



# Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations



Franciscans International works to protect the rights of the child in national and international fora.  
Photo: © Trevor Cole/Unsplash

## FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER | 2018/01

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Welcome to the first 2018 issue of Franciscans International Newsletter!

In this issue, you can read about Franciscan International's led events that took place in New York, the analysis of Franciscans International's Africa Regional Coordinator on the third Universal Periodic Review of Benin, and the new Franciscan Spotlight featuring Rodrigo Peret, OFM from Brazil.

In the email version of the newsletter you will find links highlighting publications and our work at the United Nations.

We hope you will find our Newsletter informative and engaging. And, of course, if you want to know more about Franciscans International's work please visit our website: [www.franciscansinternational.org](http://www.franciscansinternational.org).

Fraternally,

Markus Heinze, OFM



(left) Marina El Khoury, FI's UN Representative in New York moderating the side-event to the Commission of Social Development. (right) Members of Franciscans International's Boards of Directors. From the top left: Kevin Queally, TOR; Clark Berge, SSF; Jude Winkler, OFM Conv. Second row from the left: Benedict Ayodi, OFM Cap.; Joseph Rozansky, OFM (President of the IBD); Markus Heinze, OFM (Executive Director of FI). In front from the left: Carla Casadei, SFP; Ruth Marcus, OSF. Photos: © FI/Christian Seno, OFM



## FRANCISCAN SPOTLIGHT

Paolo Cravero, Communications Officer

Franciscan Spotlight is a section that features the work of Franciscans International's partners on the ground. Through a series of brief interviews, these Brothers and Sisters share their passion for human rights, some insights into their work, and their hopes for a better future.

This Franciscan Spotlight focuses on Rodrigo Peret, OFM from Brazil. Rodrigo collaborates with the Serviço Inter-Franciscano de Justiça, Paz e Ecologia (SINFRAJUPE) and many other Latin American and international organizations, and is a long-standing partner of Franciscans International.

In November 2017, Rodrigo travelled to Zimbabwe for an exchange visit held by the People's Dialogue Network (PD). The aim of this mission was to understand the status, potential, and sustainability of artisanal mining in the country. Within that visit, together with other 22 PD delegates, he was arrested and, after two days, released.

Franciscans International reached out to him to better understand the mining situation in Zimbabwe and how human rights work fits within his Franciscan mission.

### Why is mining so contentious in Zimbabwe?

Zimbabwe is a very rich country in terms of natural resources, especially minerals. However, the population is very poor. There is no direct translation of this natural wealth in positive gains for the population. Actually, local communities are displaced by mining corporations and seldom receive proper compensation both in terms of hard cash and of infrastructures—roads, fresh water distribution, schools, among others. Many communities, displaced years ago, are still fighting for their human rights to water, education, health, etc.

Also, you have to realise that all mining concessions given to foreign and national corporations are at the discretion of the President [*at the time of the interview President Mugabe had just been deposed*]. This is different from other countries in the region, where different bodies within the state decide on these matters.



### Do you think the situation of mines is bound to change for the better given the new President, Emmerson Mnangagwa?

I do not have much hope for big changes. President Mnangagwa is a veteran of the revolution; he was Vice-President and has been in many different positions in the government during the 37 years of Mugabe's presidency.

### In your experience is this situation specific only to Zimbabwe?

No. There is a pattern in the way big mining corporations operate, regardless of the country. Although at different degrees, you will find similar types of exploitation of communities living on the land where mining has occurred: a lack of redistribution of wealth, abuses, human rights violations, lack of compensation (communal or private) and poor to inexistent infrastructures. These communities and these lands are, in the eyes of corporations, expendables for profit. We really need to rethink this extractivist approach in its totality.

### How do you see the connection between Franciscan charism and the type of human rights work that you engage in?

My human rights engagement is, at the base, an effort to protect and safeguard creation. There is a deep connection with the Canticle of Creatures and the feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood with all



(above) Auguste Agounpké, OFM Cap. Executive Director of Franciscains-Bénin during the UPR pre-Session on Benin. Photo: © UPRInfo. (in the previous page) Rodrigo Peret, OFM during a side-event to the 36th session of the Human Right Council. Photo: © FI/Paolo Cravero

creatures and ecosystems on the planet. Human rights are Franciscans at heart, they are a call to all people to defend the dignity of our brothers and sisters and the environment around us: all of God's creation.

### FOCUS ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Enkeleda Papa, Africa Program Coordinator

On Friday, 10 November 2017 the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Benin took place at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva. The UPR is a UN human rights mechanism that reviews the human rights record of UN member States every four and a half years.

In total, 82 UN member States took the floor to ask questions and make recommendations to the Government of Benin. The recommendations reflected several concerns raised by Franciscans International and its field partners pertaining to children's rights, including the issue of ritual infanticide, birth registration, and the right to education.

In this regard, while many States commended Benin for the adoption of the new Child Code, they also advised the Government of Benin to take concrete measures to ensure its effective implementation. Further, States demanded that Benin protect children from harmful practices—in particular, to ensure that cases of ritual infanticide are prosecuted and sanctioned.

Ritual infanticide in Benin involves the killing of the so-called 'witch children': children who experience an 'abnormal' birth. This can include infants born in the

breech position - where feet are delivered first - or those born face down, as a normal birth is one in which the child is born head first and face up. Newborns are also killed if they are born prematurely, with teeth or perceptible disabilities, or if the mother dies during childbirth. These children are believed to bring a curse on the family and the community. Since these deaths are not always registered it is difficult to fully assess the magnitude of the practice.

Regarding birth registration, States recommended that Benin intensify efforts in view of ensuring universal birth registration of children – a practice that, in the west African state, still lags behind international standards.

The Government also received, and committed to, a number of recommendations on the right to education. These focused on ensuring a completely free primary education for all—no hidden ancillary costs for families—especially for those from disadvantaged households. In addition, the recommendations highlighted the necessity to create a safe environment for all children attending school.

Franciscans International and its field partners, who have been working on the issue of child protection in Benin for almost a decade, welcome the commitment of the Government of Benin to take action to implement these recommendations. Together with other actors of the Beninese civil society, FI will continue its engagement in the country to ensure that these commitments are translated into concrete action on the ground.

### INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Christian Seno, OFM

The International Board of Directors (IBD) of Franciscans International (FI) met in New York City for its semi-annual board meeting on November 16 to 19, 2017. The meeting brought together the seven members of the board, who represent the Conference of the Franciscan Family as well as the Anglican Franciscans, to assess FI's work, to review its financial and activities reports, and to provide strategic guidance and orientation for FI's advocacy strategy and its future activities at the United Nations.

IBD President, Joseph Rozansky, OFM, said the board also took time to focus on the New York office, which recently hired Marina El Khoury as its new UN



representative. "Beyond the ordinary business of a board, we were very interested in checking in on the augmented staff of the office." Joseph continued, "We are thankful to Odile Coirier, FMM, for everything that she has done over the last two years, helping to keep FI alive and present at the UN in New York, and we are happy knowing she will continue her great work. We are also very happy with the way that both Christian Seno, OFM, and Marina El Khoury, FI's new UN representative, have initiated their service in the office, a positive sign of good things to come."

On Saturday, November 18, Joseph presided at the Vigil Mass at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi on West 31st Street. The Mass was an opportunity for the IBD members to gather in prayer and to share the spirit and mission of Franciscans International with Franciscans in the metropolitan New York area. The Gospel reading, taken from Matthew 25:14-30, seemed to underscore FI's urgent mission. The parable of the talents issues a challenge that invites us to use our talents creatively to build the Kingdom of God. Joseph noted, "We are trying to do just that at FI, working in the areas of peace, the poor and the planet."

After the Mass, the board of directors hosted an information session and reception that attracted members of the Franciscan family from all over the region, including former FI staff.

Marina presented on the initiatives of the recently revamped New York Office, giving a brief overview of the complex UN system and showing how Franciscans International acts as a bridge between the Franciscans working at the grassroots and the United Nations through advocacy. According to Marina, "FI has historically advocated at the UN through an approach that is country-focused and consists of using all available platforms to ensure that national governments - UN Member States - respect their international human rights obligations. FI leads gender-sensitive advocacy before the member states on behalf of different marginalized communities: rural communities, migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, and those living in extreme poverty, to name a few. The key topics of our advocacy have mostly been around human rights standards for extractive industries and mining, eradicating extreme poverty, migration-related issues, climate change, and responding to human rights violations in conflicts and post-conflict contexts."



(above) On November 18, Joseph Rozansky, OFM presided at the Vigil Mass at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi on West 31st Street. Photos: © FI/Christian Seno, OFM

In addition to bringing together previous board members and staff of Franciscans International, the evening drew many younger members of the Franciscan community, both religious and secular, who are interested in human rights and advocacy. For Kelly Moltzen, board member of Franciscan Action Network, the reception was an exciting occasion to learn more about Franciscans International and to imagine possible opportunities for greater inter-Franciscan collaboration. "The human rights work that Franciscans International does at the United Nations is critical and is an important witness to the Franciscan identity. I look forward to seeing how the international Franciscan community and the Franciscan Action Network, which works to transform U.S. public policy, can further collaborate to advance justice, peace, and integrity of creation worldwide."

## SIDE-EVENT TO THE COMMISSION OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Marina El Khoury, UN Representative in New York

Since Franciscans International's establishment in New York, our members have actively participated in the work of the Commission of Social Development, one of the functional commissions set-up under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Its main objective is the follow-up and implementation of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, where heads of States and Governments commit to "creating an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development."

The Commission takes place annually, usually in February, and reviews the progress made by Member States in achieving social development for their peoples. Its programme of work includes high-level panel discussions, informal consultations, the ECOSOC Youth Forum, a Civil Society Forum, and dozens of side-events organized by Permanent Missions and NGOs. A bi-yearly theme is carefully chosen to reflect the core commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration.

This year's theme is "Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all". As it directly relates to our mandate, we have partnered with like-minded organizations in submitting a statement to the Commission and have organized a side-event focusing on truly inclusive social development.

Focusing on a universal rights-based approach to poverty eradication, our statement is recorded as part of the Commission's documents and is shared to all Member States and Observing Parties. The statement's core message reflects our belief that extreme poverty is both the cause and consequence of human rights violations, and that "implementing anti-poverty programs without ensuring the respect of their rights keeps these communities in a vulnerable situation prone to a return to poverty at any moment." Development without human rights is short-sighted and counter-productive, as it inevitably leads to more inequalities and social exclusion.

To address the issue, we have put forward examples of good practices and recommendations. For instance, global policies and programs need to be more participative, through more frequent consultations with communities living in extreme poverty. As such, there



Participants to FI's side-event during the Commission of Social Development in New York. Photo: © FI/Christian Seno, OFM

is a need to tailor the global commitments to local contexts and to give ownership to local authorities, like municipalities, in the process. The result would be a rights-based approach to social protection floors.

Our 2018 statement also includes a mention of "the growing role played by the private sector in influencing national policies, or in disregarding them with impunity". As such, we encouraged Member States to improve business accountability for human rights abuses at national and international levels through the implementation of relevant UN human rights instruments.

Our side-event, which took place on January 30, was entitled: "Connecting Development and Human Rights in the eradication of extreme poverty: Strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda", and reflected FI's core mandate. Endorsed by the Holy See Permanent Observer Mission, the event included religious practitioners from the field, where congregations are working hand in hand with communities. The event showcased success stories aimed at encouraging States to take their international human rights obligations into account when formulating and implementing policies and programs affecting the lives of persons living in extreme poverty.

*The written statement is available in its entirety online at <http://undocs.org/E/CN.5/2018/NGO/53>.*



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A voice at the United Nations

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