

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.

An element of FI's work consists in building capacity in each of its advocacy regions for those advocating at the grassroots to better engage with key global human rights mechanisms, with the aim of effectively influencing policies that affect them.

This month, the newsletter gives you a taste of what this side of FI's work looks like in our three regions.

Asia-Pacific: Human Rights Workers in West Papua Commit to Working Together

West Papua is a harsh place for human rights advocates. On October 8th 2015, for example, West Papuan police arrested ten human rights activists, six Papuan Franciscans friars and two Augustinians for allegedly "causing public disorder" during a rally. The peaceful rally had been organised by an advocacy group demanding that the Indonesian President Joko Widodo investigate unresolved human rights violations in the region, including the December 2014 killings of four student protesters in Paniai.

In recent years, human rights workers in Papua have experienced challenges in coordinating their actions with one another, often working in isolation from one other and duplicating efforts. In an initiative to develop a common vision and encourage effective networking, the Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) network in Papua brought together local and international human rights workers and partner organisations for a four day meeting in Sorong, West Papua, from October 14-17, 2015.

Discussions focused on the different roles of church-based organisations in advocating for human rights. Experiences were shared from the field, highlighting achievements but also challenges in human rights work across the region. In responding to the extrajudicial killing of the four students in Paniai, for example, human rights advocates in Papua were able to come together to submit a joint urgent appeal to the UN. It remains difficult, however, for church-based organisations to provide joint periodic reports on the human rights situation in Papua. FI's representative was able to share how FI both encourages and leverages collaborations between local and international actors for its advocacy work at the United Nations.

On the final day, participants outlined a joint strategy to be working together, as a network, for justice and peace in Papua. This network, that includes both church-based and non church-based organisations agreed to work on specific issues including the rights of indigenous peoples, women, and youth.

To read more about human rights violations in West Papua, see our [new publication](#).

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Timika market ©Calzean(CC BY-SA 2.0)

Americas: Franciscan Family of Argentina commits to promoting the rights of indigenous peoples

Industrial agriculture in Argentina has grown by 60% in the last ten years, with a national plan to increase agricultural production until 2020. Soy plantations and other monoculture agricultural methods are causing intense deforestation and water and soil contamination. This obliges indigenous communities who live in and depend on the forest to move out rapidly, plunging them in an environment and lifestyle that do not reflect their identity and history, marginalizing them even further.

The Franciscan Family of Argentina met in October for their 4th Congress, focusing on "hearing the cry" of specific groups, including the cry of indigenous peoples and those living in extreme poverty. Franciscans International's regional focal point for Latin America, Nora Pfeiffer, attended the Congress and gave a presentation on the work of FI. She demonstrated how FI, with the Franciscan Family, can act in solidarity with indigenous peoples by engaging the UN human rights mechanisms to influence policy makers to adopt more just systems.



4th Congress of the Franciscan Family of Argentina

One written response to the presentation about FI's work reads: *"From the bottom of the continent, I want to cry out because I can no longer silence what happens down here. The earth is drying up because man no longer gives it water, the smoke darkens the sky keeping the sun from shining through. The factories where I work are making my people sick and there is no cure to their illness; these are the wounds inflicted on the environment by humankind. Today I use my voice for the people, who out of fear or complicity decide to be silent, I can no longer continue to turn my head away from the men, women and children who were here yesterday and today are gone."*

In response to the cry of indigenous people, the Argentinean Franciscan Family committed itself to staying actively informed about the realities facing the 38 indigenous groups in Argentina. Participants also ratified their interest to work with FI on promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in the face of discrimination and all policies that negatively affect them.

Africa: East African partners strengthen partnerships for economic, social, and cultural rights advocacy

Documenting cases of human rights violations in a way that gets them noticed and picked up by the United Nations is a daunting task – FI partners working on issues of economic, social, and cultural



rights , especially those of women and children in Eastern Africa can attest to that. Information tends to get diluted, and well-documented reports do not always reach the relevant audiences.

From October 9 to 13, 2015, FI lead a workshop in Tanzania, for the East Africa region, focusing on economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR). Participants hailed from Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia. The workshop went over the basics about ESC rights, and provided participants with the necessary tools to be able to document cases of rights violations in ways that can be used and highlighted at the UN. It aimed to emphasize the vital role that FI's partners have in promoting economic, social, and cultural rights in their communities and in the region as a whole.



Small Group Discussion in Arusha Training

The workshop also allowed these human rights defenders and civil society actors to exchange experiences, network, and explore possible collaborations. It was a good opportunity for FI to connect them to and train them further on relevant UN mechanisms, so that their work, and FI's work, can have a greater outreach and influence decision makers at national and international levels.

Participants left the workshop with new knowledge and consolidated partnerships. Many felt empowered to work beyond their specific areas, analysing the situations they face through their newly acquired lens of economic, social, and cultural rights. They appreciated that workshops like these remind them of the value of their work in the fight for justice and peace, and fans the flames of their common commitment to defending human rights.

Engaging with COP21: One Way to Care for Our Common Home

From November 30th to December 11th 2015, the governments of more than 190 nations will gather in Paris, for the COP21 conference, to discuss a possible new legally binding agreement on climate change, aimed at reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. Scientists have warned that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, we will pass the threshold beyond which global warming becomes catastrophic and irreversible: we need to stay below a 2C degree temperature rise above pre-industrial levels.



The first victims of rapid climate change are those living in poverty, directly affected by reduced food security, raising sea-levels, weather-related disasters, etc. Franciscans International has been working with these victims of climate change, putting pressure on the UN and governments to take measures that will take into account the perspective of these communities and change the situation for the most vulnerable.

FI is sending a delegation to the COP21 meetings, where it will seek to directly influence decision makers. One debate FI is sponsoring at the Conference, *Keeping Fossil Fuels in the Ground*, will highlight the strategies, goals, and progress made in the movement to ban fracking (the process of drilling down into the earth to release gas) and other extreme energy extraction in different parts of the world.

The debate will look at the essential role of such movements in building political momentum to achieve real progress in negotiations with the UN.

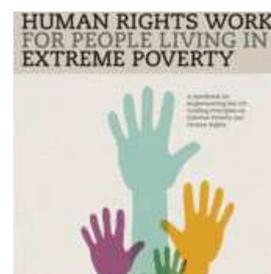
FI will also join other Franciscans in parallel events, debates, and discussions, reinforcing Saint Francis' message about caring for the environment, and joining other faith-based organisations in advocacy in Paris. "Religious communities are at the forefront of the global effort to mitigate global climate change and engage in efforts to adapt to its consequences," writes Shaun Casey, U.S. Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs.* FI and its partners are convinced that engaging with COP21 is of utmost importance in seeking to achieve firm commitments towards the mitigation of climate change, and will be using their available resources to put pressure on governments to respond effectively.

*<https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2015/11/08/faith-leaders-address-ways-actonclimate>

For more information on the Franciscans' activities at COP21, [listen to the webinar here](#).

Successful Launch of Handbook on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

The Handbook on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights was launched successfully at the United Nations in Geneva on September 21st 2015, with over a hundred people gathering to hear more about the handbook's background and watch the accompanying movie "Standing Up for Rights." FI is currently promoting and disseminating the handbook to a vast audience both globally and in the field, where communities are working to access their rights and have a say in the policies that affect them.



You can download the handbook [here](#), and watch the video [here](#).

Read more about the launch [here](#).

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FI Website



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www.franciscansinternational.org



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