

Where Are The Vatican's Women Diplomats?

Written by HdG, Amb. du Christ et de Marie, Dna. Maria St. Catherine De Grâce Sharpe, Guest Contributor
Friday, 23 March 2012 01:15



Lifting the veil on the Vatican's gender apartheid all-male "Human Rights" diplomacy – the Holy See's "Human Rights" diplomacy from the perspective of the "First Lady of Vatican/Holy See Pontifical Ecclesiastical Diplomacy."

For as long as the "conscience of humanity" has been able to witness, remember, and when necessary, testify; and for as long as the documented archives of the UN, the Holy See, and the sovereign states to which the Holy See's diplomatic missions has been accredited have existed, the global ecclesiastical diplomacy and the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical diplomatic profession of the Holy See have for centuries been a blatantly all-male, priest-only enterprise void of the presence of Catholic women.

The fact remains that, even though Catholic women have never ever been officially admitted to the Holy See's professional ecclesiastical foreign service ministry and diplomatic mission apostolate, this gender-apartheid state of affairs has nothing to do with any Vatican diplomatic prerequisite of the priestly ordination for Catholic women (something which is absolutely prohibited in the Catholic Church). In 1994, Pope John Paul II published the papal apostolic letter, *"Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,"* exclusively reserving ministerial priestly ordination in the Roman Catholic Church to Catholic males. However, in order to affirm once and for all time that ministerial ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood did not serve as an impediment to Catholic women serving as ecclesiastical diplomatic representatives, in 1995 Pope John Paul II established the "Glendon Precedent" and appointed Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon, to serve as the Holy See's senior papal diplomatic representative to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China that year.

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The appointment of a non-career Vatican Catholic woman lawyer to represent the Holy See at the Fourth World Conference on Women served to testify to the world that the Holy See had not ever admitted any qualified Catholic women into its still all-male professional ecclesiastical foreign service, and therefore, possessed no career Catholic women diplomats in its foreign service to send to the Conference. To save diplomatic face, the Holy See appointed an outside female legal professional – one not trained in ecclesiastical diplomacy, nor an member of the Holy See's professional ecclesiastical foreign service – to represent the Holy See at the World Conference on Women. The Glendon Precedent is critical to establishing Vatican women diplomats since it officially affirmed that there exists no theological, scriptural, Magisterial, ecclesiastical, ecclesiological, canonical, legal, sociological, institutional, political, moral, or any other impediment to the training/education and commissioning of qualified Catholic women as full-time, paid, diplomatic-rank professional Holy See ecclesiastical foreign service representatives.

What is amazing (and, at the same time, not) is that this state of diplomatic gender apartheid continues to be condoned by the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace, the Holy See's internal human rights oversight agency. Thus, the UN's establishment of "UN Women" was to more strongly demonstrate to the global public and to UN voting and non-voting members the UN's solemn commitment and determinate resolve to ending all forms of discrimination against women—including that by non-voting UN permanent observer members, such as the Holy See. Chapter 1, Article 2, Para. 6 of the UN Charter (June 26, 1945), commands, "The Organization shall ensure that states which are not Members of the United Nations act in accordance with these Principles so far as may be necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security."

Factual evidence of the Holy See's policy of systemic exclusion and diplomatic gender apartheid of women from formal admission to the professional ecclesiastical foreign service ministry is not just overwhelming, it has been visibly ubiquitous, while all the time begging for urgent and righteous condemnation by the UN and the global diplomatic community—but has failed to receive the due diligence of public moral, legal, and/or diplomatic condemnation it deserves. For example, the Vatican's annual yearbook, the *Annuario Pontificio*, includes an official listing of the Holy See's all-male pontifical diplomatic representatives, and the [Vatican's original website](#) profiles the Vatican's professional diplomatic training school exclusively for males ordained as Catholic priests, the [Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy \(PEA\)](#), listing all the PEA's male-priest admits and subsequent alumni from 1701 to 2002.

On December 7, 1965, two months after visiting the U.S., addressing the UN, and blessing the Holy See's newly established Permanent Observer Mission to the UN building, which had been

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opened the previous April, Pope Paul VI, in accordance with the universal human rights mission of the Church and the UN, published the Catholic Church's most powerful and explicit papal document to date – condemning all forms of discrimination, including that by gender, known as “*Gaudium et Spes*” (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

Gaudium et Spes states, “Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent... the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.” In November 1973, the UN launched the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. In its perambulatory language, this Convention classified all forms of systemic discrimination, exclusion, and segregation as forms of apartheid, and condemned all forms of apartheid as “a crime against humanity.” Further, at the opening of the Seventh Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, in March 2008, Secretary Ban-Ki Moon stated unequivocally, “No country, however powerful, should escape scrutiny of its record, commitments, and actions on human rights. The Review must reaffirm that just as human rights are universal, so is our collective respect for them and our commitment to them...”

The UN Secretary General is right. No nation must be able to sit at the UN void of critical comprehensive scrutiny of its record, commitments, and actions on human rights. The Holy See is a sovereign moral authority at the UN promoting itself as a “friend of humanity,” while it is guilty of diplomatic gender apartheid. This is an unconscionable state of affairs, most especially since the Church's Magisterium has unequivocally condemned all forms of discrimination—including that by gender. The Holy See has the highest moral, legal, and diplomatic obligation, more than any other nation on earth, to urgently terminate its practice of ecclesiastical diplomatic gender apartheid.

Thus, in order to be true to its international human rights enforcement mission and to preserve the integrity of its, and the Holy See's, international human rights protection regime, the UN General Assembly urgently needs to: 1) summarily expel the Holy See from the UN for its centuries-old moral crime against humanity of diplomatic gender apartheid against Catholic women; 2) formally appoint a UN Special Envoy to the Holy See to conduct a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Holy See's human rights record in order to compel it to publicly appoint a Vatican diplomatic official to co-oversee the Holy See's establishment of professional women diplomats; and 3) officially acknowledge, as well as provide operational funding and office space for the Vatican Diplomacy Women's Task Force, the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Diplomatic

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Apostolate of Women & The Laity (PEDAWL), and the PUBVM Vatican School of Law, Diplomacy & Foreign Service for Catholic Women in order to create official full-time, salaried Catholic Vatican Women Ecclesiastical Diplomatic Representatives, who are then assigned to the Holy See's global network of ecclesiastical diplomatic missions (apostolic nunciatures) and included on the Holy See's official diplomatic list of Pontifical Representatives published in the Vatican's *Annuario Pontificio*.

Catholic women, like any other class of global women, deserve, and have a right to equal protection under the UN's international – as well as the Holy See's ecclesiastical – human rights rules of law. It is the UN's responsibility to ensure that Holy See takes firm and effective action to terminate its centuries-old policy of systemic exclusion Catholic women from official admission into the Holy See's ecclesiastical foreign service ministry and diplomatic “human rights” mission apostolate—or it needs to summarily expel the Holy See from all participation in the UN's global family of human rights organizations.

Photo: CNS photo/Alessia Pierdomenico, Reuters. Pope Benedict XVI greets Vatican-accredited diplomats during an audience at the Vatican.

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