



Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations




Franciscans International

Annual Report 2019

Imprint

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Cover photo: © Franciscans International; Brother Auguste Agouunkpé OFM Cap during a campaign event in Northern Benin

Franciscans International Annual Report 2019

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/ Letter from the President /

On behalf of the International Board of Directors, I am pleased to present our Annual Report for 2019 – a year that holds special significance for Franciscans International, as it marks 30 years since our common ministry was officially recognized by the United Nations. Throughout the year at various celebratory events, we had the pleasure of meeting many of the brothers and sisters who have contributed to this endeavor over the decades. In sharing their experiences as well as their ambitions for a more just future during these gatherings, they underlined how deep this work is ingrained in our roots. Francis himself admonished the leaders of his day to care for those under their rule, reminding them that they too are accountable for their actions. In 1219, he travelled to the Holy Land to deliver a message of peace to Sultan Al-Kamil. Eight centuries later, their meeting is still held up as an example of dialogue and mutual respect.

In October 2019, the board had the opportunity to meet with UN Secretary General António Guterres in New York. During this visit we presented him with highlights of the work Franciscans International has done over the years, but also expressed our concern about specific brothers and sisters who have faced threats due to their ministry. During our conversation, the Secretary General also remarked on the dovetailing of Franciscan values and the aims of the United Nations in promoting human rights, peace and reconciliation, the preservation of our planet, and the importance of having a consistent voice present to defend them. Today, standing up for these values and inspiring a new, young generation to join us remain as relevant as ever.

The International Board of Directors expresses its sincere gratitude to all the Franciscan Orders and Congregations who continue to support our work at the United Nations. We also thank the brothers and sisters who speak out to affect positive change in these international forums, despite the many difficulties and challenges this may bring. Finally, we are grateful to the managers and staff of Franciscans International for their tireless work in supporting our common ministry.

Fraternally,

Joseph Rozansky OFM
President of the International Board of Directors

/ Letter from the Executive Director /



2019 has been a difficult year for many of our brothers and sisters working on the frontlines to defend human rights. From Brazil to the Philippines, those standing up for the dignity of their communities and respect for our common home have faced intolerance and, in some cases, direct attacks by the powerful. At the international level, we work in a context that increasingly turns away from multilateral and common solutions, as governments choose to look inwards instead.

Nevertheless, I am encouraged by the many meetings and conversations I have had throughout the year with the many Franciscans representing our global family. Our 30-year celebrations in Geneva, Rome, and New York provided an opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments but were also characterized by the determination of all who attended to continue our common ministry. While our team prepares to formulate its strategic plan for the next years, we are encouraged and inspired by the work of our partners at the grassroots.

As I write this, it has already become evident that 2020 will be unlike anything we could have anticipated. In just a few weeks, the rapid spread of covid-19 has laid bare the systemic injustices in our societies and raised profound questions about human rights. While the impact on our work at the United Nations remains uncertain, I am confident that our team will rise to the challenge. Franciscans worldwide have done the same, supporting their communities in these difficult times.

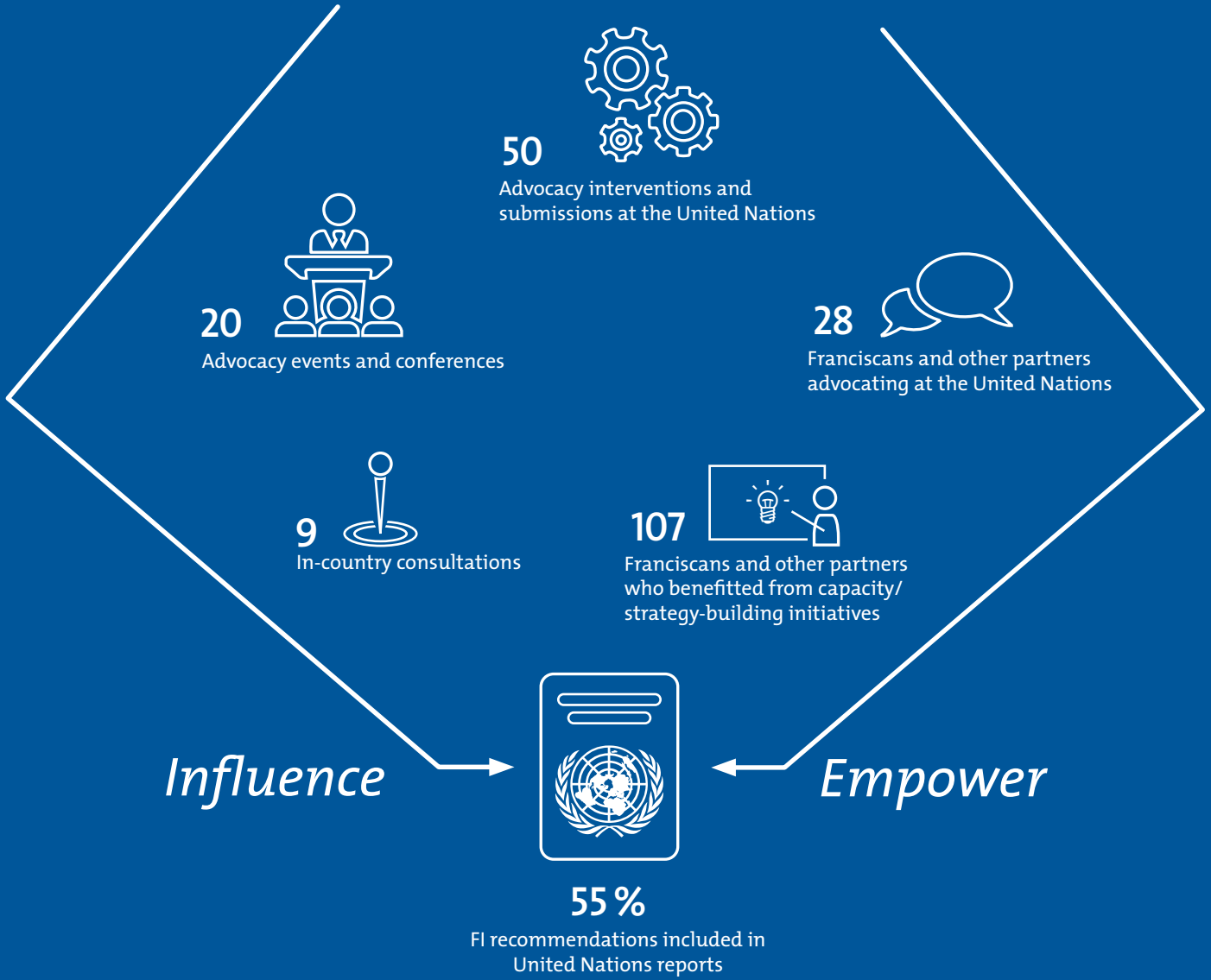
Meanwhile, we must be conscious that many of the acute problems we are confronted with today – poverty, injustice, environmental degradation – are not new and, indeed, were already a daily reality for so many. As the Franciscan voice at the United Nations we will continue our work mindful of the fact that we do so in the long tradition that was founded over eight centuries ago by Francis and Clare.

On behalf of all the staff, I wish to express my gratitude to all those that have supported us in this endeavor: the Franciscan Orders and Congregations, the International Board of Directors, the funding agencies, our partners, and all those that raised their voices at the United Nations.

Faternally,

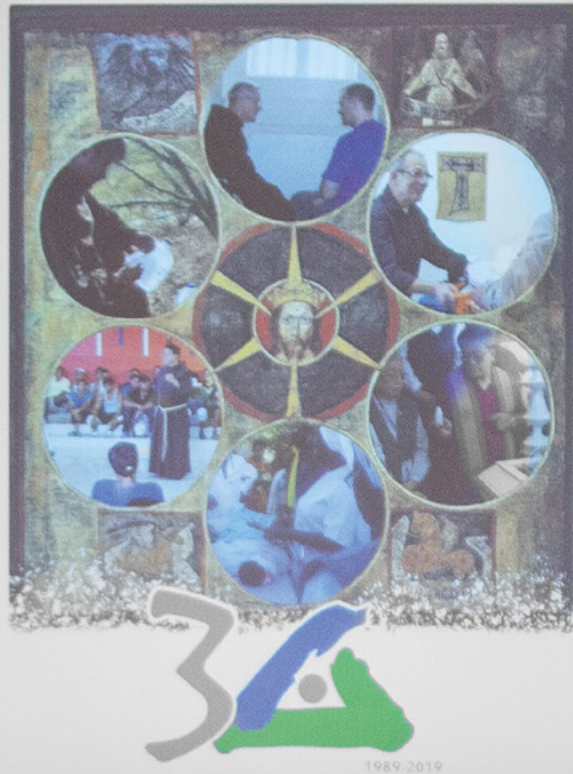
Markus Heinze OFM
Executive Director

Franciscans International in Numbers



18% 
Increase in social media following

750 
Franciscan Family members reached in 21 gatherings



Members of the Conference of the Franciscan Family host FI's 30-year celebrations in Rome
© Franciscans International



/ Thirty years at the United Nations /

Throughout 2019, Franciscans International organized a series of events to celebrate the three decades since it was first officially recognized by the UN Department of Public Information, affirming that the organization was considered to have the commitment and means for sustained work at the United Nations. As a non-governmental organization, FI was granted Category I status in 1995 and currently holds Generally Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

On 15 March, FI hosted a reception at its headquarters in Geneva, welcoming our NGO partners, diplomats, and Franciscans from all over the world. Not just a celebration, the event brought together people who have worked together for years bridging a gap between groups that do not always easily meet. The reception was followed the next day by a High Mass that was presided over by Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva.

The Conference of the Franciscan Family also organized a gathering at the Auditorium Antonianum in Rome on 15 July. Brothers and sisters gathered for the keynote address 'Memory and Prophecy' which was delivered by Minister General and former FI staff member Michael Perry OFM. He was then joined by long-term partners Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu OFMCap and Sister Diana Muñoz Alba FFM, representing FI's regional programs. The event was also attended by Brother Dionysius Mintoff OFM, who first raised the suggestion to establish a Franciscan presence at the UN in 1982, together with the late Sister Elizabeth Cameron of the Sisters of Saint Francis from Clinton, Iowa.

A final event took place on 8 November in New York. We welcomed Helena Yáñez Loza, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the UN who explored the topic of collaboration between civil society and governments. Also in attendance were former FI directors Kevin Smith OSF, Ignatius Harding OFM, and Kathie Uhler OSF who gave a short presentation about the early years of the organization.

Ahead of this gathering, the International Board of Directors met with UN Secretary General António Guterres where they presented some of the work FI has done to connect Franciscans at the grassroots with UN mechanisms to bring about positive change. The Secretary General expressed his appreciation for the contributions made by FI and stressed the importance of this engagement and work by civil society.

To mark the 30-year anniversary, FI also published a short booklet documenting its history and the deep connections between Franciscan values and human rights. It is available in the "Franciscan Corner" on our website.



*FI's International Board of Directors
with UN Secretary General
António Guterres*
© UN Photo/Manuel Elias

/ About Franciscans International /

Franciscans International brings the human rights challenges faced by its Franciscan and lay partners at the grassroots to the attention of international and national policymakers. Working with civil society in over 30 countries across four continents, we address some of the most pressing human rights issues of our times.

At the core of FI's mission is our belief in the dignity of all people, which is lived out in our commitment to protecting and preserving human rights and the environment. We use advocacy as a tool to combat and curb human rights abuses, and to reclaim the central role of human rights in the formulation and framing of national and international public policies. We believe that human rights must be at the heart of all political processes, in particular those that are related to international development, the environment, and security.

With offices in Geneva and New York, FI plays a significant role in denouncing human rights violations and empowering human rights defenders. Through evidenced-based advocacy, facilitating dialogues, capacity building, and by providing our partners with an opportunity to address the human rights violations occurring in their communities directly at the United Nations, we are able to engage and fulfill our mission of promoting social and environmental justice, and peace.

Franciscans International operates under the sponsorship of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF), which represents the various branches of the Franciscan Family. Ministers General of the Conventuals (OFMConv), the Capuchins (OFMCap), the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), the Third Order Regular (TOR), the International Franciscan Conference of the Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular (IFC-TOR), and Secular Franciscans (OFS), along with an International Board of Directors, work with FI's management team and dedicated staff to ensure that the organization supports and maintains the Franciscan Family's commitment to justice and peace throughout the world.

*FI co-founder Brother Dionysius
Mintoff OFM during the 30-year
celebrations in Rome*
© Franciscans International



PLANET B

It's
clean
+

There's
NO Planet B!
B? B? B?



Thomas Jefferson

Global Advocacy

Franciscans International's advocacy rests on three pillars that have formed the foundation of Franciscan spirituality throughout the centuries: human dignity, peace, and care for creation. In our work in today's international forums, this translates into a conviction that sustainable development, the preservation of the environment, and respect for human rights are all inextricably linked. As such, FI seeks to place human rights standards at the heart of all policy-making processes. Our global advocacy encapsulates issues that are relevant across our regional programs, bringing together the concerns and values expressed by Franciscans and other partners. We strive to ensure that these are reflected in UN standard-setting processes, and that partners can use these additional avenues to effectively advocate for their causes.

Business and human rights

As production chains stretching across borders become more complex and businesses grow more influential and powerful, so has their potential negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights and the environment increased. Weak governance, corporate capture, and a lack of meaningful participation of affected communities have all contributed to situations where human rights abuses are now frequently committed through business activities with little or no accountability.

FI has taken a leading role among civil society and faith-based organizations supporting the efforts of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations (OEIGWG). Established in 2014 by the Human Rights Council, it has the mandate to elaborate on a legally binding instrument that

Igor Bastos from SINFRAJUPE joins the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and the ambassadors of Fiji and Ecuador during a panel discussion in Geneva

© Franciscans International



“The positive difference that FI made is that it takes very local partners to the High Level Political Forum to share experiences of the real life that is going on in the Pacific. This collaboration really changes the way civil society organizations participate in the HLPF and we hope it continues in the future.”

Willy Missack, Coordinator
of the Vanuatu Climate
Action Network

*Willy Missack speaks during
the High Level Political Forum
on sustainable development
in New York*

© Earth Negotiations Bulletin

would regulate business activities in international human rights law. During previous sessions, FI has hosted grassroots and religious leaders to share testimonies from affected communities, notably from the global South. However, the 5th session of the OEIGWG took on a more technical dimension, as States discussed the first draft of a possible future treaty. FI provided expert analyses ahead of the session as well as through direct interventions during the deliberations focusing on gaps with regard to business accountability. FI's positions were supported by civil society allies and a number of States and reflected in the negotiations.

FI also continued to raise the issue of business and human rights in other forums. The Brumadinho disaster in Brazil, where a combination of weak government oversight and corporate neglect led to a dam breach on 25 January that killed 272 became a key priority for FI throughout 2019. Two weeks after the collapse, FI hosted Brother Rodrigo Péret OFM in Geneva, advisor to the special commission on mining and integral ecology of the National Bishop's Conference of Brazil, to provide information on the disaster and its underlying causes. FI facilitated the participation of Igor Bastos from the Serviço Inter-Franciscano de Justiça, Paz e Ecologia (SINFRAJUPE) in a training for human rights defenders and hosted him several days afterwards to help contribute to the organization of a visit by the Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes to the region in December 2019.

During the 41st session of the Human Rights Council in February 2019, FI organized a side event that was made publicly accessible through a livestream to further expose the violations that occurred in Brumadinho. Brother Rodrigo was joined by Olivier de Schutter, Professor of Law at Louvain University, who used his testimony to analyze how efforts towards a new binding instrument could be used to prevent the recurrence of similar tragedies and ensure redress for the victims

Climate Change

Climate change negatively impacts the enjoyment of human rights across the world. This is disproportionately felt by already disadvantaged and marginalized communities including people living in poverty. Climate change affects a number



of rights, including the rights to health, food, and water. FI advocates for both strong international efforts to combat the crisis as well as for mitigation of the impacts already felt by reclaiming the central role of human rights in sustainable development and climate policies.

During the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in New York, FI built on its previous work toward more accountability and policy coherence in compliance with human rights in the realization of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Coordinating efforts in New York and Geneva between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the diplomatic representations of Ecuador and Fiji, FI helped to organize a prominent event on SDG13 (Climate Action) at the HLPF. During this discussion, our International Advocacy Director was joined by Coordinator of the Vanuatu Climate Action Network Willy Missack, who provided testimony from the Pacific Islands where the impacts of climate change have already become a daily reality, as well as a number of other panelists who shared strategies for the successful implementation of national action plans.

In August 2019, FI brought together 16 participants from Fiji, Indonesia, the Philippines, Kiribati, Mongolia, and Vanuatu in Jakarta for a workshop on forced migration due to climate change. Using our 'Toolbox' on human rights, sustainable development, and climate policies, FI staff and participants explored strategies and opportunities to use different UN human rights mechanisms to address the concrete problems their communities are experiencing.

FI was also an active participant during the 25th UN Climate Change Conference (COP25), despite the last-minute change of location from Chile to Spain. Throughout the session, FI helped to facilitate discussions among different stakeholders on human rights and principles for climate action, including through a joint press conference on climate justice through an interfaith perspective. Together with the Dominicans for Justice and Peace, FI also conducted a one-day workshop for grassroots organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, sharing recent successful efforts such as our climate-focused submission under the Universal Periodic Review ahead of the examination of Kiribati.

Franciscans International offices





FI's International Advocacy Director and partners from Guatemala and Zambia during a side event with the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation

© Franciscans International

The right to water

Access to safe drinking water without discrimination remained a distant reality for many in 2019, as over 2 billion people worldwide still rely on polluted sources for their daily use. As the effects of climate change grow more pronounced and water becomes increasingly sought-after, access to water is only likely to further be restricted without effective action.

While the UN has affirmed that water is not merely a natural resource or commodity but a fundamental human right to which all people are entitled without discrimination, restrictions

and pollution of water sources through large-scale industrial and agricultural projects is a growing and global phenomenon. In consultation with grassroots partners FI provided substantial contributions to the development and launch of a study on the 'megaproject cycle' by the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation. This framework, which was presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2019, identifies seven stages in the lifecycle of megaprojects and provides a list of questions that can guide accountable actors to implement their human rights obligations at each stage.

Such projects and their impact on local communities have been a concern for Franciscans working with all of FI's regional programs. Ahead of the official publication of the report, FI hosted a side event at the margins of the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council where partners from Colombia, Guatemala, and Zambia were able to present case studies from their communities and discuss the applicability of the framework directly with the Special Rapporteur. In October 2019, we co-organized a second event in New York, where the Special Rapporteur again engaged with FI partners and audience members to explore how local communities can use his framework to stand up for their rights and protect the environment when these are threatened by new large-scale development projects.

Questions around water have been of particular concern in Central America, where pollution, climate change, and shortages have contributed to loss of livelihoods and the increasing levels of forced migration. In El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, shared water resources are frequently contaminated by upstream pollution, creating a situation that can only be adequately addressed through international cooperation. Over the past years FI has supported efforts by partners at the national level in all three countries toward a regional agreement to protect transboundary water resources. In order to further empower partner organizations and reinforce regional connections, FI organized a workshop in Panama aimed at experience sharing and strategy building. The training included an online session with the Special Rapporteur on water.

FI also raised these regional concerns at the international level using different UN human rights mechanisms, including through our work with Sandra Carolina Ascencio OFS from the Central American Network on Transboundary Waters, who submitted a report and participated in the pre-session of El Salvador's examination under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). As a result of this joint lobbying with other like-minded organizations, El Salvador received 11 recommendations on water from other States – compared to only one during its previous UPR cycle. It also was the first time the country received any recommendations on the issue of transboundary waters and on mining. These outcomes provide civil society with concrete means of putting pressure on the government and will foster new projects for implementation.

“Elevating cases to the international level makes a lot of sense, especially when communities have already tried to refer these cases to local and national mechanisms without success.”

Morgan Katati, Executive Director of the Zambia Institute of Environmental Management



Brother Rodrigo Péret OFM and Brumadinho survivor Dari Pereira meet with Pope Francis
© Order of Friars Minor

Rodrigo Péret OFM

Although workers in Brumadinho grew increasingly worried that a nearby dam, holding back left-over products from iron mining, had started to leak, they were unprepared for its sudden collapse on 25 January. Video footage shows miners running for their lives, as a stream of mud rushes toward the Vila Ferteco community. 272 people were killed. The damage to the environment, including agriculture and water supplies, will likely be felt for decades.

“This is not an accident but a crime. And it’s not the first time this happened,” says Brother Rodrigo. As an advisor to the special commission on mining and integral ecology of the National Bishop’s Conference of Brazil, he had already been working with victims in Mariana, where a dam collapse in 2015 killed 15 people.

The subsequent investigations revealed that in both cases the company responsible had known the structures were unstable. Safety inspectors had revised their criteria, local

officials were allegedly bribed, and warnings from workers were ignored. Many others remain at risk. “The same company had to stop operations in four or five other mines,” says Brother Rodrigo. “Of course, these mines didn’t suddenly become dangerous after Brumadinho – they already were.”

In May 2019, Brother Rodrigo and Dari Pereira, a survivor of the disaster, presented Pope Francis with the names and pictures of those that perished, which immediately received his blessing. Since then, the Pope has repeatedly spoken out on behalf of the victims and sent Papal representatives to the area.

Meanwhile, Brother Rodrigo and others have continued to raise this issue at the United Nations, supporting international efforts toward business accountability and calling on the Brazilian government to take meaningful action. “There is a possibility to shame countries, to highlight and expose. And we see that they respond,” he says. “This is part of citizenship. This is part of our social responsibility.”



Regional Programs

/ Africa Program /

In 2019, Franciscans International saw the fruits of sustained advocacy efforts together with partners at the national level. Nevertheless, new development projects and resource extraction continue to raise profound human rights issues. Throughout the year, our work in Africa has focused on the situation of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women, children, and internally displaced persons.

Benin

For over a decade, the Franciscan Family in Benin has collaborated with FI to combat the ritual infanticide of so-called 'witch children' who, largely due to stigma associated with complications at birth, are believed to bring ill-fortune to their families and communities. This approach of combining grassroots sensitization and international advocacy was cited in 2019 by UNICEF as a best practice for making an impact through engaging the UN human rights system.

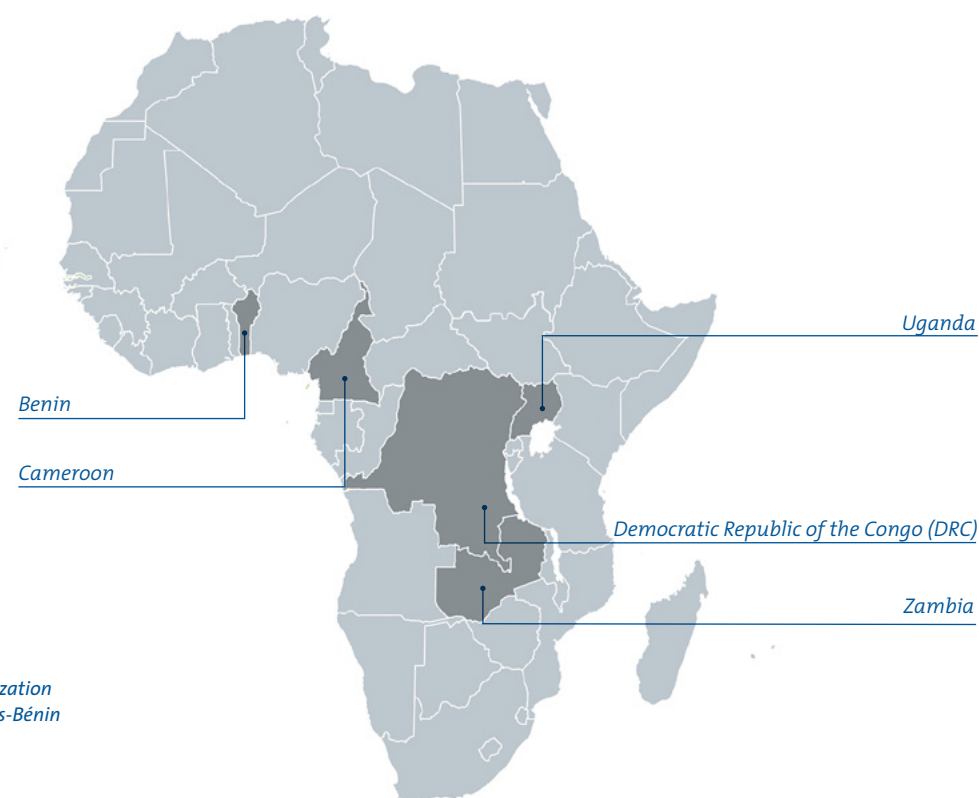
As one of the achievements, UNICEF uses the inclusion of specific articles on infanticide in Benin's 2015 Children's Code and the 2018 Penal Code after the issue was consistently raised at the UN. This work continues, for example in May 2019, when the Executive Director of Franciscains-Bénin raised gaps in the implementation of these legislative measures during the country's examination by the Committee against Torture (CAT). UNICEF also noted the overall decline in ritual infanticide, although this raises new problems such as abandonment. These issues are reflected in the future ambitions of Franciscains-Bénin to establish a shelter for vulnerable mothers and children.

In November 2019, FI also visited Northern Benin to contribute to a sanitization and awareness raising campaign in the villages of Kika, Tobré, and Bokossi. These events, organized with the support of traditional leaders, aimed to challenge



Sister Adélaïde Yameogo FMM speaks during a campaign session for women and girls in Northern Benin
© Franciscans International

Focus countries



"For mines to have a positive impact, we need the government to adopt adequate legislation. Otherwise women will end up in a position of great vulnerability.

One day the mines will run dry. What will remain for women and girls?"

Sister Nathalie Kangaji SND

existing conceptions of 'witch children' and provide a safe space for women to discuss the issue, while providing emergency contacts for mothers which they can access if they believe their child is in danger.

The mission also included meetings with local authorities and community leaders, where FI helped facilitate a dialogue on how commitments made by the government to the international community can be translated into concrete action on the ground, for example by establishing local monitoring committees that can quickly intervene if they suspect a child is at risk. Toward the end of the visit FI's delegation also met with NGO partners and the board of directors of Franciscains-Bénin to discuss possible future collaborations.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 25 January 2019, Félix Tshisekedi was inaugurated as president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). While the electoral process raised concerns with regard to fairness and transparency, it also marked the country's first peaceful transition of power since it gained independence in 1960. The Catholic Church played a pivotal role during a tense, and occasionally violent, two-year period during which the elections were repeatedly postponed. Church leaders facilitated a political dialogue and helped to prevent further escalation. Working closely together with the Conférence Nationale Épiscopale du Congo (CENCO), FI consistently raised the importance of free, fair and transparent elections in the DRC at the UN.

Nevertheless, the human rights situation in the DRC remains extremely precarious, especially with regard to resource extraction and the rights of women and children. Ahead of the DRC's examination by the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW) in September 2019, FI supported consultations with civil society in the Lualaba mining region. These findings were submitted to the Committee both as a written report and in an oral statement during the examination by Sister Nathalie Kangaji SND, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission at the CENCO as well as the Director of the Center for Legal and Juridical Aid in Kolwezi. Visiting Geneva twice in 2019, she also participated in side events on mining disasters and their impact on women and children during the Human Rights Council's 41st and 42nd sessions.

The concerns voiced during the consultations included the lack of women's participation in decision-making processes in the mining sector, the prohibition of access to artisanal mining activities, poor labor conditions, low incomes, and environment pollution with harmful effects on the health of women and children. FI's recommendations for improvement built on those made to other human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Review, which adopted its conclusions on the DRC in September 2019. Throughout all stages of this process FI also facilitated access to grassroots leaders, including submitting written findings and participating in the in-person sessions.

Following the December 2018 elections FI again partnered with the Justice and Peace Commission of the CENCO and the Carter Center to organize a workshop in Kinshasa to evaluate the commitments made by the new government, notably at the UN. As gathering reliable information from the DRC's remote mining region remains extremely difficult, the 28 participants from both the Catholic and secular civil society organizations were also trained on how to monitor and document human rights violations and used the opportunity to formulate a collective action plan to better coordinate joint advocacy work.



Sister Nathalie Kangaji SND during a FI workshop in Kinshasa
© Franciscans International

THE AFRICA PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

- Hosted 6 partners from Benin, Cameroon, the DRC, and Zambia in Geneva;
- Submitted 5 reports to the UN on Benin, Cameroon, the DRC, and Uganda;
- Delivered 6 oral statements during relevant UN sessions on the DRC and Benin;
- Participated in examinations by the Committee against Torture (CAT) for Benin, the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for the DRC, and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for Cameroon;
- Organized 2 side events on the margins of the Human Rights Council on women's rights and mining disasters in the DRC;
- Conducted country visits to Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda.



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu OFMCap speaks during a side event at the United Nations

© Franciscans International

Fridolin Ambongo Besungu OFMCap

Born to a rubber tapper's family in Belgian Congo in January 1960, Brother Fridolin Ambongo OFMCap saw the name of his country change no less than four times in the decades that followed. However, what remained constant was the suffering of many of his fellow citizens, as leaders and rebels alike fought over the vast natural resources of the DRC. "The desire for enrichment has trumped justice," he told the Human Rights Council in September 2015. "This is behind all the problems in the DRC."

As a Capuchin brother, he became an outspoken and prominent human rights defender. In 2016, he was instrumental in the Church's efforts to broker a deal between opposition parties and the government, which helped guide the DRC through a constitutional crisis after President Kabila's term ended.

With the support of FI, Cardinal Ambongo repeatedly raised issues of exploitation, corruption, and disenfranchisement at the United Nations in Geneva. He considered his elevation to Cardinal by Pope Francis in October 2019 as an affirmation of his work as a human rights defender, a sentiment that was echoed by his fellow clergy in the DRC.

His work has not been without risk and at times resulted in death threats. However, this has not deterred him. "Without falling into historical-theological disputes over the reasons for the death sentence of Jesus, we know with certainty that Jesus died also because of his struggle for justice," he said during the celebration of FI's 30-year anniversary in Rome. "As long as there is any form of injustice in society, His memory cannot leave his disciples indifferent and inert."



/ Americas Program /

Human rights challenges in the Americas have not been confined to national borders. Throughout 2019, Franciscans International worked with partners to respond to these challenges in a regional context, aiming for a comprehensive and holistic approach that addresses and ultimately prevents human rights violations at all stages. The Americas Program and its local partners also made significant contributions to FI's global advocacy, particularly on issues relating to the right to water and business and human rights.

Brazil and Venezuela

Under the Bolsonaro administration, the human rights situation in Brazil has seen a steady and worrying decline. Although these trends affect large segments of society, already marginalized and discriminated against groups, including indigenous peoples, have been particularly vulnerable. In the Amazon region, private actors are increasingly resorting to violence—at times with the tacit or explicit approval of authorities—in order to take control and exploit indigenous lands.

These attacks not only have an immediate impact on the communities themselves, the routine burning of forest to clear a way for agriculture and animal husbandry also takes a severe toll on an already fragile ecosystem. Ultimately, these violations destroy traditional knowledge, which affects the communities as well as the territories that are no longer maintained and preserved with the wisdom accumulated over centuries. Similarly, the impact of non-demarcation of indigenous territories outside the Amazon has subjected people to widespread violence and humanitarian crises.

Archbishop Roque Paloschi and Ms Erileide Domingues at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples Issues in New York
© Franciscans International



Focus countries





Migrants hosted at the Franciscan la72 migrant shelter in Tenosique, Mexico

© La72 Tenosique

“Here at the UN, one can denounce what happens, create many reactions and thus potentially decisive changes. That is what I did: I felt I could share my message on the situation of the Warao to UN experts and journalists, which was my objective”.

Melquiades Ávila Hernandez

FI called attention to the importance of preserving traditional knowledge during a side event on the margins of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, where it supported the advocacy work of Archbishop Roque Paloschi, President of the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI) and Erileide Domingues, Kaiowá, a member of the Aty Guasu Great Assembly of the Kaiowá and Guarani peoples. They were joined by Vice Prosecutor-General of Brazil Luciado Maia to discuss actions at the national and UN levels to enhance the protection of indigenous peoples.

In Geneva, FI hosted Melquiades Ávila Hernandez, representative of the Warao People who live in the border regions of Brazil and Venezuela, during the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council. Although the Warao face numerous human rights issues in both countries related to healthcare, education, housing, forced mobility, and threats over gold exploitation on their lands, the information available to the international community remains scarce. The participation of Mr. Hernandez in this session was considered essential as it enabled the High Commissioner for Human Rights to include concerns over the situation of the Warao in her global update to the Council, giving visibility to this otherwise underreported situation.

Mexico and Central America

The countries of the North of Central America, encompassing Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, remain one of the most violent regions in the world. However, insecurity, poverty, corruption in both the public and private sphere, displacement due to agricultural and industrial mega-projects, and the increasingly severe impacts of climate change have all contributed to driving forced migration. The International Organization for Migration estimates that in 2019 over half a million people from this region were displaced.

FI works to address the root causes of migrations through cross-regional efforts (see Global Advocacy for more). However, Franciscan congregations along the migration routes also work directly to support people on the move, including through several shelters that offer not only the opportunity for a short respite, but in some cases also offer medical and legal support. The context in which they work has grown increasingly hostile to both migrants and those supporting them, with governments adopting more aggressive and restrictive policies and organized crime seeking to capitalize on the vulnerable situation of people.

In June 2019, FI hosted Sister Diana Muñoz Alba FMM, the Director of the Casa Betania Santa Martha shelter in Mexico which, in the three preceding months, saw a 200 percent increase in women and children passing through. Together with Rosario Martinez, who collaborates with the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission Guatemala she joined the Special Rapporteur on migration during a side event to discuss the obligations of countries of origin, transit, and destination. Following the event, she also addressed the 41st session of the Human Rights Council to call attention to the increasingly aggressive tactics against migrants by Mexican security forces.

FI was able to raise this issue in a private meeting of selected civil society organizations with the High Commissioner for Human Rights herself. Conveying the information from partners on the ground, FI stressed the importance of addressing other types of mobility, particularly that of indigenous peoples who are regularly subjected to evictions and forced displacement as consequences of megaprojects, and to attacks from both State and non-state actors.

THE AMERICAS PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

- Hosted 9 partners from Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, and Venezuela.
- Submitted 6 reports to the UN on Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.
- Delivered 5 oral statements on relevant UN sessions on the human rights situation in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico.
- Participated in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.
- Organized 3 side events on the margins of the Human Rights Council on migration, mining disasters, and violence against women human rights defenders in Brazil.
- Organized a workshop on the right to water in Panama.



Sister Diana Muñoz Alba FMM speaks during a side event at the Human Rights Council in Geneva
© Franciscans International

Diana Muñoz Alba FMM

The Casa Bethany Santa Maria Shelter, located some 90 kilometers from the border between Mexico and Guatemala can support approximately 65 migrants, providing them with food and a place to rest. In June 2019 alone, Sister Diana and three other Franciscan Missionaries of Mary received 1,528 people, including 370 children. Together, they do what they can to help people who will often have walked for a week trying to avoid the security forces and cartels that prey on them.

However, Sister Diana is not only a Franciscan sister: she is a human rights lawyer as well. Part of the care she provides is educating and informing people as best she can. “I can only give a daily human rights talk so that people have

information about their rights as migrants,” she says. “The objective of many people is not the ‘American dream’ but simply a safe place to live free and in peace.”

The sisters work in an environment that is growing increasingly intolerant toward migrants and those that care for them. Governments in the region have responded to the crisis with hostile policies that only further expose people on the move to human rights violations. Sister Diana has spoken at the United Nations in both Geneva and New York, to call for change and to make sure policy makers are confronted with the difficult reality on the ground. “I think that with my speech at the UN, I touched hearts,” she says. “But also, I made people uncomfortable.”



/ Asia-Pacific Program /

The human rights situation in Asia-Pacific remains fragile. In Sri Lanka for example, the Easter Sunday attacks lead to a new wave in xenophobia, religious intolerance, and put severe strains on the transitional justice process established after the civil war. Meanwhile, many countries in the region are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, putting a further stain on respect for human rights.

Indonesia / West Papua

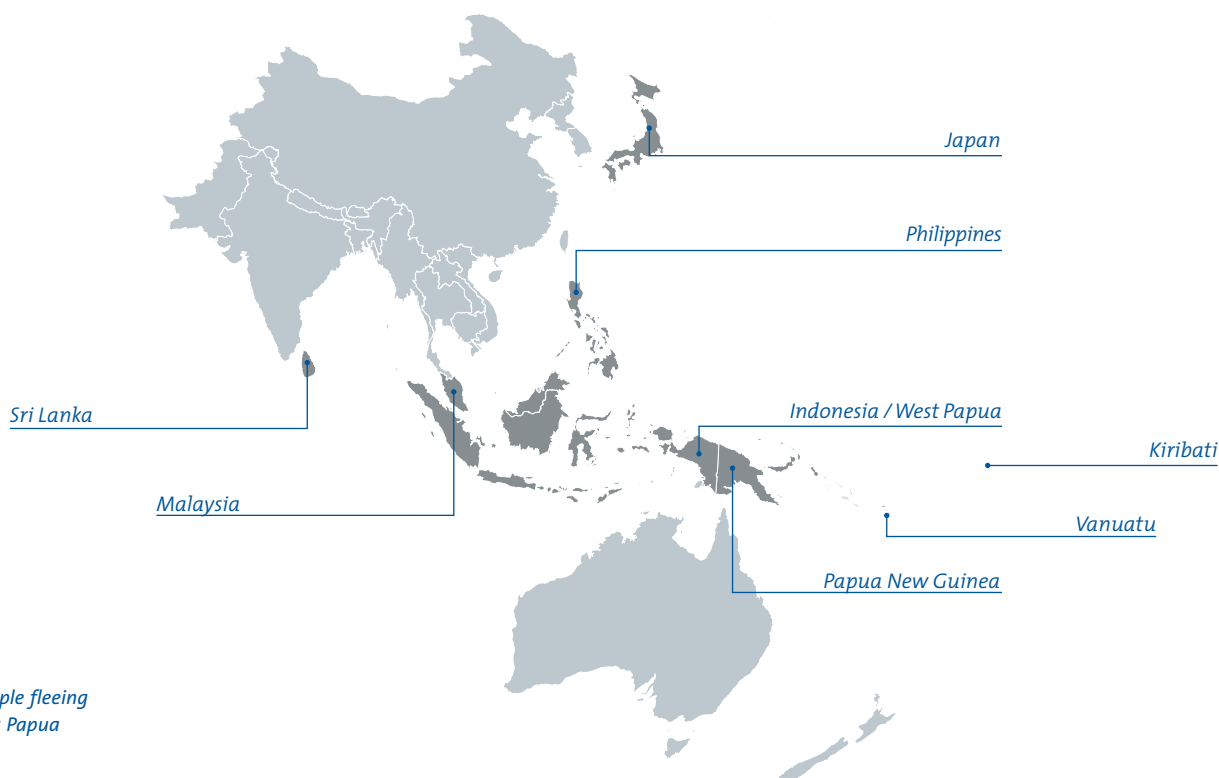
Throughout 2019, FI received information on human rights violations in West Papua occurring in a context of persistent conflict over questions of independence, alleged discrimination against indigenous Papuans, and the development of unsustainable agricultural mega-projects. With their deep roots on the island, the Franciscan Family continues to be a vital source of reliable information, as access to journalists and other international observers remains largely restricted by Indonesian authorities.

A notable exception came in February 2019 when, after years of preparation, FI successfully helped organize and participated in an ecumenical visit to West Papua under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) – the first such visit to be allowed since the territory was integrated into Indonesia in 1969. The delegation visited the towns of Jayapura, Wamena, Merauke, and Sorong – all sites of alleged violations – where its members met with church leaders, civil society organizations, and representatives from the police and security forces. Following the visit, the delegation had the opportunity in Jakarta to discuss their findings with the Minister for Religious Affairs and a number of presidential advisors.



Brother Benedict Ayodi OFM Cap is welcomed in Jayapura as part of the WCC's ecumenical delegation
© Franciscans International

Focus countries



“I learnt that the data we collect and publish only on Facebook or WhatsApp to expose health or education issues can actually be used to write to UN Special Rapporteurs for instance”.

FI partner from West Papua

The situation remains tense, as became evident on 19 August, when a video of security officials using racial slurs and attacking indigenous Papuan students who had lowered an Indonesian flag outside their dormitory sparked several violent protests. Authorities responded by deploying at least 6,000 troops to the island and shutting down internet access for several days. Throughout the year, FI used its direct and indirect access to West Papua to highlight these ongoing and other violations, among others through two side events during Human Rights Council sessions, dialogues with Indonesian diplomats and a number of urgent appeals to UN special mechanisms.

The findings of the West Papuan Franciscans were also reflected in a joint report on the human rights situation which was launched in October 2019 in Rome in the presence of several diplomatic missions, including Indonesia. Documenting violations between 2015 and 2017, this publication was personally received by Pope Francis and the Vatican Secretary of State.

The Philippines

The already tenuous human rights situation in the Philippines has seen a dramatic decline since the current administration launched its so-called ‘war on drugs’ shortly after taking office in June 2016. According to official statistics reported by the Drug Enforcement Agency 5,552 people had been killed in related police operations by December 2019. However, reports from civil society monitoring developments on the ground suggest that over 27,000 people may have died so far. Extra-judicial killings by police, security forces, and vigilantes have overwhelmingly targeted people from poor communities.

The Franciscan Family and wider Catholic Church in the Philippines have expressed strong opposition to the government’s actions, while providing rehabilitation for drug users as well as pastoral and financial support to the families of victims. This work has provoked threats from government officials, including President Duterte himself, in an environment that is increasingly hostile to the work of civil society and faith-based organizations.

At the UN, FI and its partners have repeatedly called attention to the ongoing human rights violations in the Philippines. In June 2019, Father Angel Cortéz OFM, Co-Executive Secretary of the Association of Major Religious Superiors (AMRSP), was one of eight partners supported by FI to attend the 41st session of the Human Rights Council to share his testimony and help build momentum toward an international investigation and accountability mechanism. In an unusually tight vote, the Council took a major step forward by adopting a resolution that asks the High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a report on the situation in the Philippines, which will be published in June 2020.

In August 2019, FI visited the Philippines as part of a second WCC ecumenical mission, meeting with victims and their families, representatives from indigenous communities, students, lawyers, and church leaders. Parallel to the visit, FI used the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Council’s resolution with civil society as well as strategies to support the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in its investigation.

Brother Angel with other Filipino human rights defenders during a side event at the Human Rights Council
© Franciscans International



THE ASIA-PACIFIC PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

- Hosted 13 partners from the Philippines, Indonesia, Kiribati, Sri Lanka, and Vanuatu in Geneva and New York.
- Submitted 6 reports to the UN on the Philippines, Kiribati, and West Papua.
- Delivered 14 oral statements during relevant UN sessions on the Philippines, Japan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Vanuatu.
- Organized 6 side events on the margins at the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.
- Conducted two country visits in Indonesia and one in the Philippines.



Ruth Markus OFS in the Security Council Chamber at the UN headquarters in New York
© Franciscans International

Ruth Markus OFS

Born as a daughter of the Malaysian Kasazun Dusun tribe and a wife, mother, and grandmother herself, Ruth has a deep and abiding passion for human rights. After training as a lawyer in London, she became an outspoken advocate especially for women and indigenous peoples. “The most pressing issues in my work have always been campaigning for the eradication of all forms of violation of the basic human rights of every being,” says Ruth. “However, if I have to narrow it down to the indigenous population, I would say, to put a stop to the destruction of their ‘sacred identity.’”

Malaysia’s legal code allows for specific religious and customary systems. However, the ability to freely choose and express one’s faith is being infringed, sometimes through trickery by officials who will change identification cards, at other times through offering incentives like more development projects for a community. Ruth recently addressed these problems at the Human Rights Council during an examination

of Malaysia’s human rights record under the Universal Periodic Review.

“My three-dimensional identity as an indigenous, a lawyer, and a Franciscan are complementary to each other,” says Ruth. “Except for the Christological dimension of St. Francis, the Franciscans are likewise known for their enduring passion concerning Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Hence, it comes as no surprise that my because of my identity as an indigenous, I am, by nature, a Franciscan.” In 2016, she joined FI’s International Board of Directors as the representative of the Secular Franciscan Order.

In these roles she continues to be inspired by the traditions of her tribe and its understanding of peace, justice, and care for creation. “It is the job of each and every human being irrespective of gender, creed and position in life to make Mother Earth ‘Breathe Again’, so that we can also breathe again.”

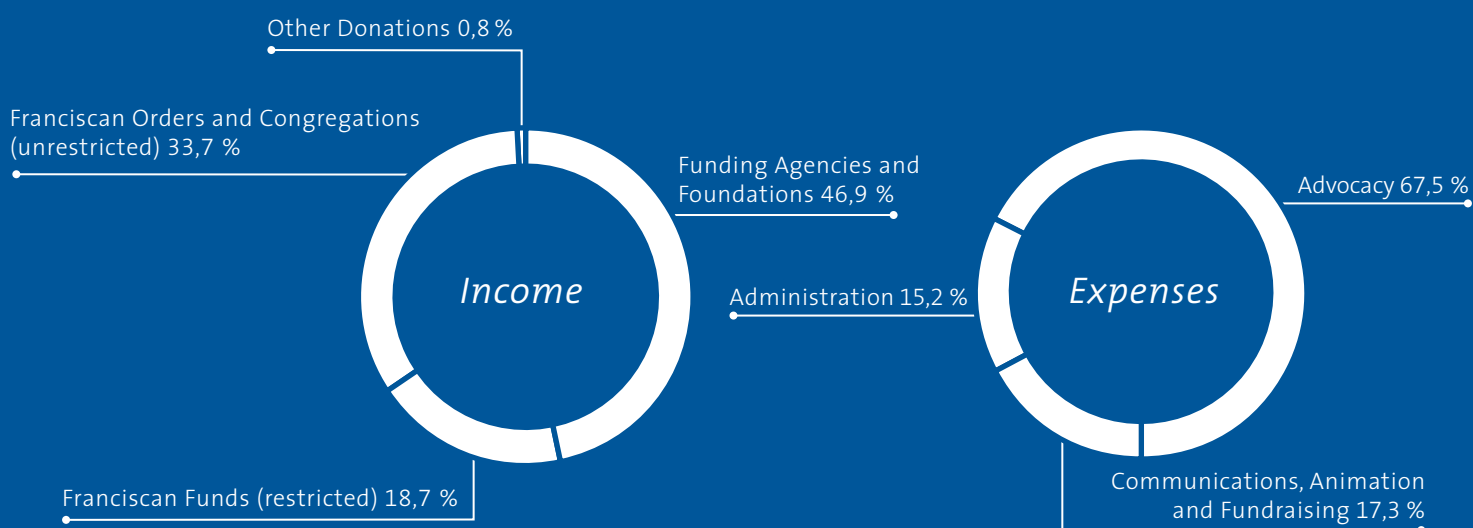
Financial Report 2019

Reviewed by PricewaterhouseCoopers SA

<i>Income</i>	<i>CHF</i>
Franciscan Orders and Congregations (unrestricted)	409'719
Franciscan Funds (restricted)	227'337
Funding Agencies and Foundations	569'899
Other Donations	9'212
<i>Total income</i>	<i>1'216'167</i>

<i>Expenses</i>	<i>CHF</i>
Advocacy	769'662
Communications, Animation and Fundraising	173'580
Administration	197'542
<i>Total operating expenses</i>	<i>1'140'784</i>

Total non-operating income and expenses	4'679
<i>Result of the year</i>	<i>70'704</i>



Help us protect human rights

Franciscans International is entirely dependent on donations from Franciscan orders and congregations, funding agencies and institutions, parishes, and people sensitive to Franciscan values of solidarity, peace, social justice, and respect for the environment. Make a difference with your donation and help us protect human rights.

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A mural at the Franciscan SEFRAS migrant shelter in São Paulo, Brazil
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Donor acknowledgement

Franciscans International wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the Franciscan Orders, Congregations and all individual donors for their invaluable support of this Common Ministry.

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Our Vision

A global community in which the dignity of every person is respected, resources are shared equitably, the environment is sustained, and nations and peoples live in peace.

Our Mission

Using a rights-based approach, Franciscans International advocates at the United Nations for the protection of human dignity and environmental justice.



Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations

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