



Franciscans International
30 years at the United Nations

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FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL: *Our common ministry*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It is with great joy that I present this publication on behalf of the Conference of the Franciscan Family. As we mark the 30th anniversary of our common ministry at the United Nations, the stories before you offer a window into the work of Franciscans International, both past and present. With it, we also pay tribute to Brother Dionysius Mintoff OFM and the late Sister Elizabeth Cameron OSF, who first recognized the need for Franciscans to engage with the international community in search for common, just, lasting solutions to the most intractable of social and environmental problems.

When they suggested bringing our voices to the UN in 1982, many of us immediately felt a strong affinity with this idea. The core values enshrined in the founding charter of the UN echo Francis' and Clare's dedication to peace, the poor, and the planet. We also felt a responsibility. If the UN is indeed the forum where leaders of the world gather to make the decisions that affect all of us sharing this common home, we need to be there – to build bridges, to bring people together, and to share our testimony.

Although the development of our ministry has, at times, been tumultuous, it has always been a powerful channel for dialogue and positive change. Through its presence in New York and Geneva, it amplifies the voices of our sisters and brothers working at the grassroots, where many share their lives with the people and are subject to similar conditions – those that are contrary to the will of God and an affront to human freedom, dignity, and integral development of persons, communities, and nations.



Thirty years after FI was officially recognized by the UN, we find ourselves at a crossroads in history that is defined both by its promise for progress as well as the threat of regression and isolation. As we face this challenge, we remain convinced that FI's role as our voice at the UN remains as important as ever.

On behalf of the Generals and Representatives of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, I wish to state unequivocally our gratitude to all those Franciscans and others who have worked directly or indirectly with FI over these past three decades, and to guarantee our commitment to the mission for which it was created and towards which it continues to journey.

Peace and all good.

On behalf of the Conference of the Franciscan Family,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Michael Anthony Perry, OFM". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michael Perry
Minister General, Order of Friars Minor

Members of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (2020)

- Michael Perry OFM • Carlos Alberto Trovarelli OFMConv • Roberto Genuin OFMCap
- Amando Trujillo Cano TOR • Deborah Lockwood IFC-TOR • Tibor Kauser OFS



HOW WE GOT HERE:

Franciscan voices at the United Nations

To hear Brother Dionysius Mintoff OFM talk is to hear about relations – be they divine, human, or historical. Born on Malta, he developed a keen sense of the island’s place in history as a hub between different worlds, be it in ancient times or during the World War he lived through. In his ministry, he still seeks to transform our relations for the common good.

In 1971, he founded the John XXIII Peace Laboratory, an open and unrestricted meeting-place, on the grounds of a former airbase that saw heavy combat during the war. At age 88, he still works there, now supporting the many refugees that make the perilous journey to the island. Each of them carries a story that is deeply personal, yet inextricably connected to global issues discussed by policy makers far away. It was this recognition of connectedness that inspired him to establish a Franciscan presence at the United Nations.

“There is a chapter our history when the Pope called on the Franciscans to conduct a church-wide consultation, because no other order had roots quite as deep or widespread,” says Brother Dionysius. “I realized this could also work the other way around: if we Franciscans are everywhere, why can’t we bring the voices of the marginalized to the powerful.”

His idea resonated deeply with the late Sister Elizabeth Cameron of the Sisters of Saint Francis from Clinton, Iowa. When she passed away in 1994, her obituary noted that she had been a world traveler and a dedicated member of several national and international advocacy organizations. However, she had also been a teacher for over 40 years and was the local director for programs such as Head Start, that directly touched people’s lives.

In 1982, they wrote a letter to the Franciscan Family in the United States, raising the idea that there should be a connection between



From left to right: Dionysius Mintoff OFM, Kevin Smith OSF, Ignatius Harding OFM, and Kathie Ulher OSF

the grassroots work of their brothers and sisters and those leaders that make decisions at the global level: the Franciscans should establish a permanent presence at the UN.

The roots of their idea had already been deeply ingrained in history of the Franciscan family. Francis himself wrote to the ‘rulers of the people’, reminding them that they too “must render an account before the Lord your God, Jesus Christ, on the day of judgment,” – the 13th Century equivalent of calling for accountability. 800 years after Francis’ visit to the Holy Land, his meeting with the sultan is still held up as an inspiration for international and interfaith dialogue. Sister Elizabeth and Brother Dionysius quickly found support among their fellow Franciscans, and

work began to set up this new interfamilial ministry.

The idea also resonated with many Franciscans already working with grassroots communities. “By the time the 80’s got around we started realizing the problems we faced weren’t ‘county problems.’ When I visited Peru or Colombia, I found the same problems that we faced in Bolivia,” says Brother Ignatius Harding OFM, who would later take on the role of FI’s co-director. “When we heard about the idea of Franciscans at the United Nations, it sounded like the logical extension of the work we were doing in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commissions.”



Brother Kevin Smith of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn was among the first to get involved and shape the ministry in a way that it could function within the framework of the United Nations. As this work got underway, he quickly realized that the Franciscans were not alone in their desire to come to the global stage. Brother Kevin recalled being in a meeting with Robert Muller, at the time the assistant Secretary-General of the UN, when he raised the idea of Franciscans forming a non-governmental organization (NGO).

Muller, who would later be remembered as ‘the philosopher of the UN’, simply responded “what took you so long to get here?”

In 1989, FI was formally recognized by the UN Department of Public Information, affirming that the organization had the commitment and means for sustained work at the UN. As Executive Director, Brother Kevin also was instrumental in getting FI recognized as a Category I NGO six years later. This meant that the Franciscans now could actively participate in UN deliberations but also, perhaps invite their brothers and sisters to provide their testimonies.

“We would always bring in people who were directly involved with issues. That meant a lot to the diplomatic missions: to have people from the ground that could speak at meetings,” says Sister Kathie Ulher of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany and co-Director of FI. “No matter what country was involved, there was always a Franciscan there, and we were able to bring them in. Financially, we were scrapping. A lot of times we had to pay our own way to go to meetings. But there was a lot of coordinating within the Franciscan Family, and we never got a rejection. If you

asked for something, people did it.”

Over the years, FI underwent a series of transformations, evolving and adapting to stay relevant and influential as an organization that represents the whole of the Franciscan Family in an ever-changing world. However, the founding principle that originated with Sister Elizabeth and Brother Dionysius has remained unchanged.

“For us, the most important thing was – and still is – that people don’t have a voice. That people who are most affected, like now with climate change, are the ones who never get to speak up,” said Brother Ignatius. “From the first moment we were not talking about ‘being the voice of the people’ at FI, but about ‘giving the people a voice.’” ■



From left to right: Bishop André de Witte, Cardinal Alvaro Ramazzini, and Reverend Ralf Häußler outside the UN in Geneva.

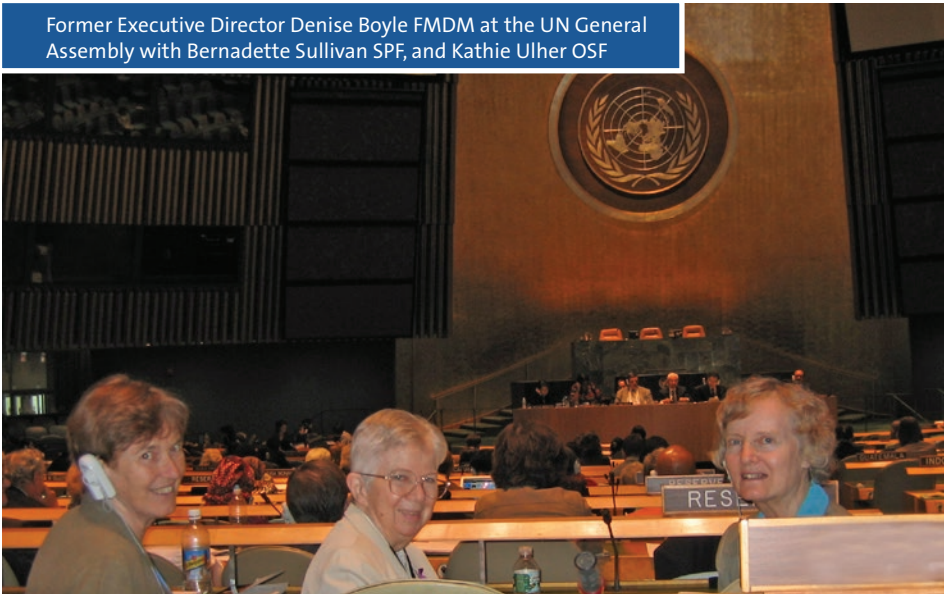


FI’s Executive Director Markus Heinze OFM accompanies Nathalie Kangaji SND as she prepares to deliver a statement to the UN Human Rights Council

1982

In a letter to the Franciscan Family in the United States, Brother Dionysius Mintoff OFM, and Sister Elizabeth Cameron OSF, raise the idea of establishing a Franciscan presence at the United Nations. Their suggestion quickly gains support and an interfamilial committee is established to organize this new ministry.

Former Executive Director Denise Boyle FMDM at the UN General Assembly with Bernadette Sullivan SPF, and Kathie Ulher OSF



1989

The UN Department of Public Information officially recognizes Franciscans International as a non-governmental organization (NGO) at the UN, affirming it has the promise, commitment, and means for sustained work on relevant activities in the future.

1990

FI opens its first office in New York. In these early years, the organization is made up of members, who support it through annual fees.

1995

The UN's Economic and Social Council grants FI General Consultative status. As the highest level recognized by the UN, it reflects FI's representation of wide segments of the population on a diverse range of issues worldwide. At the time, only 52 other NGOs were granted this Category I status.



Former Executive Director John Quigley OFM during a training at FI's Geneva office in 2007



Former board member Benedict Ayodi OFM outside the UN in Geneva

1997

FI opens a second office in Geneva, where the second largest UN office after New York is located. As the home of the Commission on Human Rights, and later the Human Rights Council, this is where much of the UN's human rights work takes place.



FI's Board of Directors in 2009

1999

The Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF) approves a new charter for FI, formalizing its role as the organization's official sponsor, and appoints an International Board of Directors (IBD) on which all branches are represented. The membership fees are abolished, and the CFF declares that, because of its sponsorship, FI represents the whole Franciscan Family at the UN.

2005

A new ecumenical dimension is added to FI when the the Anglican Society of St. Francis First and Third Orders joined the IBD. The organization's activities also continue to expand after a large donation by the Capuchin Conference of the United States makes it possible to establish a permanent Africa desk.



Former Liaison Officer Odile Coirier FMM during a training for the Anglican Franciscans in the Solomon Islands

2008

FI opens its third office in Bangkok to help build the capacity of the regional Franciscan Family. This office also works together with the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The organization is also represented in various other regional groups.



Office Director Julie Morgan and Beth de Vera SFIC in Bangkok

2013

After an intensive consultative process, the CFF decides to restructure FI in order to bring greater transparency to its operations and to more efficiently address the needs of the Franciscan Family. The Bangkok office and various other regional groups are dissolved. FI assumes its role as the voice "at" the UN, working on behalf of, and together with Franciscans. In New York and Geneva, it provides specific technical expertise and supports any member of the Franciscan Family seeking to bring an issue to the UN's attention.



Franciscans after a meeting with the UN in Bangkok



PUBLICATIONS (2007)

Word Poverty: Franciscan reflections

An important distinction was made by Saint Francis between the fundamental poverty that he practiced and proposed to all and the social poverty that is involuntary. Social poverty, those multiple forms of deprivation of what is indispensable for human integrity – food, clothing, lodging, work, education, freedom, etc. – was an evil to be eliminated.

In *World Poverty*, Franciscans International and the Franciscan International Study Centre present a collection of essays that examine the far-reaching impacts of poverty across the world, linking international human rights law and the teachings of Francis to explore how to address this problem in today’s world. Available upon request in English and German.

“The International Franciscan Conference of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis (IFC-TOR) strongly supports the charism of Franciscans International and its voice spoken to the world community. There are many Franciscan Third Order congregations of Sisters and Brothers throughout the world, all called to follow the Gospel and reflect the call of human dignity and their rights of the poor: of justice and peace.”

FI works courageously to ensure that field partners and grassroots communities are involved in response to the cries for justice and peace in the most vulnerable of situations. Through advocacy and action and through publications, FI ensures the widest outreach among the poorest communities around the world through a human-rights based approach with full participation of affected communities.

The Franciscans throughout the world have a steadfast partner and supporter in the face of some very difficult situations, especially of our brothers and sisters at the peripheries with whom we are called to walk by Pope Francis time and time again.”



Deborah Lockwood

President
International Franciscan Conference of
the Third Order Regular of St. Francis

BENIN:

Bringing change from the grassroots

The little village of Kika is not the easiest place in the world to get to. After driving north from Cotonou, Benin's largest city, for about six-and-a-half hours, you will have to turn off the highway. From there, it's only about 100 kilometers more – a journey that will take you almost four hours over the uneven dirt roads.

Nevertheless, Brother Auguste Agounké OFM Cap and twelve of his colleagues have squeezed themselves in two cars to make the journey. Over the course of three days, they will visit two more nearby villages and talk about ritual infanticide in Northern Benin.

According to tradition, there are many signs that can tell when a 'witch' is born. The baby may come into the world facing the ground or with its feet first. The mother could go into labor early or even die while giving birth. Other signs only manifest themselves later when, for example, a child starts teething from the upper

gums first. It is believed that such a 'witch child' will bring grave harm to its family. To protect the community, the child should be killed.

The exact number of children that have been accused of witchcraft and have been killed or abandoned is unknown. However, what is certain is that the practice still persists. Born in 1930, Father Pierre Bio Sanou, a native of the Bariba in Northern Benin, became one of the first and most vocal critics of his own community's practice of ritual infanticide. "Faced with the scourge, I asked the executioner in my community to stop all killings and asked him to call me every time there was a request from a family for a child to be killed," he later recalled speaking at the United Nations. All in all, Father Pierre is credited with directly saving over 200 hundred children. He was joined in his struggle by the Franciscan Family in Benin.



Children during a campaign event in Northern Benin



Together, they set out not only to save children in immediate danger, but also to bring about systemic change and eradicate the practice of ritual infanticide entirely. “This isn’t always easy,” explains Brother Auguste. “We have to explain to people why one specific element of their tradition is harmful, while other parts still greatly benefit the communities.”

Benin’s Franciscans realized that in order to bring structural change they would not only need the support of the communities

and their traditional leaders, but also to put pressure on their government. After a training for human rights defenders in Geneva in 2012, they recognized the need to establish an official organization, and Franciscains-Benin was born.

Because of its consultative status, FI could support the Franciscans from Benin to share their knowledge and concerns about the treatment of ‘witch children’ whenever experts at the UN examined the country’s

human rights record. Through this advocacy, other states increasingly started raising the issue with the government and calling for action. Partly as the result of this pressure, Benin’s National Assembly adopted a new Children’s Code in 2015 that has specific provision to protect infants accused of witchcraft. It also makes ritual infanticide a specific crime, punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

The work of the Franciscans in Benin and Geneva was hailed

by UNICEF as a best practice of collaboration between grassroots and international organizations. A 2019 report examining their work concluded that “the increasing replacement of infanticide by abandonment is believed to be the result of the work of Franciscans Benin.”

While abandonment brings its own challenges the babies survive, and the Franciscans are working hard to help them. To make their interventions more sustainable, Franciscains-Benin





Women during a private session on preventing infanticide

recently bought a large piece of land in the north and they are currently raising funds to build a home, school, and church there to shelter abandoned children accused of witchcraft.

Meanwhile, as long as children face infanticide or abandonment at birth, the Franciscans in Benin continue their sensitization campaigns at the grassroots. As soon as they arrive in Kika, Brother Auguste's team unloads a big set of speakers and turns on the music.

Rather than a stern lecture, today they will deliver a positive message of empowerment.

Over the next couple of hours, the team is joined by traditional leaders who address the men. In a safe space, women discuss what they can do if they fear their babies might be accused of witchcraft, and how they can reach the local monitors that Franciscans Benin has helped put in place. Afterwards, the community is brought together to share what they have learned. Tomorrow, the team will move on to the next town, but first, as the sun sets, everyone is dancing. ■

Franciscans and human dignity

Behind the oft-noted courtesy and personalism of Francis of Assisi, laid a religious conviction: every human being was a gift from the Creator God. Indeed, the *Canticle of Creation*, written by Francis, attests to his belief that every creature, human or not, every created thing, animate or inanimate, was a gift from God. That is why they were to be addressed as Brother or Sister, because Francis saw that all creatures were united by virtue of their being made by a loving God. This conviction is what led Francis to embrace lepers, preach to animals, and praise God for the basic elements like fire and water.

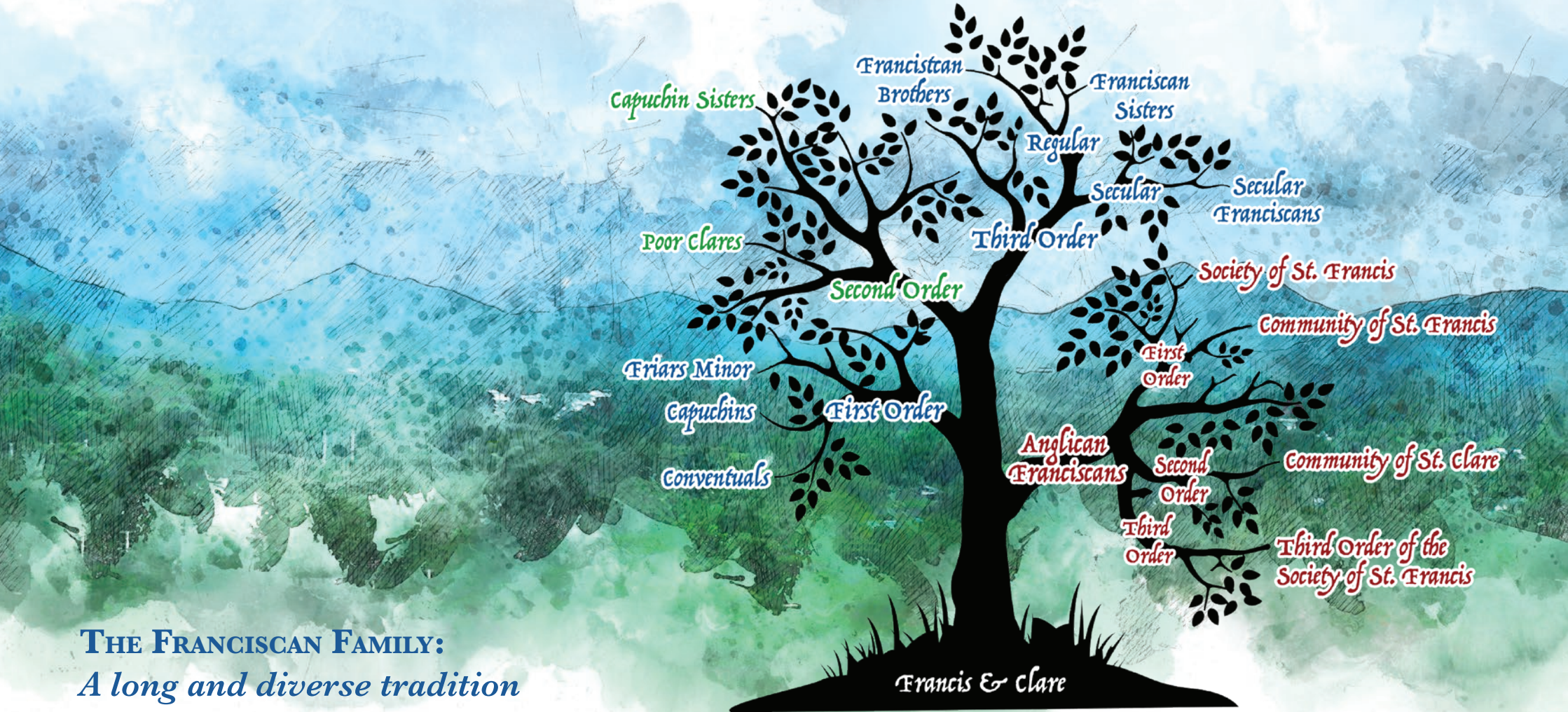
Being aware of the biblical accounts of creation, Francis knew that the human person is seen as made in the image and likeness of God in a special way. That did not lead him to ignore the sacredness of all creation; it did lead Francis to a particular respect for the human person as a manifestation of God's ongoing presence in the universe.

Within the Franciscan tradition, the idea of the sacredness of the human person is firmly established. When trying to communicate that conviction to others – believer and nonbeliever – the claim of sacredness has often been translated into the language of human dignity. There is an innate dignity in every person that is not the result of social status, economic productivity, or political power. It is the consequence of being a human person.

To give more specific content to the claim of the sacredness of the person or human dignity, the contemporary language of human rights has evolved as a means of putting flesh on the skeleton of dignity. To protect and promote human rights is a modern way to articulate the Franciscan conviction that each and every person is sacred due to being a creation of our loving God.

Kenneth R. Himes OFM

Professor of Theology at Boston College



THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY: *A long and diverse tradition*

Franciscans worldwide are a large and diverse family. Since the time of Francis and Clare, brothers and sister throughout history have found different ways of shaping their lives and communities to express their beliefs.

These different branches and traditions come together in the Conference of the Franciscan

Family (CFF), which is made up of the Ministers General of the First Orders, Third Order Regular, Secular Franciscan Order, and the President of the International Franciscan Conference of the Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular.

The CFF sponsors Franciscans International as their voice at

the United Nations and appoints the members of FI's International Board of Directors, which itself is a reflection of the different Franciscan branches.

The message of Francis and Clare transcended the Catholic Church and, although not a part of the CFF, the Anglican members of the Society of St. Francis are also

represented on FI's International Board of Directors.

FI is the first ever common ministry on the international and intra-familial scale in the history of the Franciscan movement.



PUBLICATIONS (2013)

Development: Sustainable for whom?

While sustainable development is generally seen as responsible and just, below the surface it is also a concept that gives rise to a much larger debate: what are the concrete realities behind so-called development for grassroots communities and the environment? Who truly reaps the benefits of development policies? Taking a holistic look, what are the real costs of these policies?

Without getting bogged down in jargon, Franciscans International examined the concept of sustainable development in both developing and developed countries. This book provides a starting point for readers to influence these policies as informed citizens. Available upon request in English and French.

“Franciscans International amplifies the voice and experience of Franciscans; together we can make the voices of the poorest people heard in the corridors of power. I belong to a small community, which could not do this on its own, and so I very much value being part of a worldwide Franciscan organization, bringing Franciscan values and priorities to the United Nations.”

Helen Julian

Minister General
Community of St. Francis



Christopher John

Minister General
Society of St. Francis

“Franciscans International provides a way for Franciscans and their friends at grassroots levels to take what they see and hear and help it become a voice at the United Nations. The strength of Franciscans is surely the range of relationships we have with all people in society, and through FI we can empower those who are most affected by injustice, violence and environmental degradation and help them speak to those at the UN who make and monitor policies. FI joins up people and helps build up humanity!”

WEST-PAPUA:

Raising voices from the grassroots

Yuliana Langowuyo started her law studies in 1998, the same year her country started what is now known as the *reformasi*. After the resignation of President Suharto, Indonesia underwent a series of tumultuous changes as it emerged from decades of dictatorship. As a native of West-Papua, this transformation also raised questions for Yuliana's own future.

Growing up, she had seen violence and unrest, but when a senior from her faculty was killed by the Indonesian security forces, things changed. "One day, on my way to campus, I heard that he had been shot in a nearby field. I was shocked, and it was one of the things that deeply touched me personally," Yuliana recalls. "Though I didn't know what to do after I graduated, I looked at the situation in Papua and it became clear to me that I could not work as a civil servant for the government."

She decided to use her training as a lawyer to work on human rights issues instead. This led her to join the Justice, Peace and of Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC) of the Order of Friars Minor in 2010, first as a volunteer and later as a staff member. The same decision also placed her in a situation where she was defending the rights of her fellow Papuans in a context marred by discrimination, economic interests, religion, national pride, and deep colonial scars.

Indonesia formally declared its independence in 1945. However, even after the United Nations formally recognized this four years later, the territories that are now Papua and West-Papua remained under Dutch control. It was not until 1962 that the UN brokered an agreement that would give the Papuans the right to determine their own fate – become independent or join Indonesia. Seven years later, 1,026 representatives unanimously chose the latter.



Internally displaced people fleeing violence in Nduga, West-Papua

This result was almost immediately rejected by many Papuans amid claims that these representatives had been handpicked to vote and constituted less than 1 percent of the population. The contested referendum sparked three decades of tense, and sometimes violent, conflict that may have caused as many as 400,000 deaths.

Culturally and ethnically distinct from much of the rest of Indonesia, indigenous Papuans feel discriminated against, and voice fears of being replaced in their native land through mass-immigration from the rest of Indonesia.

Just five minutes away from the convent where Yuliana works, in the harbor of Jayapura, large cargo ships pull in on a weekly basis, offloading people and supplies. According to the Indonesian authorities, these are used to further develop the island and improve quality of life. Many West-Papuans will claim these efforts are targeted at resource extraction, turning large parts of



Girls in Wamena wearing traditional Papuan clothing

the island's forests – on which they traditionally depend for their livelihoods – into palm oil plantations.

Meanwhile, authorities continue to repress any calls for self-determination. In 2019, when students tore down an Indonesian flag, police fired teargas into their dormitories. Allegations that they had used racial slurs set off a series of violent protests, and a week-long internet shutdown as security forces restored order with a heavy hand.

Yuliana herself almost became a casualty when she took part in

a protest years before. “While having a demonstration, the Franciscan and Augustinian seminarians and priests who participated were almost intentionally hit by the police truck. We ran away to save our lives and fifteen of us were arrested by the police,” she recalls. “I didn’t expect to have this reaction from security forces against seminarians and priests. We now understand that anyone can be a victim.”

Journalists and human rights experts from the United Nations need permission from the Indonesian government

to visit Papua, and this access has been regularly denied. Under these circumstances, it becomes extremely difficult to obtain reliable and up-to-date information. Together with FI, local Franciscans have stepped in to fill this void.

The Order of the Friars Minor first arrived in 1937 and from the outset its mission was deeply committed to human dignity and social justice. Brother Herman Munninghoff OFM and Bishop Emeritus of Jayapura recalled that only 15 percent of missionary work involved religion and the church.

“The rest is all about medical issues, health care and cultural matters, for which they have not been trained,” he later wrote. “I think this is actually the most important.”

With their deep roots in the communities, the local Franciscans are able to gather information even from isolated communities. After trainings hosted by FI, they also know how to collect and share these testimonies in ways that meet the standards expected by the international community. Through FI’s network, this knowledge is shared with key diplomats and other stakeholders, not only at the United Nations but also at the Vatican in Rome.

Information also flows the other way: in 2017 and 2018, Indonesia gave rare permission for two human rights experts to visit West Papua. FI worked with the local JPIC to make sure these Special Rapporteurs were able to interact with the people and organizations on the ground they needed to meet in order to conduct a meaningful visit.



Yuliana Langowuyo in Jayapura

These efforts have not come without a cost. The Franciscans in West-Papua have noticed how they are now closely watched by security forces. Nevertheless, they continue, inspired by their faith and the support they receive from their brothers and sisters abroad.

“My work defending the human rights of Papuans is inspired by my understanding of what Jesus has taught us to do,” says Yuliana. “As He said, ‘For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was in prison and you came to visit me,’ So, I try to bring the good news to those who are oppressed, to those who do not know where they can find help.” ■

Franciscans, poverty, and peace

Every time I read the letters that St. Clare of Assisi left us, there is a growing sensitivity in me about how much poverty was the melody which set the tone that shaped her life. This is not about achieving the highest asceticism but about her profound ability to love.

And so, it is not surprising that her priority was not the appeal of radical poverty but the reconciled relation to one another in the communitarian life, where ordinary poverty is continuously realized. In the middle of Clare’s spiritual testament, I see how she directly connects poverty and peace. To put it in my words: Clare reflects on the difficult time in her life she experienced shortly after the death of St. Francis and observes how threatening being vulnerable can be for herself and those around her, because with his death she lost all support and stability. She sees how, in such times, tension and conflict flare up. At least for her, this was a time of crisis.

In this situation, she did not look for outside help. Neither did she accept that other authorities should solve these tensions. She came together with her sisters to look precisely and frankly at the root causes of their tensions and conflict. Their solution was an act of poverty, through which they “voluntarily committed themselves to ‘Lady Poverty’ again and again.”

This simply means to let go of one’s own requirements and, through this act, open a space of life for the other. In letting go of my own desires and requirements, poverty means giving space in which God’s word can resound and we can listen to one another – in the past and here and now.

Ancilla Röttger OSC

Abbess of the Poor Clares in Munster



Tibor Kauser

Minister General
Secular Franciscan Order

“The Franciscans International is an organization, that has been representing for 30 years what is missing in the World so much even today: unity, solidarity, word for the poor; respect of the creation. It is a common initiative of the Franciscan Family, where all the Franciscan Orders, including the Secular Franciscan Order, have united for the good goals. Promotes solidarity with those marginalized, works for an advocacy for those who can not take a just share from the goods of the world, and calls the attention, that still, in the midst of many ecological movements and efforts, the concerns about a future lack of natural resources do not reflect on the respect of “all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High” (St. Francis of Assisi). FI has always been present for these goals.”

“These first 30 years of work as Franciscans International have made possible for the voice of the poor of the Earth to be heard at the highest tribune in our world, which prides itself on being civilized. Yet it experiences violence in all its forms every day, still longing for a future of true fraternity, justice and freedom. The cry of the Earth, our common home, is ever louder, but the ears of many are still indifferent to it. The price is paid by all, especially by the weakest and poorest. May the collaboration among Franciscans continue to grow and develop through FI and become an ever-louder song of hope, peace and harmony for the life of the world!”



Amando Trujillo Cano

Minister General
Third Order Regular



PUBLICATIONS (2014) *Franciscans in Papua*

At the beginning of the 20th century, Franciscan friars left their homes in the Netherlands to share their lives with the indigenous peoples of Papua. They gave testimonies of their faith, through different periods and social situations, by struggling together with the Papuans for dignity.

For over two decades, FI has supported the friars’ mission to find peaceful and lasting solutions to the problems in Papua through advocacy at the international level. This campaign is rooted in history and work of the friars, which are described in this book, as true stewards of human dignity. Available upon request in English.

FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL: *What we bring to the table*

Over the past 30 years, Franciscans International has shown that international support and solidarity can make a tangible difference. With the support of the Franciscan Family and other religious entities throughout the world, we have developed networks and expertise in defending peace, human dignity, and the integrity of creation through strategic advocacy at the United Nations.

That is why, in many countries, we are continuously supporting the advocacy efforts of the Franciscans and their partners, and of the national and regional networks they are part of. They are then empowered to expose and highlight the negative consequences of current and proposed policies to government officials, diplomats, and UN experts.

Being able to voice concerns and participate in decision making processes can not only influence these, but it can also restore dignity, especially for people in marginalized situations.

We do this together with you, because we believe that advocacy is one of the most effective means to create and implement sustainable solutions that achieve real and positive change.



A PLATFORM CONNECTING THE GRASSROOTS AND THE UN

1. Bridging

We bridge local, national and international advocacy efforts through our presence and know-how at the United Nations.



3. Voicing

We create opportunities for Franciscans and their partners to voice their concerns and increase pressure on their governments through key UN mechanisms, human rights experts, and diplomats.



2. Capacity-building

We build the capacity of our grassroots partners to monitor, denounce, and curb human rights violations faced by the people they serve.



4. Connecting

We connect Franciscans and their partners with others who face similar issues in their communities to share experiences and join forces to bring about change.





Communities

Promoting and protecting human rights

Sharing concerns, challenges, and problems
Providing support



United Nations

Tracking relevant UN activities
Evidence based advocacy and expert advice



Franciscan Family

Capacity building and knowledge sharing
Sharing concerns and verified information



“To be a Franciscan is to follow Christ in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, seeking to live the gospel in the way of Francis and Clare. In 1956 Pope Pius XI said “The spirituality of a saint is nothing other than his special manner of representing God, of speaking about him, of going to him, of treating with him... There is a Franciscan manner of contemplating Jesus, of loving him, of imitating him. The world has need of this Franciscan spirit, of this Franciscan vision of life.” (Vorreux and Pembleton, A Short History of the Franciscan Family, p. 105)

This Franciscan vision of life is centred on God’s infinite love for all people and all creation. In Franciscan International the various parts of the Franciscan family, across denominations, can come together to offer this Franciscan vision for life; love found in justice, generosity, compassion, goodness, and peace.

It offers us both resources to engage in issues of compassion, justice, and care for creation in our local communities; and, a way of raising those issues in the United Nations and providing the means for voices that are too often silenced to be heard. It gives life to those who too often have no voice, and life to those who struggle to know what to do in the face of all that is broken in our world.”

John Hebenton

Minister General
Third Order of the Society of St. Francis



PUBLICATIONS (2015)

Human rights and extreme poverty

In September 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted the first ever global policy guidelines focused specifically on the human rights of people living in poverty. But how should these be used concretely to improve the lived daily experience of millions of people?

In this handbook, Franciscans International provides the tools for those working with people living in poverty to take direct action. It can be used by all grassroots actors, whether they work with local authorities, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, or community associations. Available on our website in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.



MEXICO:

Lived realities at the grassroots

Every month, Diana Muñoz Alba of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and three of her sisters welcome over 1,200 people in their small shelter in Salto de Agua, Mexico. Although only 90 kilometers away from the Guatemalan border, the migrants that they receive will often have been walking for days, trying to avoid not only the cartels that prey on them, but also the National Guard that patrols this increasingly militarized region. If they can make it to the shelter, these migrants will have the chance to eat, rest and, if necessary, receive medical attention. After three days, they will be back on the road.

Over the last decade, the number of people on the move in the Northern Triangle, which encompasses El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, has grown dramatically: The United Nations has reported a 2,249 percent rise in migration between 2011 and 2016.

At the end of 2019, more than half a million people from this region were displaced.

Gang violence and political instability have been widely covered as causes for this exodus. However, other factors that are also at play have been less visible, even though they are still caused by human intervention. The consequences of climate change have had a profound impact on the Northern Triangle, where prolonged droughts, fluctuating temperatures, and unpredictable rainfall have a detrimental effect on people's livelihoods. Others have become displaced because of unsustainable development, as large-scale industrial projects cut off their access to water and pollute the land they use to sustain themselves and their communities.

People forced to leave become an easy target for those seeking to exploit them, and even those trying to support migrants can find themselves at risk – both from criminals and authorities.



Migrants on a train in Mexico

“It is an open secret that the authorities in our municipality are involved with the trafficking, so there is a lot of tension with the authorities,” Sister Diana says. “Working with migrants means we are taking away the jobs of criminal groups, and we’re competing with organized crime and trafficking networks. There are many cartels who will kidnap migrants and demand a ransom from the families. As a shelter, we are a thorn in the side of these criminals, because we’re taking away their jobs.”

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the international frameworks dealing with the rights of migrants and refugees were written shortly after the Second World War: these did not take into account situations where people’s lives would be at risk because of a changing climate or industrial development. Today ‘environmental migrants’ remain vulnerable, with little protections under international and national laws.

In 2016, however, the UN officially recognized the need for more cooperation between countries to address migration. FI made sure that brothers and sisters working directly with migrants were heard during the negotiations. With our support Sister Diana travelled to New York to share the lived experience of the people she cares for.

Although the outcome of the negotiations ultimately fell short of the promises made by member states, Sister Diana remains convinced that confronting policymakers first-hand with the reality on the ground is one of the most important ways to advocate

for change and she continues to do so – even if this is a long process.

“People often only become really aware when they witness the situation themselves,” she says, recalling a recent experience outside Salto de Agua. A lady, who had been making regular donations to the shelter, was visiting when a train happened to pass by. “Migrants were running to climb in, often with babies. She had never seen anything like that, so it impacted her strongly,” says Sister Diana. “When people see the reality, it raises their awareness. They see innocent people who just want to live.” ■



Diana Muñoz Alba FMM at the UN and in Salto de Agua

Franciscans and environmental justice

Franciscans are rightly concerned with the needs of the environment in which we live. Francis might have turned into the saint of birdbaths in popular thought, but his approach to creation was much richer than that simple image. He affirmed the value of creation and saw that God entered the world in human form in the humility of frail human flesh. And he recognised too that God continues to dwell among us in the bread and wine of Christ's body and blood. The world we live in is a sacramental encounter with the divine.

The things of our physical world are important; in other words, "matter matters." Justice is a rich concept in biblical terms.

More than the punishment of wrongdoing, it means giving people their rights, and especially to those most vulnerable.

If we bring environment and justice together as environmental justice, Franciscans have a powerful lens to look at the world. We love and care for the material things of creation, since they are for us signs of the divine presence. But we also hear the voices of the suffering. The poor, the marginalised, the oppressed peoples of the world. Just as we hear these human voices, we also need to hear the voices of the whole created order crying out for justice because the voices of the rivers, lakes and forests and so on, these are the voices of the vulnerable.

But justice requires more than just listening. The biblical phrase is to "do justice"; justice is action. The action done by Franciscans International is to take the voices of the vulnerable (of humans – and of all creation) and to let these voices speak in the UN gatherings where policies can be set and programmes initiated.

Our best witnesses to the cry of the environment are those living most closely to the land and sea and rivers. They see and know the daily changes caused by climate change or rising sea levels.

They know what it is when their land no longer produces the crops it has for generations, or when their fresh water supplies become undrinkable.

They have no alternative supplies. Their daily food comes from the land and sea round them—or it doesn't.

Franciscans are (or should be) the people who know intimately the needs of those living on the most vulnerable margins. We are privileged by education and status. Let us also be the people who "do justice" for all our sisters and brothers in creation.

Christopher John SSF

Minister General
Society of St. Francis





CELEBRATIONS IN 2019

In October 2019, the International Board of Directors met in **New York** with Secretary General António Guterres who expressed his support for the work of Franciscans International and his appreciation of the overlap of Franciscan and United Nations values.



Franciscans International kicked off its 30-year anniversary by hosting a reception in **Geneva** which brought together many of its civil society partners, diplomats, and Franciscans from all over the world. This was not just a celebration but also a reunion: many of the guests have worked together for years in different human rights forums on issues close to their hearts.

“Without falling into historical-theological disputes over the reasons for the death sentence of Jesus, we know with certainty that Jesus died also because of his struggle for justice. As long as there is any form of injustice in society, His memory cannot leave his disciples indifferent and inert.”

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo OFM^{Cap} during Franciscans International celebration in **Rome**.



Roberto Genuin
Minister General
Order of Friars Minor
Capuchin

“The professional manner in which the staff of Franciscans International works to bring to the level of the United Nations the challenges and difficulties that our brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Family encounter and experience concretely as they share their lives with and work with the poor and marginalized everywhere in the world is to be appreciated. It is precisely through this specific undertaking that FI can be an ever more effective instrument of human promotion, as well as a force that acts for peace and good in the world.”



“Our Franciscan and Gospel values of peace, human rights and care for creation should be proclaimed in unison by all Franciscans, from the highest pinnacle to every human being in every corner of the world. FI offers us an opportunity to do exactly that. It is a ministry that the entire Franciscan family, including our Anglican confraternity, can carry out to the world. There is no better or higher world forum to render this service than the UN.

As Franciscan-Muslim collaboration grows stronger, especially in commemoration of that historic encounter between the Poverello and the Sultan Al-Malik-al Kamil, we pray that a Muslim-Franciscan confraternity may one day join FI We have a message for the world that is both timeless and perennial.”



Carlos A. Trovarelli
Minister General
Order of Friars Minor
Conventual

PUBLICATIONS (2017)

A Toolbox: Connecting the dots

Franciscans International’s Toolbox examines how human rights violations can harm the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and makes communities more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. As a cornerstone of our capacity building efforts, it empowers people to make full use of existing mechanisms on these issues and promote an approach that respects and protects human rights.

The Toolbox can be used by non-governmental and faith-based organizations at the national, regional, and international levels, who are interested in making the link between their government’s commitments in the areas of human rights, sustainable development, and climate action. Available on our website in English, French, and Spanish.



Rodrigo Péret OFM visits Brumadinho one year after the disaster

GLOBAL:

From the grassroots to systemic change

On 25 January 2019, a dam holding back industrial waste in Brazil's Minas Gerais State collapsed, releasing over 18 million cubic meters of toxic mud. Seconds later, the stream tore through a nearby mining complex where workers were just having lunch and rushed downstream to the small town of Vila Ferteco. 272 people were killed in the disaster. The alarm meant to warn those nearby never sounded – it had been installed just below the dam and was instantly destroyed.

Upstream tailing dams like the one that collapsed in Brumadinho are a cheap way to store waste from iron mining, because they use the leftover materials itself as part of the structure. They are also dangerous. If not maintained properly, water can build up and cause liquefaction – when solid material suddenly behaves as a liquid – triggering a catastrophic collapse.

In the aftermath of the disaster, it soon emerged that the company that owned the dam had repeatedly ignored warnings of leaks. A second company had certified the structure as safe just month earlier, although internal memos later showed that its employees considered liquefaction an immediate risk.

“We consider this negligence a crime. And it’s not the first time this happened,” says Brother Rodrigo Péret OFM, who visited Brumadinho hours after the disaster. As an advisor to the special commission on mining and integral ecology of the National Bishop’s Conference of Brazil, he was already working with the victims of a similar tragedy that occurred four years earlier in nearby Mariana. “That time 19 people were killed, and hundreds were displaced by the environmental damage. We actually say there were 20 victims because one of the women was pregnant, but the baby didn’t exist for the company,” he says.

Just a few weeks later after the Brumadinho disaster, Brother Rodrigo joined Franciscans International in Geneva where he shared testimony of what he witnessed. He also stressed the importance of ongoing negotiations at the United Nations to establish a treaty that would hold businesses accountable for human rights violations under international law – efforts behind which FI has been a driving force. However, in the context of development

and large-scale industrial projects, human rights are not only threatened by corporate negligence but also because of official policies.

Although these issues are of global and universal reach, not everyone is equal when facing the consequences of the lack of political will in changing the unsustainable models of development or the lack of accountability for these failures. Indeed, climate change and

unsustainable development models do not affect all of us in the same way. Individuals and groups who are already at higher risks of being discriminated against and marginalized are and will be suffering the most.

“It’s a mentality. For example, mining requires ‘sacrifice zones’ – we’ll destroy a certain area but say it is for the common good of all. Then come the excuses: we can’t choose where the minerals are. For water, it’s the same. Most

of the time, the communities affected are not the ones that benefit from the profits,” says Brother Rodrigo. “These communities should be informed, consulted, and participate in decisions that affect them. There should be legal guarantees that their rights are respected.”

FI believes that peace, sustainable development, the environment, and human rights are inextricably linked. As part of our efforts to place human rights at the core



Angel Cortez OFM at a climate march outside the UN in Geneva



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo OFM Cap at the UN in Geneva

of all global policies, FI works through its New York office and Global Program to make sure that the voices of those like Brother Rodrigo are heard throughout the UN system and not just those specifically dealing with human rights.

“Ultimately, this is not a discussion about what we should avoid

having. It’s a discussion about what we can have,” says Brother Rodrigo. “This is an area where the Franciscans make a unique contribution in the international discussion. Not only because the spirituality of Saint Francis and Saint Clare teaches us to live in harmony with creation, but also because we bring this experience from the ground.” ■



Pope Francis receives the names and photos of Brumadhino victims

A simple thank you

Advocacy is not a matter of prestige, or of who talks louder. It is rather about finding spaces where the most fragile voices can talk for themselves, and convince decision makers to take action.

Together with you, and throughout the years, we have been making lasting impacts. Because sustained international and Franciscan solidarity makes a difference by opening doors and spaces for those who remain marginalized otherwise.

Franciscans International wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all the people and entities that have been supporting this specific way of doing advocacy at the United Nations for the past 30 years.

- To the **Franciscan provinces, orders and congregations**, we thank you for your questions, words of appreciation, and your important financial support. You are the foundations on which we can build, the ones that give us the legitimacy and the strength to act on behalf of the Franciscan family.
- To the **funding agencies**, we thank you for choosing our projects, while leading us to find comprehensive and efficient strategies for action. Your grants and constructive inputs provide us with solid material to further shape plans of action that can make a difference on the long run.
- To **all the individuals** who supported FI, we thank you for your generosity, and your commitment to our common mission throughout the years. Your helping hands for all kind of tasks, your time, your donations, and your enthusiasm are what make this project so unique.

For all this, we simply thank you.

Be sure that the common values and vision we share will be driving our action for many years to come.

OUR WORK CONTINUES:

Supporting a new generation

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The International Board of Directors participated enthusiastically in the 30th anniversary of Franciscans International, and cherished the opportunities throughout the year to meet and thank many of the people who helped make this endeavor a reality. This important event, however, cannot simply be a nostalgic trip down memory lane. Rather, we need to look toward the future and continue to engage others in the ministry of FI.



Around the world today, a young global generation has been spurred to action as they protest social injustice, the exclusion and marginalization of millions, and a climate crisis – many of the same urgent concerns that animated Francis and Clare. In this context, the work of FI remains as relevant as it was on the day it was founded.

As Franciscan family, we must continue to listen and welcome those who share our concerns. FI, the representation of our family at the United Nations, will continue to offer a platform to elevate and amplify the voices of our brothers and sisters. Throughout our long history, we have evolved as Franciscans to meet the challenges of the day. As we do so again, FI will be a home for all – young and old – who wish to join forces in our common cause and seek for new ways to promote respect for human dignity, peace, and care for creation throughout the world.

In the Gospel, people like Peter and Paul were challenged to see their world and their work in completely new ways. They took this challenge to heart and, often in the face of ferocious opposition, were able to re-ground their message in a novel and effective manner. May God give us the strength to face a similar challenge in our own day and age. May we continue to be committed to the work of FI and, through our efforts, inspire others to join us in the search for a new heaven and a new earth!

Peace and all good. May God be with us in this audacious undertaking.

On behalf of the International Board of Directors,

Joseph Rozansky OFM
President

Members of the International Board of Directors (left to right)

- Markus Heinze OFM • Clark Berge SSF • Kevin Queally TOR
- Carla Casadei SFP • Ruth Marcus OFS • Joseph Rozansky OFM
- Joseph Blay OFMConv • James Donegan OFMConv

OUR VISION

A global community in which the dignity of every person is respected, resources are shared equitably, the environment is sustained, and nations and peoples live in peace.

OUR MISSION

Using a rights-based approach, Franciscans International advocates at the United Nations for the protection of human dignity and environmental justice.



Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations