



# Catholic Courier

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## Vatican voiced pro-family stance at women's conference in China

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

BEIJING — The Vatican delegation was "a voice crying in the desert" at the Fourth World Conference on Women, according to Mary Ann Glendon, a Harvard law professor who led the delegation.

"We are obliged by our religion, I believe, to be active in the world, and we are supposed to speak the truth whether it's in or out of season," said Glendon, the first woman to ever lead a Vatican delegation.

"So, if we are a voice crying in the desert for the moment, that's all right," Glendon said during an almost two-hour interview and meal with Catholic News Service and Radio Renascenca, Portugal's Catholic radio station.

The interview came after the Vatican delegation decided it would support only parts of the Beijing Declaration, a document summarizing the conference's discussion of the status of the world's women and the measures necessary to bring equality, development and peace.

She said the Vatican was not the focal point of any alliance of countries at the conference. On some issues Muslim, Latin American and African countries shared the Vatican's position; on others, more similarities were found with the U.S. delegation.

"We have stood alone at many points during this conference," she said, especially in calling for full fidelity to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including its recognition of parental rights and the need for special protection of motherhood and families.

The Vatican strongly supported the Beijing document's sections aimed at eliminating poverty, promoting development, expanding the access women and girls have to education and improving their economic opportunities.

The 37 paragraphs of the declaration, approved on the final day of the Sept. 4-15 conference, reflect the contents of the 362 paragraphs of the conference's Platform for Action.

Here are some of the points in the declaration:

• **Women's status:** The 189 delegations "recognize that the status of women has advanced in some important respects in the past decade, but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people."

• **Poverty:** "This situation is exacerbated by the increasing poverty that is affecting the lives of the majority of the world's people, in particular women and children, with origins both in the national and international domains."

• **Advancement:** The declaration called for "urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and



Reuters/CNS

Mei Ng of Hong Kong carries Chinese lanterns through the nongovernmental organization women's forum site in Huairou, China. Aug. 30. To prepare for the conference, thousands of women gathered in Huairou and neighboring Beijing for international meetings on women's issues.

solidarity" to further the advancement and empowerment of women.

• **Equality:** "The equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men" is recognized, and governments committed themselves to ensuring "the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

• **Freedom:** The declaration called for a full recognition of "the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations."

• **Family:** "Equal rights, opportuni-

ties and access to resources, equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy."

• **Reproduction:** "The explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular, their fertility, is basic to their empowerment."

• **Economics:** The governments committed themselves to promoting "women's economic independence, including employment," and eradicating "the persistent and increasing burden of poverty" by guaranteeing women equal access to resources, opportunities and public services.

• **Development:** The governments promised to "promote people-centered sustainable development, including sus-

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## SSJ: Meeting widened view of the church

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. —

For Sister Anne Mary Dooley, SSJ, the Fourth World Conference on Women offered her a chance to meet with her fellow women religious and to widen her perspective on the universal church.



A professor of religious studies at Niagara University for the last two decades, Sister Dooley spoke with the *Catholic Courier* by phone on Monday, Sept. 18. She had attended the women's conference as one of two representatives of the U.S. Sisters of St. Joseph.

The sisters were among the 70 Catholic women religious orders who presented a joint statement to the conference's delegates calling for concrete action to end various worldwide threats to women and girls. The religious orders cited militarization and racism as among those threats, and they included debt repayment structures imposed on poor nations as well as "narrow fundamentalist interpretations" of religion on their list of causes of female mistreatment.

"(P)atriarchal structures which contribute to the feminization of poverty and do violence to women and girl children everywhere" were also targeted by the religious orders for condemnation.

Sister Dooley led a workshop on strategies to obtain equality for women in the Catholic Church during the week of Aug. 30-Sept. 8, when dozens of non-governmental organizations from around the world prepared to lobby delegates to the U.N. conference held last week.

She noted that she based her presentation on women's inherent equality with men by referring to such scriptural passages as the first chapter of Genesis; the 28th verse of the third chapter of St. Paul's letter to Galatians; and Mary of Magdala as portrayed in the Gospel of St. John.

Sister Dooley pointed out, for example, that Mary of Magdala fulfilled the requirements of discipleship and apostleship fulfilled by the men in the Gospel because she saw the risen Christ and proclaimed Him.

"She was called 'Apostle to the Apostles' in the second century," Sister Dooley added.

The religious studies professor also explained that the October, 1994 Synod of Bishops on the Consecrated Life produced some interesting statements on women that she relayed to her listeners at the Beijing forum. She

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