheers were heard when one returned from the hairdresser with a becoming hair style. My felt experience is that those who participate in the “Cut Out Cancer” Program share the gift of their own presence with one another.

At the close of each four-hour session the participants leave having been renewed in spirit by the power of one other’s presence.

THE JUST REVOLT OF THE RIVER WATERS

Sr. Eliana Aparecida dos Santos CSJ

Brazil



The Sisters of St Joseph who minister in the city of Guaíba, one of the most devastated by the floods in the south of Brazil, meeting with the associates, posed the following questions after the catastrophe: What did I see and hear? What caused the floods? What did I do to help? We are sharing some of their

answers with you:

What I Saw and Heard about the Floods

The floods left deep scars, both on the land and on the people. I saw people crying with emotion when they received donations, a relief in the midst of the chaos. But I also saw

people lost, like zombies, in a state of shock, not really understanding what was happening. Despair was visible in the expressions of those who had lost everything - people, homes, and possessions acquired with so much effort.

Scenes of despair were common. I saw people

and animals sheltering on the roofs of houses, waiting for help. Fear was constant, with frequent monitoring of the rains which came with surprise, sweeping away everything in their path. There were times when the situation required quick and decisive action, such as the urgent dismantling of camps in the middle of the night. In Guaíba, shelters were hastily opened and even family homes welcomed people and animals. What was most impressive was the solidarity: locally and nationally. People, companies, the military, the Navy and the fire department came out to help. However, some money was misappropriated and donations even stolen. In the midst of the chaos, the example of a priest

who did not abandon his flooded house, sheltering 40 parishioners on the second floor, showed the strength of faith and solidarity.

What caused the floods?

The causes of the floods are many. The Guaíba River, which had been filled in, was trying to regain its natural course. The river was full of all types of garbage which clogged culverts. The absence of trees along the riverbank aggravated the situation. Another factor was the extraction of sand from the riverbed, banned ten years ago, which added to global warming. Disrespect for nature, our common home, and a lack of awareness about the culture of care also contributed to the catastrophe. In addition,

the lack of effective public policies and necessary interventions has intensified the problem.

What have I done to help?

We sheltered and supported people and animals in our homes. At PROJARI Social Project run by the Sisters of St. Joseph, together sisters, staff and volunteers, we welcomed, listened to and developed activities for those in need. On a personal level, I provided food for the families affected and donated money for accommodation in the church. I helped with cleaning and making food for the shelter. I learned to see the signs from God that call us to change our lives. I've noticed gaps in personal education for the defence of life and the importance of taking on recycling and caring for waste. I understood that I should recycle paper and disposable items and take them to the right place. Garbage should always be disposed of in the right place, and sensitive documents should be shredded.

Above all, I understood that everything is interconnected. Maintaining hope in the face of adversity and cultivating an attitude of respect for human life and the culture of care are the great lessons I take with me from this experience.



FLAMES OF TANMAYA: A CELEBRATION OF GRATITUDE AND UNITY

Sr. Laveena D'Souza CSJ

Tanmaya/India



On June 17, 2024, the Tanmaya Provincial House resonated with purpose and unity as the Province Leadership Team hosted a transformative Goal Orientation Programme (GOP) for its younger members. Aptly themed 'Gratitude,' the event brought together 45 sisters from those who entered between 1994 and 2017. The programme was a joint venture of the Leadership Team and the core group members, aimed to inspire a spirit of thankfulness.

The day began with a profound prayer service led by Sr. Laveena, the Coordinator of the programme. Emphasizing gratitude towards the province, the sisters, and the congregation, the ceremony featured Sr. Molly (1994 batch) and Sr. Priyanka (2017 batch) carrying

a lit candle, symbolizing the connection and inspiration shared among different generations of sisters.

Sr. Sangeeta, the Councillor in charge of the

programme, warmly welcomed the group, acknowledging their commitment and enthusiasm and setting a positive tone for the day. The event featured insightful



Sisters Molly and Priyanka carrying the lit candle



Group Photo of GOP

sessions from Sisters Vineeta, Neha, and Nidhi, who shared their experiences and wisdom. Sr. Vineeta recalled her journey of embracing adversity and cherishing blessings, reciting a poignant poem by Grace David that highlighted resilience and the pursuit of happiness. Sr. Neha energized the room with a dynamic session emphasizing the importance of recognizing the sisters as the community's most valuable resources. She stressed that prioritizing well-being and support for one another allows everything else to fall into place naturally.

The programme transitioned into group discussions, where the sisters, divided into seven groups, considered their experiences of gratitude towards the congregation and their insights on the future of religious life amidst the current political climate. The discussions

reflected deep gratitude for the formation, education, love, care, and numerous opportunities provided by the congregation. Despite acknowledging a challenging future, the sisters emphasized the importance of trust in the Lord, vigilance, unity, and continuous self-improvement.

In the afternoon, the sisters shared their collective insights, revealing a profound appreciation for the congregation's support in various aspects of life, including spiritual growth, medical care, and the development of personal and professional skills. The conversations also underscored a strong resolve to remain united, vigilant, and proactive in the face of impending challenges.

The final session, led by Sr. Nidhi, posed a thought-provoking question: "How do you want to spend the rest

of your life? As a Maximizer, as a Maintainer, or as a Minimizer?" Encouraging the sisters to adopt the qualities of a maximizer, Sr. Nidhi urged them to be trendsetters, strive for excellence, expand their horizons, and walk the extra mile. Her words were a call to action, inspiring the sisters to become the 'Flames of Tanmaya,' driving change and growth within the community.

As the day concluded, the atmosphere was one of fulfilment and renewed purpose. The enriching sessions and the oneness of the sisters left everyone with a deep sense of satisfaction and a stronger bond of gratitude and unity. This Goal Orientation Programme was not just a meeting but a celebration of shared values and an affirmation of the sisters' commitment to their community and faith.

THE CATASTROPHE IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL AND THE CRY OF THE PLANET

Sr. Iraci de Fátima Cirino dos Santos CSJ

Brazil



Everything is interconnected. Since 2015, Pope Francis has been telling us that the planet is the common home of all life, including humanity. However, for almost 20 years now, it is the planet itself that has been crying out in pain for help. The Earth cries out as fires devastate the most vulnerable, as highlighted in the 2022 “Season of Creation”. These disasters have awakened us to listen to those in need, but Pope Francis’ documents also call us to listen to the cry of the Earth.

In Rio Grande do Sul, southern Brazil, the recent catastrophic flooding was a wake-up call to listen both to the cry of the needy and to that of the planet. The challenge, however, goes beyond the individual level. Political and economic systems need to take collective decisions to end

destruction and injustice. The Church, through the encyclical *Laudato Si*, emphasizes the interconnection between the poor and the fragility of the planet, drawing attention to political responsibility and the need for a new way of life.

The document also highlights the Earth as a living mother that sustains life and cries out against abuse. Tackling the climate crisis and restoring natural areas is urgent. The recovery of wetlands, for example, is seen as essential to mitigate global warming and natural disasters. When humanity is faced with chaotic situations that could threaten its existence, it has no choice but to change. The best way is to consult human nature itself. Although contradictory (both wise and foolish), it is characterized by being an infinite project, full of potential. Within these potentialities,

elements of a different and better order can be identified, which will necessarily be based on a new relationship with nature, affectionate and respectful, feeling part of it; on the love that belongs to human DNA; on the solidarity that allowed the leap from animality to humanity; on universal fraternity, based on the same genetic code, present in all living beings; on the cultivation of the world of the spirit that also belongs to the essence of the human being.

“It is up to us, as people and as a community, to think and rethink with the utmost seriousness, to seek a spirit of universal solidarity among humans and with all beings in nature, and to realize it collectively. This will be the great way forward that can save us,” writes Leonardo Boff, theologian, philosopher and writer.

VOLUNTEERING IN SAN RAMÓN

Carla Daniela Salgueiro Forquera

Salesian Volunteer of Don Bosco/Bolivia



My name is Carla Daniela Salgueiro Forquera, better known as "Carlita". I'm 25 years old and grew up with the Salesian spirituality of Don Bosco, at St. John Bosco Parish, in the town of El Alto in La Paz, Bolivia.

This year I felt a special call from God, and responded immediately when I received an invitation to serve my brothers and sisters in need. I am grateful for my experience in the parish of San Ramon in the state of Beni. I arrived in this community on February

18th and stayed until June 3, 2024.

It was the first time I was away from my family for such a long while, as well as from the parish, friends, city, and the cold and high elevation of my city, La Paz. It was also my first trip to the city of Trinidad, capital of the state of Beni in the Bolivian Amazon region. And it was the first time I flew; everything was new and enchanting.

Waiting for me were S. Francisca Dias de Medeiros and S. Ericka Rodriguez, as well as catechists, women from the Bible study, and young people from the youth ministry, all with their warm welcome which touched me deeply.

The process of adapting to the climate and above all to environment, was not easy.



Sr. Francisca, Sr. Ericka, Carlita

In the first few days after my arrival, I discovered that I have an allergy to mosquito bites, which are typical of this region of my country. The sisters' attention and prayers were of great help in my recovery.

Once I had recovered, we began to organize academic support for the children who were having difficulty at school. Seeing this situation and the children's needs, as well as the real poverty, made me realize that I had made the right decision. We had the opportunity to teach and learn, play games, and pray together. We shared lots of smiles, tasty snacks, and above all, a lot of affection. Whenever the children saw me coming, they would run up shouting 'Carlita'. As

part of my volunteer work, I also carried out activities with young people from the youth ministry, accompanied catechists preparing persons for the sacrament of confirmation and young people in the ministry to adolescents, visited rural communities, and gave guitar and singing lessons.

I think that everything I've experienced during this time is a solid basis for the experience that awaits me next year, volunteering for the cause of peace in Germany. I've had some beautiful experiences visiting rural communities. The people of this region of Bolivia are very welcoming and kind. They always welcome everyone with a smile and something to eat. The flora and fauna are a true marvel. The variety of

birds and animals gave me a lot of peace and energy, and also made me think about the greatness of God and God's love.

My experience with sisters Jacinta, Francisca, and Ericka was truly rewarding because through their spirituality I was able to maintain an attitude of constant prayer throughout the day. We shared everything as a family, our daily experiences, our sufferings, and also our joys. They shared their devotion to St. Joseph with me. I can say that a part of my heart has stayed with them and a part of them will stay with me forever. I thank God for their lives and their vocation because through them we can help the neediest of the Kingdom of God.

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