

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.

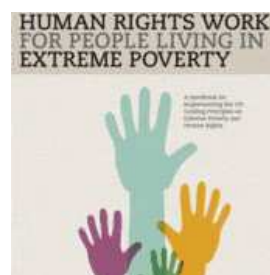
As summer comes to a close, activity at FI has started back up at full speed. FI is preparing for the September Human Rights Council, which always represents an opportunity not only to raise awareness about urgent human rights abuses around the world, but also to directly influence high level policy makers who can bring about structural change.

Launching new Handbook: "Making Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty"

After two years of hard work, including consultations and field-tests worldwide, FI is ready to launch its new Handbook on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights along with its partner ATD Fourth World. The launch will take place during the Human Rights Council, on September 21.

After the UN published the Guiding Principles on Extreme poverty and Human Rights in September 2012, FI and ATD Fourth World agreed that a handbook was needed to translate the legal language of the Guiding Principles into concrete suggestions to help those working at local level to better understand the implications of human rights for people living in extreme poverty.

Making Human Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty: A Handbook for implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights is the result of a two-year participatory process involving dozens of organisations and individuals worldwide. The purpose of the handbook is to assist those working directly with people living in extreme poverty to understand their situation from a human rights perspective, and to suggest actions that can be taken with local governments and other sectors of society to ensure that their rights are respected and protected. Beneficiaries include social workers, community organisers, teachers, or urban planners working for the State but also for NGOs, religious institutions, or community associations.



The handbook has been commended by Ms. Magdalena Sepulveda, former UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights and author of the Guiding Principles on Extreme poverty and Human Rights. In the foreword of the handbook, she confirms that "this excellent and comprehensive handbook [...] is extremely timely [and] makes an important contribution to the implementation of the Guiding Principles".

The launch is expected to gather a wide variety of actors present at the UN for the Human Rights Council, including visitors from the field who work directly in a context of extreme poverty. It will feature the premiere of a film produced to accompany the Handbook, which illustrates that extreme poverty should be addressed through a human rights-based approach, and shows how the handbook is a useful tool for ensuring participation and empowerment.

Stay posted to view the handbook and movie after their September 21 release.

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Asia Pacific: Calling out Australia and Addressing state violence in West Papua

FI is preparing for two main actions regarding the Asia-Pacific region at the Human Rights Council: denouncing Australia's harsh policies towards asylum seekers and raising awareness around torture and impunity in Indonesia.

Australia's harsh policies regarding asylums seekers and refugees are in contradiction with its international human rights obligations, specifically when it comes to its policy of third country-processing, a policy by which asylum seekers are processed offshore rather than in Australian territory. Several UN Human Rights bodies have expressed their concern following the allegation of human rights violations at the Manus Island detention center, including the death of an asylum seeker following violent unrest, and the death of an asylum seeker who did not get medical care in time. FI has teamed up with partners Edmund Rice International and Destination Justice to host a debate at the UN during the Council. One of the panelists will be a key witness on the impact of Australian policy on asylum seekers currently detained on Manus Island and on Christmas Island, allowing the grassroots voice to feature at the Human Rights Council. A statement is being prepared and will be read, denouncing the harsh Australian policy on asylum seekers.



Inside Manus Island Detention Centre, flickr photo (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

FI has also joined partners to organize a panel on torture and impunity in Indonesia. Over the past 50 years, state violence has been a common feature in West Papua, Indonesia's most secretive and isolated region. Since the administrative transfer of Papua to Indonesia in 1963, thousands of cases of violence towards indigenous Papuans perpetrated by Indonesian security forces have been recorded. In recent years, Papuan civil society groups have observed an intensification of structural and systematic state violence in West Papua. In this panel, leading advocates will address the culture of impunity in West Papua that threatens human rights and democracy in Indonesia. Indigenous Papuans, often stigmatised and discriminated against, continue to be at risk of torture, enforced disappearance and cruel or degrading treatment. State violence has led to the displacement of thousands and the destabilisation of Indigenous Papuan communities. The panel will be live streamed so that local actors can witness their concerns being shared at the UN.

Brazil: advocating for greater protection of indigenous people's rights

In addition to strategies with Franciscans in Honduras, Mexico, and Peru, and in continuation of its work in April (see June newsletter), FI's Americas Program will use September's Human Rights Council session to increase international attention and pressure regarding attacks on the rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil and especially against the Guarani-Kaiowá people.

Localised conflicts are taking place within a national context of persistent and concerted efforts to undermine well-established safeguards for the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil. The clear aim is to convert and free up the land and territories of indigenous peoples, peasants, and traditional communities for the uncontrolled exploration of natural resources: especially for the expansion of agro-industry and mineral exploration, as well as mega projects such as hydroelectric dams, highways, ports, water channels, electrical lines, and nuclear power plants. In many cases the Government has failed to demarcate indigenous lands and failed to guarantee possession of those lands that have been recognised. Criminalisation and violence against communities and leaders are on a stark rise. Another tragic trend is that among indigenous youth suicide rates are soaring. "The people have no future, no respect, no work, and no land to grow and live on. They choose to die because they are actually already dead inside," explained Eliseu Lopes, a Guarani-Kaiowá leader.

To continue to bring international attention to this situation, at September's Council session, FI will host Eliseu Lopes and Flávio Machado, a representative of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI). CIMI is an entity of the Brazilian Bishops Conference that has been active for more than four decades in the country and is widely respected and renowned among social movements. FI has been carrying out international advocacy on the situation of the Guarani-Kaiowá and the Brazilian national context in a variety of ways, including statements and parallel events at the Human Rights Council, dialogue with special procedures, and hosting delegations of advocates in both Geneva and New York.

For this session FI will assist the partners to deliver an oral statement to the Council on September 22 and will facilitate strategic meetings with key UN agencies, governmental representatives, and NGO allies. In particular, FI will speak to the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples to keep her attention on the Brazilian case. In April FI, CIMI, Eliseu and other indigenous leaders had a meeting with the Special Rapporteur and she has recently spoken out on the situation.



A young boys works with his family tending potatoes. ©WorldBank (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

DRC: influencing decision-makers at the UN

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to appear on FI's radar because of widespread and systematic human rights violations committed with impunity: extrajudicial executions, sexual violence, persisting recruitment of children into armed groups, massive displacement of population, and threats and reprisals against human rights defenders and independent and critical voices, including journalists.

The situation of insecurity and violence in the DRC is complex and multi-factorial, and FI believes it must be addressed at its root causes for any lasting change to take place, especially at this crucial time, as the country is preparing for parliamentary and presidential elections in 2016. This means taking into account the persistent climate of impunity, the presence of armed rebel groups, weak governance, a presently flawed electoral system and the lack of state authority throughout the territory, the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources, and the lack of equality between men and women.

During the upcoming Human Rights Council, the UN will release a report evaluating the current situation and present a study on the impact of technical assistance and capacity-building on the situation of human rights in the DRC. FI and partners are working and preparing to use this opportunity to present civil society's perspective on the human rights situation in DRC, by inviting local partners to intervene in a debate at the UN. FI and partners will provide a platform for human rights defenders and representatives of religious communities to express their concerns at the international level and convince the Council that the human rights situation in DRC should stay on the agenda.

One of FI's guests will be His Excellency Monseigneur Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, president of the Commission on Natural Resources, a technical commission whose role is to provide the Bishops' Conference with necessary information for advocacy towards a responsible management of natural resources that is beneficial to the Congolese people and to the environment. He will focus his presentation on the impact of mining on the human rights of local communities, to reinforce FI's message that the illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources is one of the root causes fuelling conflict and human rights violations in Eastern DRC.



Families on the move to escape the current fighting, eastern DRC. ©Oxfam International (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

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