

**Comments Submitted by Sister Mary Beth Reissen, SSND  
Regarding the European SSND Report on NGO Status at the  
United Nations  
Geneva, Switzerland August 27, 1980**

Broadly the European Report bespeaks certain misjudgments (sic) of the work of the United Nations and the work of NGOs. If the UN is “anti- Christian,” one should consider the fact that there are already Catholic NGOs as well as many more Religious NGOs who believe in collaborating for the betterment of our world. Our Vatican documents, our popes, especially since John XXIII, have repeatedly supported the UN, retaining obviously a critical stance vis-à-vis each issue. One need only recall that the Holy See itself enjoys Permanent Observer Status at the UN.

Rather than examining the SSND ability to influence or not to influence the UN as is done in the European Report, it would be far better to examine the opportunities for international understanding that SSND could receive from NGO status, whether that status be with OPI or the more difficult UNESCO or ECOSOC status. NGO affiliation offers opportunities for collaboration on an ecumenical level in efforts to build a more just and peaceful society. NGO status provides a unique means of “networking” and “bonding” among the various groups for good.

The Report notes that the ECOSOC NGO system is deficient, too much bureaucracy, etc. One must note, however, that presently some NGOs are addressing the problem of bureaucracy and the UN. They are formulating proposals for UN reorganization and restructuring.

Concerning the quote from “Deutsche Tagespost”, there have been numerous occasions when the work of the Security Council and the General Assembly has been of grave importance. The problem of Ineffectiveness comes from a world still comprised of sovereign States who indeed relish their sovereignty. However, the UN offers a transitional opportunity where States can choose to relinquish portions of their sovereignty to obtain international benefits.

As for NGO representation at various UN Conferences, Frau Dr. Mannle is quoted stating that representatives from Eastern Bloc States or from developing countries are more numerous at such occasions. From my own experience as Non-Governmental Observer for Pax Christi International Catholic Peace Movement at the UN Law of the Sea Conference, there are no Eastern Bloc or developing country NGOs present. In the case of the Law of the Sea Conference, we Western NGOs see this as unfortunate. Other UN Conferences will naturally have differing types of NGO Representation. True, at some Conferences Eastern Bloc NGOs exert much influence, but that is not to prevent other NGOs from dialoguing with them, thus offering varying points of view. Actually, the NGO forum offers a unique means of dialogue. I attended the International Conference on Women and Disarmament in Vienna, April, 1978. There I personally met with Eastern European women who at least learned of the work of Pax Christi for the first time.

I must emphasize that NGO presence by developing countries is limited. It is difficult enough for developing countries to send official delegates to Conferences, much less NGOs. Very often, official delegations of developing countries are very understaffed. This is born out in my own personal experience at the UN Law of the Sea Conference.

Overall the Report by some quotes leaves a distaste for developing countries. In every UN Conference and in the General Assembly developing countries are addressing the past and present injustices they have endured due to imbalances in global distribution patterns. Thus our present age experiences the ongoing North-South debate. We, as religious women, cannot run away from this question of massive global injustice. By NGO status an organization has the unique opportunity to educate its members on such critical issues as this North-South debate.

The suggestion concerning SSND affiliation with CIEO is welcome and indeed positive. If the Congregation chose to affiliate with CIEO, the question must be addressed as to whether the congregation would enjoy a genuine participative voice in CIEO decision-making.

Finally, when considering NGO status or CIEO affiliation, consideration should be given to how all SSNDs would experience the sense of participation.