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Welcome to Franciscans International's Newsletter!

This Newsletter, which you will get three times per year, is distributed in two parts and provides an overview of our work. An email version provides you with links to highlights of our work at the United Nations (including Oral Statements submitted to various UN bodies, multimedia content, and our most recent publications), while an online version allows you to read more in-depth about important events and initiatives that Franciscans International is currently working on.

In this issue, you can read about capacity building in Geneva, Franciscan responses to the migration phenomenon in Central America and Mexico, and the crisis unfolding in Marawi, Philippines.

We hope you will find our Newsletter informative and engaging. And, of course, if you want to know more about Franciscans International's work please visit our website: www.franciscansinternational.org.

Fraternally,

Markus Heinze, OFM



(left) A youth in an evacuation centre outside Marawi. Franciscans in the Philippines have been some of the first to bring humanitarian assistance to the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Marawi in the form of food, medical assistance, and livelihood support. (right) Members of Franciscans International's New York Office collaborated with the Migrant Center to host a panel on the migration crisis in Central America and Mexico.



FRANCISCAN SPOTLIGHT

Br. Christian Seno, OFM

Franciscan Spotlight is a new section that will feature the work of Franciscans International's partners on the ground. Through a series of brief interviews, these Brothers and Sisters will share their passion for human rights, some insights into their work, and their hopes for a better future.

Our first Franciscan Spotlight focuses on the work of Fray Tomás González Castillo, OFM. The founder of La 72, a migrant and refugee shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco, Mexico, Fray Tomás has recently been honored as a runner up for the United Nations' Nansen Refugee Award. Named after Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian explorer, scientist, diplomat, humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who served as the first High Commissioner for Refugees at the League of Nations, the Nansen Refugee Award honors individuals who have advocated for the aid and protection of displaced persons.

On 18 October 2017, Fray Tomás was presented with the Human Rights First Award for his work in advocating for migrants and refugees. Human Rights First wrote, "Unbowed, Friar Tomás persists in championing the human rights of migrants and challenging the Mexican government to end impunity for crimes against the hemisphere's most vulnerable population."

Franciscan Spotlight spoke with Fray Tomás about the significance of receiving international recognition for his humanitarian work and the importance of human rights advocacy as a Franciscan.

What does your recognition as a finalist for the United Nations' Nansen Refugee Award and the recipient of the Human Rights First Award in New York City mean to you?

This recognition is not for one person because La 72 has been a collective effort of several years. It is a recognition of the work of the many people who have gone through Tenosique and have believed in our project. As Franciscan, it is a recognition of our Family and of our Order.

How will this honor impact your work with the migrants and refugees in La 72?



This recognition commits us to continue working with passion, without rest; because migrants and refugees will continue to come and they will continue to suffer.

How does working with Franciscans International and the United Nations assist you in your work with migrants and refugees in Mexico?

Franciscans International is a strategic ally. The issue of migration and refugees is a "transversal" theme in the present pontificate and, for us Franciscans, it is imperative to work with them.

Why is it so important to include working for human rights in your ministry as a Franciscan friar?

We Franciscans have a gigantic spiritual heritage. In the history of our family, we have not yet travelled down all of the paths franciscanism is capable of taking. The struggle for human rights is one more path to live out our charism. But I believe that human rights should permeate all of the evangelization work of our Order.

How can other Franciscans in Mexico and all over the world get involved with advocating for our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters?

The migratory reality of Mexico and the United States is one of much suffering. Politicians, governors, the owners of economic power have worked to create borders and design walls; each Franciscan and each Province should, today, serve migrant and refugee according to the gospel.



The Franciscans International Office in Geneva hosted a training for Franciscan partners to learn about and discuss the interconnection between human rights standards, sustainable development and climate action commitments that States have adhered to.

TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Cédric Chatelanat, Project Manager

This fall, Franciscans International organized a cross-regional training in its office in Geneva to build the capacities of trainers from its international network around human rights, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate change. Eleven participants representing 10 different countries from Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe, joined the training that provided space for sharing their experiences and knowledge.

Participants also discussed with a range of experts to identify strategic ways to engage with UN in New York and Geneva around issues such as extreme poverty, land grabbing, water sanitation and corporate abuses. And to put theory into practice, most of them took the opportunity of being in Geneva to lobby diplomatic missions and UN experts on these important topics.

Both Franciscans and lay partner organizations sent experienced representatives to the training. Among the participants, for example, there was a Franciscan sister involved in an unprecedented area planning, together with local communities in Mukuru, one of Kenya's biggest slum. Or an Indian brother battling to defend the rights of marginalized groups being deprived of their land by corporations. All of them left Geneva taking not only technical knowledge, but also concrete action plans.

Several of the projects discussed during the training

are already underway, including a follow-up regional seminar that will take place in Uganda before the end of the year.

More collaborations and projects to advocate for a stronger protection of human rights in the context of Sustainable Development Goals and climate change are expected for 2018.

RESPONDING TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS

An event with the Migrant Center and La 72

Br. Christian Seno, OFM

On October 17, Franciscans International partnered with the Migrant Center at the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi to sponsor a panel discussion the responding to the migration crisis in Mexico and Central America. This intimate panel discussion was held on the evening prior to the Human Rights First Awards Dinner, which was presenting Fray Tomás González Castillo, founder of La 72 Hogar-Refugio Para Personas Migrantes, with a humanitarian award for his work with advocating for the human rights of migrants and refugees in the south of Mexico. The panel, which was moderated by community organizer Waleska Cabrera, included Ramón Márquez, Director of La 72, Eleanor Acer, Senior Director of Refugee Protection at Human Rights First, and immigrant activist Teresa Gutiérrez.

Ramón Márquez presented on the current situation in Mexico and provided some startling statistics regarding the experiences of the migrants and refugees who go through the doors of La 72. In the six years since the shelter has operated, Mr. Márquez noted that over 75,000 have gone through the shelter. In 2016 alone, over 13,800 were received in the shelter. "We are not there only to give humanitarian assistance; we are not there to give charity to the people. We are [there] to defend rights. We are there to promote rights. So, we want the people that are arriving at the center to identify themselves as human rights defenders."

Given the media focus on the heated rhetoric surrounding immigration in the United States, Mr. Márquez pointed out that the Trump administration's policies have impacted the flow of migration in Mexico.

In 2017, the shelter has seen a sharp decrease in the number of migrants (by half), while the number of asylum seekers in Mexico have doubled. The increased number of people fleeing violence in Central America to Mexico has been met with resistance from the Mexican government.

The anti-immigrant and anti-refugee policies of the Mexican and U.S. governments were echoed by Eleanor Acer. In particular, she focused on the policies of the Trump administration that seek to limit the flow of migration, such as the pending legislation that would prevent refugees who passed through identified “safe third countries” (such as Mexico or Turkey) during their journey from applying for asylum in the United States. For Ms. Acer, this is a source of concern. “Despite a lot of the public rhetoric, the US hosts a very small portion of the world’s refugees, particularly in comparison to its capacity... What the United States does sets a tone for the rest of the world.”

Human Rights First has done work to address these current challenges by researching the Mexican asylum system. They issued a report to identify the ways in which Mexico is not a “safe third country” and to make clear that the United States cannot legally declare it as such, under international human rights principals.

Immigrant rights activist Teresa Gutiérrez offered compelling personal testimony. She shared how the migrant’s and refugee’s journey is accompanied by racism, “hate and anger brought on from nothing and directed towards our very beings.” She provided heartrending narratives of injustice that she and other migrants and refugees face.

Ms. Gutiérrez connected the economic injustices facing undocumented workers in the United States with the broader human rights violations affecting migrants and refugees. “We face discrimination in terms of human rights. We can call this the new era of slavery.” For Ms. Gutiérrez, the roughly 12 billion dollars that undocumented immigrants pay in taxes is a prime example of a corrupt system that takes from people in vulnerable situations.

Ms. Gutiérrez closed with a challenge for Franciscans, “What [do] we need from the Franciscans and other activist groups who claim to help us? We need action... This is the time you have to embrace us and take us in for real, as well as to organize and inform each other to create a network of power together as people of faith.”



On October 17, Franciscans International sponsored a panel discussion the migration crisis in Mexico and Central America. The panel brought together human rights defenders and advocates. (bottom) Fr. Julian Jagudilla, OFM, of the Migrant Center in New York City.

Similarly, Mr. Márquez urged us to “follow the example of Saint Francis. Host them, receive them, embrace them, hear them, accompany them, give them hope and give them dignity.” The work of Franciscans International and its collaboration with partners such as the Migrant Center and La 72 aspires to live up to this call.

PHILIPPINES: THE CRISIS IN MARAWI

Over 400,000 people have been internally displaced from Marawi City.

Paolo Cravero, Communications Officer

From May 23, 2017, the Islamic City of Marawi, the capital of the predominantly Muslim Lanao del Sur province in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, in the Philippines, has been the epicentre of violence.

On that day, the Philippine Army and a local radical Islamist entity, allegedly affiliated to ISIL, the Maute Group, began a battle in the city. This action soon became a siege and, as of June, official data report that over 400,000 people were internally displaced to neighbouring provinces.

Local Franciscans have been some of the first to bring humanitarian assistance to the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Marawi in the form of food, medical assistance, and livelihood support. Franciscans also organised psycho-social interventions (similar to group counselling meetings) to help IDPs deal with their trauma.

Norly Sara Paingco, 24, was present at one of these meetings. Until May 23 she was a student in the city of Marawi. On that day, she had to leave her city, her house, and her school. She now lives in an evacuation center in Baloi, in the Lanao del Norte province, some 30 km north of Marawi city.

"Why are we being evicted from our houses? Why are we considered terrorists?" she asks in tears. "Now I cannot study. My future is destroyed."

Since May the crisis in Marawi has intensified and the martial law, initially proclaimed for the city of Marawi only, was extended to the whole island of Mindanao on July 22.

The living conditions of IDPs in the country is increasingly worrying and Sen. Leila de Lima, former chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights, requested the Duterte administration to formally invite the United Nations special rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, to look into the growing number of citizens displaced by this crisis. As reported by The Philippine Star, "The senator said the government, as the 'legal protector of Filipinos who are unable to protect themselves,' has the duty to pursue



Norly Sara Paingco, 24, attended a meeting organized by Franciscans. Norly was forcibly displaced from Marawi and now lives in an evacuation center in Baloi, in the Lanao del Norte Province, some 30 km north of Marawi City.

an impartial investigation through an independent commission of inquiry to be conducted by the UN special rapporteur."

Budi Tjahjono, Franciscans International's Asia-Pacific Coordinator, was recently in Iligan City—40 km from Marawi—to attend a meeting with the JPIC of Franciscans in Mindanao, titled "Franciscans, ONE with Marawi." In the context of this meeting, that aimed to consolidate Franciscan responses to the crisis, Mr Tjahjono also visited one of the evacuation centres where local Franciscans are engaged in humanitarian assistance and advocacy. His assessment of the situation is similar to the one provided by Sen. De Lima. He said, "It is very important to address immediately the IDPs situation though the lenses of the UN guiding principles on internal displacement." And he further added that "the Philippines should invite the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs to visit Marawi and the region. And the Government should also reconsider their position in regard to Bill 1142 on IDPs rights."