



Greetings from the FI Office!

We thank you for your involvement and interest in FI's work to influence key policy makers to promote human rights for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Here are some of FI's recent activities. For questions or more information, please contact communication@fiop.org.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."— Martin Luther King Jr.

FI staff wishes you and your loved ones all the best for 2016! May it be a year of wholeness and peace, a year that brings us towards greater justice for the marginalised and the most vulnerable.

COP21 and Beyond: Promoting a Human Rights Based Approach to Climate Issues

The adverse impacts of climate change are a matter of justice and inequality. Communities who are dependent on the environment for their livelihood – pastoralists, indigenous people, people living on small islands and low coastal zones – and people living in poverty are the ones most affected by both climate change and the responses taken to address its impacts. The increase of droughts, floods, cyclones and typhoons threaten their right to life, to adequate food, to safe drinking water, to adequate housing, to health. Those communities whose rights are most threatened are also those most at risk for being left behind and marginalised in talks about mitigating climate change.



FI and partners therefore actively engaged with the COP21 climate talks in December 2015, highlighting the protection of human rights as a key element in mitigating the impacts of global warming, and calling for robust human rights language in the Agreement. They also pushed to ensure that marginalised communities be involved in any future climate actions.

FI's representatives organised and participated in official events at the COP21, including debates on the impact of extractive industry on the environment, focusing on keeping fossil fuels in the ground, banning fracking, and protecting people's rights to health, and to a safe and clean environment. FI and partners also took part in parallel discussions with activists and civil society. Through this active participation, FI and partners sought to influence the language of the deal, insisting that governments must be held accountable to protecting human rights when addressing climate change and seeking to mitigate its impacts.

Hailed as a success by many, the Paris Agreement defines an ambitious target to limit the temperature increase to well below 2°C, aiming for a 1.5°C objective. Although human rights language is included in the Agreement's preamble, the Agreement itself does not strongly put forward the link between human rights and climate change. FI and partners will therefore continue to advocate for a human-rights based approach to climate change, as they monitor the ratification of the Agreement and its implementation. This will include linking up with FI's work on the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 13, which revolves around climate action, and therefore complements the Paris Agreement. A focus for FI will be making sure that climate action measures are implemented at national level, in consultation with those affected at the grassroots, so that even the most marginalised can meaningfully participate in effective climate change-related planning and management.

Read more about our event on fracking [here](#).

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Extreme Poverty is a Human Rights Violation: Poverty Reduction Efforts Should Focus on Rights

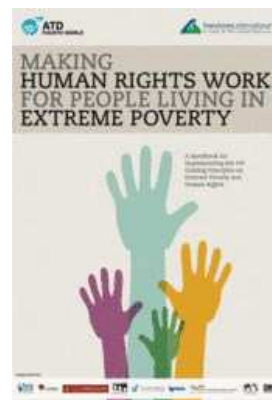
In his recent inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy on December 8th 2015, Pope Francis encouraged Catholics worldwide to "open wide the doors of their hearts" to forgive others and work against social exclusion. "Mercy and forgiveness must not remain beautiful words," he said, "but must be realized in daily life."

On December 17th 2015, at a Press Conference held at the Holy See Press Office (Sala Stampa) in Rome, Franciscans International, along with ATD Fourth World and Caritas Internationalis, presented its publication "Making Human Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty: A Handbook for Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights" as a tool for combating extreme poverty; a tool that echoes with the Pope's concern about today's "economy of exclusion and inequality." Defining extreme poverty primarily as a human rights violation, the handbook puts forward key elements for mobilising and empowering people and communities to advocate for better policies.

The handbook's human-rights based approach recognises all people as rights-holders and ensures that States are held accountable to upholding those rights.

"The elimination of extreme poverty is not only a moral duty, but also a legal obligation, by virtue of the provisions of international law on human rights," stated FI's Advocacy Director at the Press Conference. "As is enshrined in the UN's Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights: 'Extreme poverty is not inevitable. It is, at least in part, created, enabled and perpetuated by acts and omissions of States and other economic actors; the tools for ending it are within reach.'"

FI is using the launch and promotion of its handbook "Making Human Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty: A Handbook for Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights," and the movie "Extreme Poverty: Standing Up For Rights" to push for and exemplify a rights-based approach to addressing extreme poverty at the UN, among Catholic leaders, and with our partners on the field.



Calling for Urgent Action to Protect the Rights of Migrants in Mexico

Br. Tomás González is a Mexican Franciscan brother who operates a shelter for migrants seeking refuge and security along the Mexico-Guatemala border, in Tenosique, Tabasco. The majority of people they receive come from Central America and they have observed that this exodus is no longer motivated primarily by economic reasons: people are fleeing for their lives hoping to escape gangs and violence. The shelter is named "La 72" in honour of the 72 migrants massacred in San Fernando Tamaulipas in 2010.

Ever since Mexico put in place its new administrative policy, *Programa Frontera Sur*, to control the flux of immigrants into the south of the country, the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants has worsened. Due to the fact that they are forced to find alternative routes, these people are even more exposed to abuse and violence from organised crime and agents of the State. Violent police operations carried out near migrant shelters have discouraged many from seeking refuge in recognised locations.

Consequently, there has been a clear increase in human rights violations – ranging from crime and extortion, to murders, forced disappearances and massacres. Unaccompanied minors have been arriving at the shelter, often sent by their parents in a desperate attempt to save them from the violence taking place at home.

The shelter provides migrants with humanitarian assistance (food, water, and medical assistance) as well as legal assistance in the Mexico system to denounce crimes they have suffered and/or apply for asylum. Additionally, La 72 also carries out advocacy to alert decision-makers both nationally and internationally about the dire situation of these migrants and to promote solutions that address the root causes of the crisis.

Franciscans International is partnering with La 72 to make the situation of these migrants known at the United Nations. FI denounced the negative impact of Mexico's *Programa Frontera Sur* on migrants' human rights before the Human Rights Council in September 2015. In December, FI hosted Br. Tomás in the USA and facilitated advocacy meetings with representatives of the Mexican government, the US government, the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and key allies in civil society. FI also endeavored to connect Br. Tomás to other key international Franciscan networks. FI is committed to working in partnership with La 72 throughout the coming year, to continue denouncing the situation of migrants on the Mexico-Guatemala border and beyond. In addition to actively participating in Mexico's review by the UN human rights mechanism on migrants in 2016, FI is exploring the possibility for in-country meetings and a Geneva and US advocacy tour.



Br. Tomás with New York NGO representatives

Benin: the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child Calls Benin to Further Address the Situation of Children Accused of Witchcraft and to Strengthen Universal Birth Registration

The Committee reviewed Benin on January 20th 2016, highlighting issues to the government of Benin that directly echoed FI's concerns about children accused of witchcraft and birth registration rates. Read the press release (in French) [here](#).



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FI Website



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