

Reflections for UN Consultation on Trafficking  
November 3, 2009  
Hong Kong  
Phoebe Griswold

It is a joy and a privilege to be here in this international consultation on “Human Trafficking with a Focus on the Asian Child” which is gathered under the leadership of the Anglican United Nations Observer. I join you to share a call that I hear, for myself and for you the attendees. It is a call for us all to speak with a prophetic and courageous voice and address the evil of human trafficking. We are called to offer ways forward to rid the world of such ungodly human behavior with imagination and with faith.

We are all blessed to be here among our sisters and brothers of the Anglican Communion from around the globe from the grass roots to policy makers. We are delighted that at least one third of the attendees are young women who are themselves already experts in their fields.

I hear a call to us women and men of the Anglican Communion to make a difference in this issue through the power of God, the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit. I invite you into this call. It is my hope that you will hear the same call and be empowered, not only to hear that “with God all things are possible” but, because of this conference, act to achieve what you hope for empowered by the living God. My reflections this morning come from a place of experience, exploration, discovery and search in my own life.

I will expand upon the following points:

- The world is in a state of profound social change. One of these foundational changes is the role of women.
- At just such times of transition we have the opportunity for women to make an impact – to seize history!
- We as Anglican women, women of faith, can enter upon the global stage and influence this change for the good of creation.
- But we have a much greater chance to be part of the change for good when we bring to the dialogue and work the potential power of our faith, alive and active today, that is, when we engage in the work as persons of faith.

We are in the midst of a profound global social movement and a major change in women’s lives and their roles in society. Women who have been part of this movement are not surprised to see the flood of media input particularly over this last month in the US on this topic. *Time* Magazine recently had a special report on women, as did the *New York Time Magazine*. NBC had weeklong special coverage on the changing roles of women based on a study by Maria Shriver.

But, what I do not hear articulated clearly enough in the media is what the impact of the social change in women’s lives can mean for the betterment of our world. I believe that women, as they rise up through education and jobs, will take their places in the decision-

making bodies of the world. When that happens the culture of the world will change and the welfare of creation will become our highest human value. Women have demonstrated through eons the priority they give to care-giving for people through family life. Human well-being, healing and peace-making are what women care about.

So, I hear a call to us as women at this conference to recognize the opportunity of this moment and to enter into the process of change and take our place in the work, in the dialogue and in those places where important decisions are being made. By being here at this consultation we are part of the global social change movement. We should celebrate that we are already on that stage as individuals and as a church. I remember hearing during a high level panel at the UN that in times of chaos women have the best opportunity to change the world around them. This is because the shifting plates of the earth allow for new life to creep up towards the light. However, once the shifts have occurred, the contributions of women are shut down.

The opportunity for women to make a difference throughout the Anglican Communion is seismic. We exist as a unique global community with access to 165 countries – (UN membership numbers 194 countries). This gives us the means to get together – to learn from each other – to learn from similarity and difference – to reach both the grass roots and the leadership tables – and to have access to larger systems, such as governments. The UN Observer’s Office is an excellent example of this gathering force. We have the chance to gather globally – to speak globally – to tell our stories and to bring about change from a global base. There are other structures already in place such as the International Anglican Women’s Network (IAWN), the global Girl’s Friendly Society and the Mother’s Union. All these are part of our identity. They are what I refer to our as charisms: our God given gifts and the tools we have to work with. And, most important, we have a common commitment to this work based in our shared faith.

I hear a call to us as *church* to claim our identity as a global body and to make this church work for us to get done what we see it *needs* to do. I hear a call for us to speak out boldly about trafficking as the church.

When we speak out to whom are we speaking? I have recognized here a curious omission in our presentations thus far. We have talked a great deal about vulnerable children and women as victims of trafficking but we have not really named men as the consumers in sex trafficking. In many of our contexts this is a very difficult subject for women in the church to raise, given that church leadership for the most part is male. How do we speak truth to power? Here the United Nations has so much to teach us about putting the role of men and boys in gender issues directly on the agenda. We must speak out clearly about the need to address the role of men in helping combat sex trafficking.

I feel called to invite you into this work where God is already present and active. God’s care and compassion for the victims of sex trafficking is greater than ours, greater than we can know or imagine. We must trust that God is already at the center of this work. Our task is to collaborate with God’s work. With God’s help we can truly unleash the

power of change that we seek. I would therefore like to suggest some ways forward in our own thinking and acting at this conference and beyond.

We are not just another NGO. We are a faith-based community. In order to make our unique contribution we have to know our own faith. Even more, we have to know what it means to be faithful in our own day and time. We must ask what God is saying to us today as we confront the issues of Trafficking? We can look to the ground-breaking work of progressive women theologians, especially from the Third World, who have much to teach us? I have been reading what they are saying and would like to share some of their points which are relevant to this conference.

First of all the theologians tells us to place a value on our experience. Value your experience. What you have lived and know for sure is where God is speaking to you. Each of you brings that to this conference. The stories that we tell, the country reports given here, are the voice of holiness in each one of us. Those of you who are working at the grass roots or the street, spoke of the suffering you not only saw, but the suffering you experience personally in solidarity with those victims. I think it is only through God's solidarity with us that we can carry such pain. And the brilliance of the research and clarity of the findings presented here are also experiences of holiness, seeking to express God's truth. Solidarity with suffering is a consistent quality of our Lord Jesus who stood in truth and compassion with all whom he met. His presence and miracles came from hearing the blind call out and asking what they wanted. I think that Jesus is with us here in the longing for health, the searching for ways forward and the hope that this makes a difference. Here is a new theology emerging for today. It is how women and men know the living God. It is a voice that we must speak in the halls of our church and at the places where decisions are made in the name of our church. This is a live theology for today known through the issues of Trafficking that we must bring to our church's attention at all levels.

Then, I hear you speaking about women's bodies. Our bodies are an essential part of what God is revealing to us today that we need to address and put right with what God wants. We know what God wants. God wants whole people – body, soul and mind together. All around the world progressive women theologians are listening to women and holding up the importance of the body and the critical place of sexuality in God's hope for the body, its health and wholeness. I have been studying Asian women's theology and I find this quotation from *Asian Feminist Theology* by Kwok Pui-lan very inspirational:

“Asian feminist theologians join other third World Theologians in the search for a form of spirituality that integrates body and soul, inner and outer worlds, and contemplation and social action. Specifically they wish to imagine and develop a spiritual practice that honors their embodied selves as women. All too often women's sensuality and sexuality have been regarded a lustful, dangerous and sinful, both in the Christian and in the Asian traditions. An embodied spirituality that affirms women's desire for love and their experiences as sexual beings allows women to feel at home with their bodies, with others and with God.”

I believe we are invited to determine how best to bring the delicate subject of our own bodies forward in order to arrive at a new understanding of what it means to be human. We are called to be courageous with this topic and celebrate the beauty of ourselves as being in the image of God. We need to restore this gift to all women.

I hear you listening and loving the diversity of experience from those of you who are working at the grass roots, to those of us who try to make things happen at a wider organizational level. I see in the process of this conference the wide invitation to listen to all voices in order to make an impact. The planning of this conference is an example of that thinking. I see us taking advantage of the global reality of the Anglican Communion by bringing difference together. I see us honoring the richness of God's diversity.

I hear a call to me to invite you, as women of faith, to bring to these conversations your diverse, rich spiritual experiences and by doing so to invite God more directly to be among us. I believe that God is yearning for us to know the infinite expanse of God's nature. We have an opportunity to know something about the breadth of who God is as we share with each other our own insights about God's nature from the enormously different contexts of our lives. I invite you to talk about God with each other. I experience that God likes us to talk about God. When we hold those conversations, God is likely to show up!

Again, I would like to give an example of the potential of cross-cultural conversations about God thru the voice of Kwok Pui Lan. I took her course, "Third World Feminist Theologians," at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts the summer before last. She says, "The search for a passionate, life-giving and empowering spirituality has been a dominant theme in Asian women's theological reflection... For Asian feminist theologians spirituality is not so much a gaze toward heaven or an emptying of the self, but rather the celebration of the *KI* (the energy of life), the joy of living and the quest for wholeness."

Here we are in Hong Kong. Here we are in Asia, and the voice of the Asian theologian invites us to see God as **LIFE GIVING ENERGY**. I think we can all from our own experience testify to those times when we have known **LIFE GIVING ENERGY** and our intuition tells us when that energy is absent and needed. Our churches, and the whole body of the Anglican Communion is in need of **LIFE GIVING ENERGY** and I know that women can bring that life to the church. The time is NOW that we can do that. This conference can make that difference by what we decide here to speak boldly, truthfully and with great LOVE to the church and the world. It is our gift to the work of seeing the world free of Trafficking as we are people who love life, who sustain the work through love and who will not give up.

Women theologians from around the world are saying that the theology we are doing here together, joining with suffering – in this case the human suffering of poverty, loss of freedom of self and body – is the stuff of being with God and being empowered, truly and miraculously empowered – to make the world whole and lovely once again.

**Our call together is to bring this LIFE GIVING ENERGY TO THE WORK wherever each one of us is and wherever we find ourselves together as members of the Anglican Communion.** That is our call as women and men of today.

I would like to leave you with three questions:

What is God saying to you through the issue of trafficking?

What is God telling you about who God is for today's world?

What is God's message for the Anglican Communion that we are called to speak?