

**30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**  
**Franciscans International**  
**Rome, Italy – July 16, 2019**  
**“Memory and Prophecy: Franciscan Presence at the United Nations**  
**Yesterday, Today, and in the Future”**  
**Bro. Michael A. Perry, OFM**  
**Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF)**

My dear brothers and sisters may the Lord give you shalom, that abiding, integrating, and liberating grace that accompanies humanity and the created universe on our common historical path.

It is a great joy for me to speak in the name of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF) as its representative for maintaining contact and nurturing understanding and collaboration with the International Board of Directors of Franciscans International. On behalf of the Generals and Representatives of the CFF, I wish to state unequivocally our gratitude to all those Franciscans and others who have worked directly or indirectly with Franciscans International over these past 30, and to guarantee our commitment to work with FI to ensure that it might realize the mission for which it was created and towards which it continues to journey.

Clearly, the purpose of this celebration is to acknowledge and celebrate the great work of the IBD and the dedicated Staff of FI in Geneva and New York over these many years. We also wish to recognize and thank those many partners of FI, especially those members of the Franciscan movement working on the ground, many living with the people and 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.

***Memory: In Search of a Universally Recognize Forum for Promoting Integral Development***

Franciscans International came to birth thanks to two Franciscans who were drawn together around a common vision, one involving the intersection of a shared set of values rooted in the human, Christian, and Franciscan tradition, on the one hand, and promoted by the UN Charter and mission on the other. Bro. Dionysius Mintoff, OFM, a Maltese friar, was engaged in issues involving the promotion of political, economic, peace, fundamental rights, and direct service to the poor. Sr. Elizabeth Cameron, OSF, an American Franciscan religious sister, was working to

promote fundamental human rights and development at the local and international level. In 1982, these two Franciscans came to a common conclusion: the recognition of an urgent need to engage with the international community in the search for common, just, lasting solutions to the most intractable of social and environmental problems. The only place where this might best be achieved was at the United Nations. A joint project was begun involving the Franciscan family, which resulted in the creation of the Franciscan Non-Governmental Organization, Franciscans International, as an instrument for peace, human dignity and development, and promotion of care for the environment. Peace, the poor, and the planet were central, unifying themes among Franciscans. But it was clear to Bro. Dionysius and Sr. Elizabeth and to those who first welcomed the proposal that Franciscan spirituality and ethics and the Founding Charter of the United Nations had shared many common values. In the late 1980s, a conference of the Franciscan family was organized by the OFM international Office of Justice and Peace to promote the idea of a common project, the first ever on the international and intra-familial scale in the history of the Franciscan movement.

In 1995, Franciscans International was awarded General Consultative Status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Bro. Ignacio Harding, OFM and Sr. Kathie Uhler, OSF, to name a few key people who were deeply committed to the project, played key roles in securing this recognition Bro. John Quigley and Ms. Alessandra Aula would come to play significant roles in the expansion of the work of FI in both New York and Geneva (1997), with an increasing specialization of its work on human rights. In 1999, the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF), an organization representing all Franciscan worldwide (religious and lay) assumed a central role as organizational sponsor of FI, engaging with the International Board of Directors, and promoting the mission and work of FI among all of the members of the Franciscan family. Thirty years later, this critical work continues. In 2005, the work of FI, already deeply engaged in Latin America and Asia, expanded its work to Africa. In 2005, the Anglican Franciscan First and Third Order formally joined FI, thus expanding the ecumenical dimension of its work. In the years following 2013, FI underwent a process of restructuring to help it re-focus on its core mission, bring greater transparency to its operations, find new ways of engaging the Franciscan family in the work of the organization, and to create a sustainable path towards the future. Mr. Doug Clory, SFO, and Bro. Marcus Heinze, OFM, played critical roles in helping to make FI stronger, more focused, and effective. Special thanks are in order also to two other Franciscan sisters who played a vital role in the history of the organization, serving as Executive Directors: Sr. Florence Deacon, OSF; and Sr. Denise Boyle, FMDM. Many other Franciscan women and men, lay and

religious, and other laity whose names are not mentioned at this time, also are to be thanked for their tireless commitment to the mission and work of FI over these past 30 years. This list includes those who have served, or who currently are serving, on the IBD, under the leadership of Bro. Joseph Rozansky, OFM.

### *Prophecy and the Future of Humanity and the Planet*

We live in a world that is economically, politically, culturally, and technologically interconnected in profound and positive ways, promising new solutions to intractable problems and proposing methods for greater collaboration. However, we also live in a world with an increasing degree of disconnectedness, resulting in an increasingly alarming rise of old and new forms of political, economic, social, and cultural exclusion. We are living witnesses to many disturbing trends: an alarming rise of xenophobia, directed in a particularly disturbing way against the new immigrants and also against those whose hold different religious beliefs; new forms of overt racism resulting in social marginalization; continued exploitation of human beings through multiple forms of trafficking (human, narcotics, arms, etc.) and abuse; promotion of militant, violent, dictatorial forms of governance; the re-launching of the race to expand nuclear capacities and to develop other technological and biological instruments for conducting warfare and threatening the international community; threats of new forms of terrorism; increasing tensions and divisions within the community of nations (UN, EU, etc.); and an unabated exploitation of the natural environment, leading to destruction of the world's forest (lungs), oceans, and atmosphere, containing the potential to destroy the earth's regenerative capacity, threatening the future of the human species and all other life forms on this tiny planet.

In his prophetic encyclical entitled *Laudato Si* (2015: §207), Pope Francis, invites all people to enter into a process of reflection, dialogue, study, the raising of a new awareness of and commitment to care for the poor and excluded and of our 'Common Home', the planet. Quoting from the *Earth Charter* (29/06/2000), an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Pope calls us to embark on a new trajectory, one that will help guarantee the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life (environment), and also those future generations who will suffer the consequences of actions undertaken by our generation. I include the entire text of the first paragraph of the *Preamble* from the *Earth Charter*:

*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and*

*fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.*

The first thirty years of FI have been dedicated to a program promoting the values of the Gospel, a Franciscan ethics capable of dialogue and collaboration with the people, structures, and mechanisms of the UN, capable also of engaging with partners on the ground at the grassroots, seeking to build capacity, raise awareness, and deepen commitment to the pursuit of *a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, ...a culture of peace [and care for the environment]*. May the coming thirty reflect these same core values so that FI might respond to emerging challenges with creativity and courage. May God bless the mission and work of FI and move the hearts of all Franciscans so that together we might fulfil our vocation as promoters of “the new heaven and the new earth” (Revelation (21:1), a world built on the foundations of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.