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Just because it's
not happening
here doesn't mean
it's not happening



by Benedetta Di Stefano,
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We live in a country, Italy, which while guaranteeing in its Constitution the **principle of equality**, has seen about 50 women killed by their partners, husbands, boy-friends, ex-partners and so on, in 2021 alone. This goes to show an absolute truth: the image of the female is still inextricably linked

to the idea of possession, domination, prevarication, even in our country.

This premise is useful when considering the issue faced by Afghan women since last August with greater awareness since we cannot pretend to be innocent ourselves.

The purpose of this editorial is to contribute to keep the spotlight on a dramatic situation for as long as possible,

a situation that risks being forgotten in a short time, a situation that represents an emergency for all humanity.

The geographical location of Af-

ghanistan has meant that this place has been continuously criss-crossed by people of different ethnic groups, faiths and cultures. It is a territory that has always been divided in terms of its social, cultural, ethnic and religious composition and the geography of the territory has always favored this partitioning. Add to this the fact that neighboring empires, and in modern and contemporary times European and regional powers, have always chosen to support one or the other group for geopolitical interests and obvious ethnic and religious considerations. It is in this framework that in the 1990s the Taliban (*students of madrasas*) imposed themselves, so called because the leaders of this movement emerged from the Koranic schools in the north-west of Pakistan. They studied in environments influenced by a rigid and rigorous interpretation of the Koran.

Thus, between 1994 and 2001, the Taliban managed to conquer about 90 percent of Afghan territory but failed to control the northeast, including the Panjshir Valley – majority-populated by Tajiks, an ethnolinguistic minority that, along with the Hazaras, is at greater risk of falling under Taliban control today.

After 20 years of American occupation, the Taliban have not changed, but Afghanistan has, at least as far as the population of the cities is concerned.

The Taliban of 2021 can certainly terrorize Afghans but not take them by storm. The whole population, especially the women, are fully aware of their rights and they are proving it in all the demonstrations in the streets day after day.

The first measures were against women: prohibition to play sports; distinction of male classes from female classes in schools; obligation for women to wear the *niqab* (full veil that leaves open a slit at eye level) to go to university; obligation to be accompanied by a male member of the family (*mahram*) to go out and the absolute prohibition to work except in situations where they cannot be replaced by men, for example: cleaning female toilets.

On September 12, the Taliban minister for Higher Education,

After 20 years, the Taliban have not changed, but Afghanistan has done

Abdul Baqi Haqqani, announced that women would be allowed to study in universities and post-graduate programs, although he later clarified, “*We will not allow male and female students to study in the same class. Mixed classes go against the provisions of sharia,*” Islamic law. During the last Taliban government (1996 - 2001), **girls’ schools** were **closed** and women were prohibited from working. Afghani women walking alone in public spaces often reported being assaulted. Taliban

fundamentalists are again imposing their strict interpretation of **sharia** law, including a conservative dress code and public executions for moral violations. **The Ministry of Women** in Afghanistan has also been transformed into the **Ministry of Prevention of Vices and Promotion of Virtues**.

So, no restraint, on the part of the Taliban. **Women** return to the darkness, they become **invisible** once again. Once again, they are the easiest prey on which to exercise Taliban power, in a distressing repetition of History. Yes, because we can trace a parallel history to what is written about in books, the history of violence against women.

Violence against women is understood as a structure that makes the physical, psychological, economic or moral integrity of women vulnerable. This arises mainly in **patriarchal cultures**, where the aim is to gain control through the domination of women. It has always been a clear example of the principles of the concepts of **inequality, discrimination** and **subordination**. In short, women are victims of violence simply because they are women.

It is clear that the history of gender-based violence has not yet been written. Without a doubt, however, complaints and testimonies are increasing more and more, moving from almost silence to a fairly large visibility.

The existence of a specific form of violence against women, for the simple fact of being women, has its very origin in their own secondary role that has been assigned to them historically and

that, to a large extent, continues today. Discrimination that is present in every imaginable social field: at work, at home, in public, private and political life. It is obvious that gender inequalities are cultural constructions that can be maintained over time but can also evolve through a process of cultural transformation and advances in education, depending on the opportunities and context in which humans develop. Such inequality is clearly a situation that is aggravated in times of major conflicts and moments of war where sexual violence against women becomes a real strategy to attack, humiliate and despise the enemy.

In this sense, the feminine is perceived as **"the other"**, different to oneself, represented by what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) called *"The second sex"*. It is not only perceived as different but as inferior and therefore unequal, devalued and excluded. In the gender system, woman is defined as what is different from man, as what is "not man". Men are often defined in terms of status, for example, in terms of work or personal achievement, while women are identified in their relationships with men in terms of their position in kinship systems: mother, wife, sister, or daughter. One of the most serious and most penalizing discriminations is that related to education.

While it is true that both males



and females often have to overcome obstacles in accessing education, it is also true, as a rule and other factors being equal, that the obstacles faced by a girl child are more frequent and penalizing.

The main cause of girls' exclusion from school is gender discrimination. According to UNICEF, of the approximately 121 million children who have never had the opportunity to attend school, **65 million (54%) are girls.**¹

Obstacles to female schooling stem from discrimination and prejudices deeply rooted in many cultures: two-thirds of the 875 million illiterate adults in the world are women², a sign that in the recent past girls went to school even less often than today. Women's education brings countless benefits, both to the individual concerned and to society as a whole. Educated women are able to avoid early

pregnancies and HIV risk behaviors. In many cases, a classroom is the only safe place for a teenage girl.

Education is the best means of promoting gender equality: ensuring equal opportunity where education begins is the first step in achieving this goal!

At the moment, the only gender equality in Afghanistan is that of the possibility of being massacred, equally, during demonstrations against the Taliban.

This is why the Afghan situation must be carefully monitored, so that women are not excluded from schools and universities, where they have already been rendered invisible anyway.

We have a **duty** to continuously and firmly **express dissent** and **protest against any discriminatory situation**. We have the duty **not to look away**. We have the duty not to forget what is happening to **Afghan women**. ■

¹ <https://www.unicef.it/programmi/istruzione/>

² <https://www.unicef.it/media/limportanza-delle-pari-opportunita-nellistruzione/>

24 October, United Nations Day

Br. Ángel Diego

In 1945 the “United Nations” was officially born as an organisation that had already been in the making for years. World War II was ending, and many countries were discovering the need to seek peace. A peace that would be lasting.

In that now distant year of 1945, a group of fifty countries met to draw up the UN Charter, by which the signatory countries became part of this organisation, with the main objective of preventing another world war from taking place.

We all know how the United Nations, over all these years, has been committed to working to maintain peace, security, provide humanitarian aid, and protect rights.

In recent years, the United Nations has also been pro-

moting the care of our planet, in this case through the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Not only do they wish to ensure peace, security and the rights of all people, but they also wish to care for the planet, in order to care for those who suffer most from the consequences of climate change.

As Marists of Champagnat, we too are present at the United Nations, through FMSI¹. The Foundation obtained the ECOSOC status, granted by the United Nations to a number of civil society organisations that play a significant role in the work for Human Rights. This allows FMSI to have a voice at the UN through

¹ FMSI: Marist Foundation for International Solidarity, founded on 24 October 2007. FMSI has ECOSOC status, granted by the United Nations to certain civil society organisations that play an important role in human rights work.



various mechanisms of participation: UPR elaboration, participation in the Day of General Discussion, participation in the Human Rights Council...This also allows us to be present in several think tanks and advocacy groups at regional level and in different countries.

Many lay people and brothers and sisters are work-

ing in favour of human rights, especially child rights. Alliances have been established with other organisations from civil society and the Church which facilitate a greater presence in the defence of rights, as well as giving greater weight to our demands.

FMSI and the Solidarity Secretariat, as well as the General Administration, are committed to continue working in the defence of Human Rights,

particularly those of children and young people. To this end, projects are being developed which combine political action at the level of the United Na-

tions and concrete actions in some of the countries where Marist Brothers are present. The projects in Papua New Guinea and Bolivia, which are in full development at the moment, are interesting in this respect.

The United Nations, and the mechanisms of participation that they offer, help us to take steps in what

the last General Chapter asked of us, creating bridges, strengthening our global family, from the firm commitment "in the promotion and defence of child rights".

At the UN we have the opportunity to continue working on behalf of the most needy children and young people in our world, defending their rights, promoting the dignity of each person and the care of our common home.

Thank you to all those brothers and sisters, lay women and men, who are already engaged in your life and ministry to carry this mission forward. ■



Signed on 25 September 2015 by the governments of the 193 Member Countries of the United Nations and approved by the UN General Assembly, the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development sets out 17 [Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs](#), which are part of a broader programme of action, to be achieved in the environmental, economic, social and institutional domains by 2030.

The UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is an action programme for people, the planet and prosperity.





The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child approved by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989, is the most signed and ratified human rights treaty to date. All nations, with the exception of the United States which signed but has not ratified the Convention, have committed to enforce child rights through their legislation and policies.

The 32 years life of the Convention is not such a long time in history, if we think that it was only in 1989 that the world recognized that children and adolescents are holders of inalienable civil, social, political, cultural and economic rights and have the right to participate in all decisions that affect them.

“It is a topic that is anything but obvious” says a teacher who coordinated the workshop carried out in her school with pupils aged 6 to 11 on Child Rights and FMSI Values ([link](#)) “ and it is essential to be vigilant with respect to issues concerning rights, especially in a historical period such as the one in which we are living”.

“Over the years, as a public school, we have tried to always maintain an active and constant commitment for the recognition and respect of the rights of all and in particular those of the children. We believe it is essential to educate the new generations to respect each other, especially in highly deprived socio-cultural contexts. We realize every day how stereotypes and cultural prejudices are strongly rooted even in the little ones; the school therefore stands as an added value when it proposes activities in its overall education plan that educate for respect, welcoming and equity, and equal opportunities of personal growth for all”.

We recall that among the four fundamental principles of the Convention there is the right to participation (art. 12): children must express their opinions on decisions that affect them. This right applies both to decisions affecting individual children and to the broader strategic decision-making process. It is therefore not a simple tool for the “democratic participation” of a category but it invites us to consider the priorities expressed by the children as our own: “In the laboratory”, the teacher explains, “small

children were more oriented to give priority to the right to play and be together, while older children chose the right to a family, to health care, to a home... highlighting the work carried out by teachers over the years. Many children have chosen to depict family, affection, care and the right to education in their drawings. “

Let us ask ourselves, as citizens, and our governments, if we are applying the Convention when we use an abandoned space for a parking lot rather than a kindergarten, or we increase the admissible level of industrial discharges to attract some new company in our area, or we buy products that are cheap because the workers who produce them have a salary too low to support their family, or we close a school or a medical

center in remote areas to invest rather in Wi-Fi equipment as a substitute for face-to-face interaction in a community setting and where children find TV programs that praise competition and increase frustration.

Are the children, who are keen observers of the essentials of life, our true reformers of the economy? Taking their priorities to heart can lead us to true change that is more than superficial. ■

**“Children
must express
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(art.12)

Project in India

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF SANTALI CHILDREN

Project in brief

Responding to the learning needs of the of Santal girls and boys who are school drop-outs and provide them with skills and knowledge for future work insertion or re-insertion into formal education.

Context

The current proposal deals with **children** that are among the most marginalized in one of the poorest areas in the world. Children of the Santali villages in the area near Talit, West- Bengali (India) and in particular those belonging to minority groups as the Santal tribes have a high level of school dropouts in the primary and middle school levels. Most of the

children belong to excluded or vulnerable groups. Their **education** suffers at the very early stages and this contributes to their state of **marginalization** and **poverty**. Parents are often not educated and are not able to encourage the children to go to school. By leaving school, children miss a chance to lift themselves, their families and their communities out of a **cycle of poverty**: this situation is particularly critical for girls, whose early school-leaving and illiteracy rates are double that of their boy peers.

Although the initiative is designed in favour of the most underprivileged Santali, we welcome children and young people of **all social backgrounds**. The Marist Brothers are currently working in the District of Burdwan where the Santali people live and our project is a way to foster harmony among them. Most of the Christians are from the Santali tribal with whom the Marist have been working since 2010 helping girls and boys who are dropouts or NEETS (Not engaged in Education, Employment or Training) by giving them opportunities to re-enter the education system or learn some skills to get a job.

Aim of the project

The project "Education and training for Santal children and marginalised people" has the objective of providing the Santal communities near Talit (West Bengali), with skills and knowledge to be ready





for work insertion or re-insertion into formal education. The project will take place at the **Marist Community College** in the village of Talit, where the Marist Brothers have been present since 2010 helping girls and boys dropouts to learn basic literacy to be able to re-enter **formal education** or acquire some skills to get a job. The center is very active in helping the population. In June 2021 we implemented a distribution of food parcels, personal hygiene products and masks, being able to give concrete help to more than 400 families and 4800 fragile people in a situation of extreme difficulty due to COVID-19 (an emergency project funded by Misesan Cara). From 2013 we have three classes a week of: tailoring, computing and spoken English; participation was a little irregular at the beginning but the classes are now becoming popular among the surroundings Santal villages of Talit, Jingu-ti, Novoghat, Bhora, Kamarpara, Bonpas, Ekpade, Burdwan, etc., with increasing requests, especially from girls. Tapping the **potential** of young Santal people has been central in the mission of our Brothers in Talit. Particular focus of their mission work has been to address the learning needs of the Santali Tribe youth who are school dropouts and provide them with skills for productive engagements for their future. The current initiative aims at offering **new educational opportunities** for drop-outs, NEETS and Santali excluded and vulnerable children with knowledge and skills to give them a new chance to re-enter formal education or enhance their future employability. Courses will be offered at the Community College in Talit, and students will be charged a minimum of fees: The

Admission Fee for every course will be 300 rupees (79 rupees is an Euro). The Monthly Fee of every course will be 150 rupees and is to be paid in the first week of every month. The classes of Mathematics and Bengali for the boys and girls of Secondary school will be free and will not require an Admission Fee. The purpose in charging fees is to get them to take the classes and the process of formation more seriously. Those who are very poor will not pay any fee. ■

Project main figures:



- 120 students (50% boys and 50% girls) for training in 5 different subjects: Mathematics, Tailoring, Computer class, English, Bengali language
- Pedagogical training delivered to 8 teachers to ensure preparation and alignment to quality standards and a rights-based approach enhancing gender equality and combating discrimination
- Delivery of 120 food parcels for the poor families of our students.



SDG Goals



Laudato si Goals



Project in Madagascar PROVIDING ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AT SAINT CHANEL SCHOOL

Project in brief

The project aims to face the water shortage problem at **Saint Chanel school of Ihosy**, Madagascar, where water shortages have started affecting the life of the school children as well as the local community. Drilling a borehole will give continuous access to water.

Context

Madagascar has a youthful population – just over 60% are under the age of 25 – and an increasing population growth rate. The community is predomi-

nantly **rural and poor**; chronic malnutrition is prevalent, and large families are the norm. Under these conditions, it is very difficult to guarantee basic services, such as **access to education and health**, and national infrastructure.

Ihosy, the capital of the Ihorombe region, has a population of less than 40,000 inhabitants. It is a rural area and the majority of the population tries to make a subsistence living through cattle farming. There are localised food insecurity problems affecting the southern parts of Madagascar, including Ihosy, due to a severe and **prolonged drought**.

Saint Chanel School in Ihosy was founded by the Marist Brothers in 1986 at the request of the local Bishop. In the first years there were few class structures, but now in 2021 the school welcomes 1,200 high school students and has 50 staff members. School numbers have grown steadily over the years. However, due to the lack of sufficient infrastructure, the school is forced to refuse a large number of enrolments each year. This is a Diocesan school administered by the Marist Brothers.

Children attending Saint Chanel school mostly come from **remote** rural areas. The school serves these poor families by offering very low-cost schooling – approximately 4 EUR per month – which enables them to access a **quality education** institute that they may not otherwise be able to attend.

Dropout rates amongst schools in the region are high





and due, unfortunately, to the difficult socio-economic conditions of the population, including some significant problems such as child marriage. The necessity of a **strong education** system to combat this **social challenge** is clear and urgent.

Furthermore, **severe drought conditions** have affected this region of Madagascar. People are becoming poorer due to loss of livelihoods and access to **safe drinking water** is a major problem. Many villagers have to walk several kilometres each day to reach a river for access to water. The children of Saint Chanel School suffer the same problem and the health of the children is suffering as a result of drinking contaminated water.

In the dry season when water tanks are empty and the town water is not working, the impact on the students is **crippling**: they are forced to bring their own water to school each day. For many this involves walking **several kilometres** to a contaminated river every day before school, only to fetch water that carries diseases. The risk of acquiring waterborne and other serious illnesses is very high. The majority of the students come from low-income homes and when they fall sick the parents often have difficulty paying for the necessary medical care.

Aim of the project

This project is designed **to solve the water problem** at Saint Chanel school where water shortages have

started affecting the life of the school children. The school has developed this proposal to drill a bore-hole which will give continuous access to water for the students, as well as for the school staff and the local community. The main purpose of the project is to promote **good health** and **well-being** so that they may excel in their **education**. ■

Project main figures:

The project aims to preserve the health of the user community Saint Chanel School, including 1,200 students, 50 staff members and their families.



- Easy access to drinking water for the school
- To improve academic performance
- To offer a better environment to the school children

SDG goals



Laudato si goals





BILANCIO SOCIALE 2020

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2020 on our website
www.fmsi.ngo**