



Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations




Franciscans International

Annual Report 2023

Imprint

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Cover photo: © Franciscans International; Alejandra Conde of the Franciscan La72 migrant shelter together with brothers René Flores OFM and Daniel Blanco OFM outside the UN in Geneva

Franciscans International Annual Report 2023

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/ Letter from the President /

On behalf of Franciscans International and its International Board of Directors (IBD) I am pleased to present the annual report of our work in defense of the rights and dignity of all and care for creation. Our work is accomplished in two distinct yet intersecting ways. First, we work with members of the Franciscan family who live and work with the most marginalized people and communities. FI translates these first-hand experiences into a language that will prompt action at the international level. Second, we partner with many other human rights organizations and pool our collective strengths to promote the common good at the United Nations.

One of our greatest strengths is the priority we place on collaborating with existing Franciscan Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation groups and their local partners working across different continents where Franciscans are present. These collaborative efforts are guided by our understanding of the principal spiritual and ethical insights of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi, relating to the unique dignity and goodness of all things, both human and natural.

Fundraising is always critical. We are most grateful to our donors for the trust they place in us. Your support allows us to further the work entrusted to us by the Conference of the Franciscan Family. FI is your organization, collectively representing your values at the international level, supporting members of the Franciscan family, working at the grassroots level, to love, care for, and defend the dignity of all. FI is your organization carrying the message of St. Francis to a world where peace is in short supply; and where respect for the environment faces increasing obstacles. FI needs your full support – moral, financial, and spiritual.

As we engage in centenary celebrations connected to St. Francis – La Verna and the stigmata (1224) – let us remind ourselves of his deep commitment to the most marginalized, and the interconnectedness of all of life – the human community and the natural environment. Let us continue to join and unite our prayers, efforts, and resources so that the messages of St. Francis and St. Clare are transmitted through our collective action. Our goal remains a more just, humane, and sustainable world where all of God's creatures might thrive.

Fraternally yours in St. Francis,

Brother Michael Perry OFM
President of the International Board of Directors

/ Letter from the Executive Director /



It is challenging and humbling to be here in Geneva, going through the process of appointment and induction, alongside managing the usual daily requirements of the organization. My predecessor Markus Heinze OFM has succeeded in leading Franciscans International to a new level of respect at the United Nations for its advocacy work and has left the organization in a strong and sustainable position. We are hugely grateful for his dedication and leadership over the past twelve years.

I have an increased awareness of those that we advocate for and those who bring their challenges to our attention. Franciscan sisters and brothers who sometimes labor under intense, dangerous, and deeply sad conditions, partnering with others for human rights, justice, and dignity for all. Despite internal changes, the goals, strategic orientations, and hopes of FI remain the same. We continue working with Franciscans on behalf of the most marginalized, to advocate for justice, peace, and environmental protection at both country and international levels.

Looking forward, creating increased capacity is a key goal. Starting mid-2023 with the creation of a new regional program to address human rights violations in Europe, mapping migration partners and issues throughout the continent. 2024 will be a busy year finalizing strategy, work plans, and budgets for this new region that FI will serve. We acknowledge that our work is not a one-way street to the UN but involves translating its decisions into firm strategies with Franciscans and partners at the grassroots.

The teams in Geneva and New York acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing support of the work of FI: Generous donations of time, resources, and especially the global network of Franciscans who continually pray and work with and on behalf of the most marginalized. You make up the other part of the FI team that we could not do without.

Our commitment to nurture and grow this collaboration is reflected in our 2021 – 2024 strategic plan which will be reviewed and updated this year. This is the foundation of continuing to address national, regional, and global human rights issues.

May we collectively work for a better world, where all people are given a chance to live healthy and worthwhile lives, where the dream of justice for all can come true, and where the compassion of God is shown to be real.

Faternally,

Blair Matheson TSSF
Executive Director

/ 2023 in numbers /

Empower

Influence

Over **800** 
Franciscan Family members
reached in 17 gatherings

4 
in-country consultations

20 
advocacy events and
conferences

20 
Franciscans and other partners
advocating at the United Nations

165 
Franciscans and other
partners who benefitted from
capacity/strategy building

57 
advocacy interventions and
submissions at the United Nations

11 
United Nations outcome
documents influenced

72% 
of FI recommendations included
in United Nations reports

*Calling
attention*

*Preventing
further violations*

*Building pressure
for change*

/ Our focus /



Environmental
justice



Extractive
industries



Human rights
defenders



Indigenous
peoples



Peace and conflict



Freedoms of assembly
and expression



Marginalized
groups

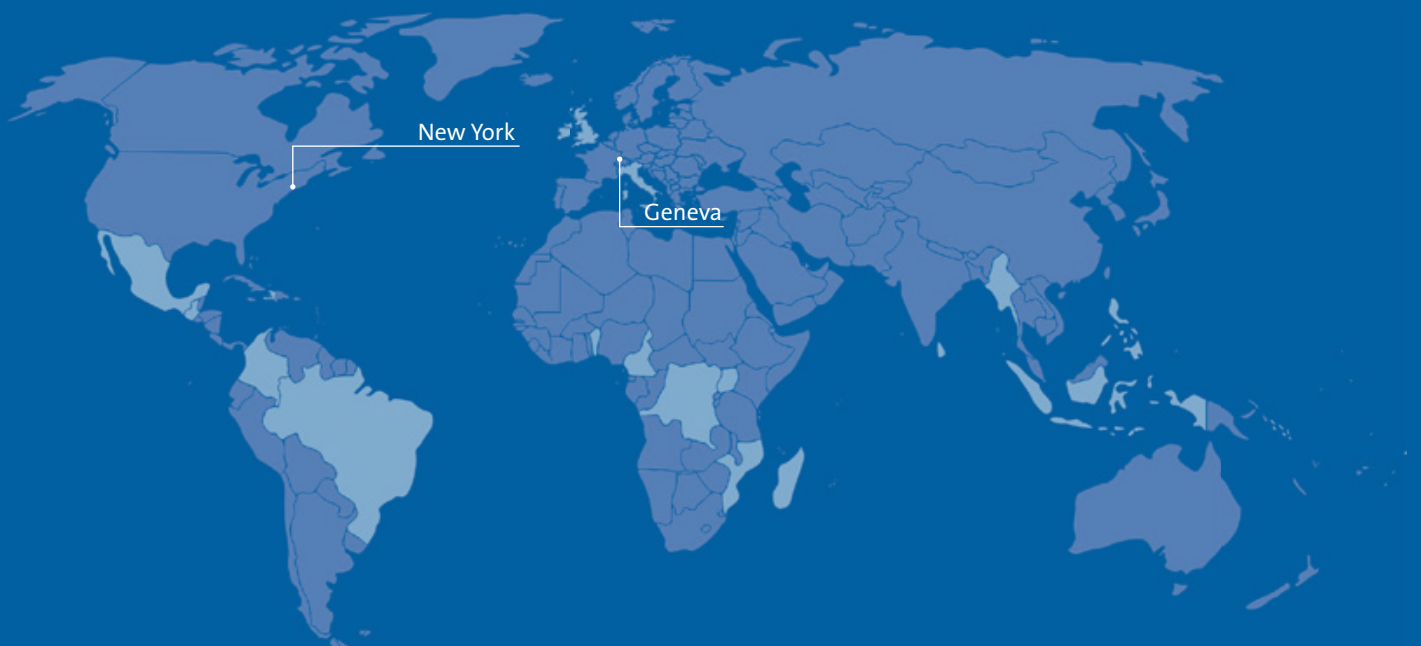


Migration and
displacement



Rights to water
and sanitation

/ Where we work /



01:00



URUGUAY

/ About Franciscans International /

Franciscans International is a non-governmental organization in General Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. At the core of our mission is the belief in the dignity of all people, which is lived out in our commitment to protect and preserve human rights and the environment.

Since our establishment in 1989, we advocate together with and on behalf of Franciscans to prevent, denounce and address human rights violations through strategic use of United Nations processes and mechanisms. We do so by bringing cases of discrimination and violence committed against individuals and groups living at the margins to the attention of international policymakers, and by influencing UN decision-making and standard-setting processes accordingly on various issues and countries.

Following their spirituality and values founded on simplicity, fraternity, peace, and care for creation, Franciscans often live and work with disadvantaged groups and individuals, have their trust and are among the closest to their concerns. In doing so, many Franciscans are human rights defenders, and FI serves as their voice at the UN.

With offices in Geneva and New York, FI operates under the sponsorship of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF), which represents the various branches of the Franciscan Family. The Ministers General of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), the Conventuals (OFMConv), the Capuchins (OFMCap), the Third Order Regular (TOR), the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and the President of the International Franciscan Conference of the Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular (IFC-TOR), along with the International Board of Directors that also includes a representative of the Anglican Society of Saint Francis, work with FI staff to ensure that the organization supports and maintains the Franciscan Family's commitment to justice and peace throughout the world.

/ Advocacy in 2023 /

Throughout 2023, Franciscans International continued its work to promote human rights, addressing a wide range of issues on four continents. While this engagement is driven by the needs of Franciscan sisters and brothers, and the specific challenges they witness at the grassroots, we also see a clear intersectionality. The root causes of local human rights problems are often global in nature or echo the experiences of other communities elsewhere in the world. Recognizing this, the United Nations (UN) remains the primary forum and system to comprehensively protect and promote human rights.



*Members of the Global Coalition
receive the UN Human Rights
Prize in New York*
© Franciscans International

Our work took place during a year when we witnessed global peace under threat and saw that dialogue between opposing parties became increasingly difficult, with international law trumped by political consideration. Yet, human rights can often serve as a basis for such exchanges. In 2023, we thus remained committed to holding governments accountable in a productive and proactive way. Seeking to use the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration, whose 75th anniversary we celebrated in 2023, as a foundation, we kept striving for a more just and equitable world.



“After many years, I feel that people still have hope for the generations to come, even though rivers are drying up and climate is becoming hot. Many have already become educated and know the effects of climate change, logging, mining – everything.”

Worrick Marako SSF

Care for the planet

Franciscans are among those who have committed themselves to try and stop or mitigate the widespread impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. With 2023 shattering yet another record as the hottest year measured, the dangers to our planet are clear. In the Solomon Islands, sisters and brothers refuse to witness the many repercussions of logging on their communities without acting to hold their government to account. Likewise, Franciscan groups support people on the move who are displaced by droughts and other extreme weather events in Mozambique, Madagascar, and Central America. We have continued to bring their concerns and calls for decisive global action to the United Nations.

For the past years, the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has been a cornerstone of our work to promote care for our common home. Some of these collective efforts received recognition from the highest levels at the UN in 2023. Franciscans International is proud to be part of a diverse Global Coalition that received the prestigious UN Human Rights Prize for its advocacy toward the recognition of the human right to a healthy environment by the UN General Assembly in July 2022. This award is a strong signal in support of collective civil society action. It also highlights the potential of the right to a healthy environment as an avenue to realize more robust environmental policies.

Emphasizing this momentum, FI continues its work toward the full operationalization of the right to a healthy environment, including by providing new tools to those working on environmental issues at the local level. In parallel to the award ceremony for the Human Rights Prize, members of the Global Coalition organized an event with diplomats, UN experts, and civil society representatives to explore the next steps. In December 2023, FI also hosted a consultation with Franciscans, grassroots partners, and other experts to identify gaps in understanding, explore different case studies, and discuss how to use this newly recognized right to hold governments accountable. The findings will form the basis of a new practical guide on the implementation of the right to a healthy environment, which FI aims to publish in 2024.

Closely linked to the right to a healthy environment are challenges toward realizing the right to water and sanitation. In March, FI participated in the UN Water Conference in New York, where we supported three side events that brought together grassroots representatives and human rights experts to draw connections between the right to water and the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As part of the Mining Working Group, FI contributed to an update of its 2015 Water Guide. In this context, we highlighted the stress put on the rights to water and sanitation by the climate crisis and, increasingly, by the activities of businesses and large corporations.

More generally, FI continued to raise the adverse impacts of the environmental crises on human rights to various UN mechanisms in both its submissions and interventions, as well as on the margins of relevant UN sessions. For example, during the 28th UN Climate Conference (COP28) in Dubai, we co-organized the Talanoa Interfaith Dialogue and a high-level event on the application of the right to a healthy environment while addressing the impacts of climate change on children.



Indigenous Peoples, business, and human rights

There is a growing recognition, conveyed by UN experts, that business activities – particularly those of transnational corporations – are among the leading causes of human rights violations. However, a combination of factors, including financial interests, promises of economic development, weak oversight, and varying jurisdictions, makes it difficult to establish robust mechanisms to prevent these violations or hold businesses accountable when they do occur. Franciscans International seeks to meet these challenges by bringing concrete cases of violations to the attention of the UN. We also continue to engage in the ongoing negotiations on a new legally binding instrument that would regulate business activities under international human rights law.

The ninth session of this open-ended intergovernmental working group (IGWG) took place in October 2023. FI made several interventions during the negotiations to provide technical inputs, calling for robust language to create actionable tools for affected communities, both directly and as part of several civil society coalitions. Although there were procedural issues and attempts to derail the process, we were encouraged to see broad participation by UN Member States, including some who had previously not joined the negotiations.

FI's engagement during the IGWG and other UN sessions continues to be informed by the work of its grassroots partners. During the 2023 IGWG session, we invited a Franciscan sister to share her testimony on the role of natural gas exploitation in fueling violent conflict in Northern Mozambique as part of a broader effort to draw attention to the real-life harm caused by business activities through different UN human rights mechanisms. Similarly, during the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, we hosted Bishop Vicente Ferreira from Brazil, who is supporting the victims of a catastrophic mining incident in Brumadinho as they seek reparations for the harm inflicted on people and the environment. FI further raised cases related to business and human rights in three submissions to Special Procedures.

More broadly, FI seeks to ensure that grassroots information shared by Franciscan sisters and brothers reaches decision-makers at the UN through its submissions and interventions, raising various cases, including from Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Following fact-finding missions in 2022, we also launched two new publications documenting the human rights impacts of logging in the Solomon Islands and the linkages between natural gas exploitation and violent conflict in Mozambique.

Indigenous communities are particularly at risk of violations, such as land grabbing, by extractive industries and other large projects that do not respect their right to free, prior and informed consent. The contamination of drinking water, environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, health issues, and forced displacement are recurring issues documented by FI.

We participated in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York and raised concerns about the threats against Indigenous lands by business activities and climate change with targeted stakeholders. We also used the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review, and Treaty Bodies to raise the issue of the militarization of Indigenous lands in Guatemala and Indonesia, which is linked to further human rights violations, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

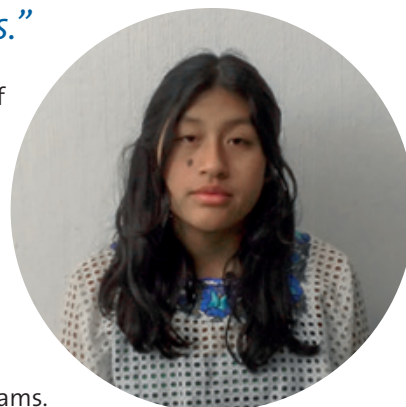
“They didn’t come here to finance the schools, the roads, or the clinics. They only came here to take the logs and go.”

Andrew Thada TSSF



Nikte Caal: “We cannot just be observers.”

“The environment has changed terribly since the hijacking of our sacred rivers,” says Nikte Caal, a young Indigenous activist. “The biodiversity and the ecosystems that existed have been destroyed.” At just sixteen years old, she has taken a stance against the development of three hydro-electric projects on the Cahabón and Oxec rivers in Guatemala. To Nikte and other Indigenous Q’eqchi, these rivers are not just a source of food and water – in their cosmology, they hold a sacred place.



Nikte’s family was among those most outspoken against the dams. Her father, Bernardo Caal Xol, filed a case with the Supreme Court of Justice on behalf of the Q’eqchi, alleging that the construction violated their rights to life, a healthy environment, and access to water. But this activism came at a high price: he was targeted with a defamation campaign and ultimately imprisoned.

“When our fathers and mothers dare to defend our rivers, they are criminalized and unjustly imprisoned. For four years and two months, I could not hug my father because they invented charges against him. The corrupt justice system imprisoned my father without any evidence,” says Nikte. “This is the story that many girls in my country are living through.”

To support her father’s activism, she addressed a high-level panel of diplomats and experts at the UN in Geneva with the support of Franciscans International, demanding that her government meet its international obligations by obtaining consent from the affected Q’eqchi communities before continuing construction. “We cannot just be observers of the destruction of our environment,” she told the panel. “We must inform ourselves of what is happening and act.”

A meeting of Indigenous representatives at FI’s office in New York

© Franciscans International





Sister Hedwig:

“People who could have been saved are dying”

More than 6.000 people have been killed in Cameroon since 2017 in the conflict between government forces and separatist groups from the Anglophone minority. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced by the fighting. In Kumbo, one of the places where civilians are caught in the crossfire, Sister Hedwig and the Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis continue to provide pastoral and medical care.

“Our pastoral work includes helping people living with disabilities. We have a specialized center where we welcome them. In the cases where they cannot come, we at least try to teach the family how to take care of them”, says Sister Hedwig. In total, the sisters provide medical care in 21 locations, including the biggest cardiac center in Central Africa. However, due to the conflict, several facilities were forced to shut down while others are struggling. The fighting and blocked roads prevent sisters from reaching the wounded. “People who could have been saved are dying,” says Sr. Hedwig.

The sisters do not get involved in politics and provide impartial medical care and protection to whoever comes to the hospital. But Sr. Hedwig is also very aware of the danger of her work: there are regular attacks on medical personnel and facilities. Schools and humanitarian workers are also targeted, in violation of international law. Despite this, she carries on: “I think that my calling as a Franciscan sister is to do everything I can to make sure things change.”

In 2023, Sister Hedwig was supported by Franciscans International to come to the United Nations and raise awareness about the reality on the ground in Cameroon, a situation that has received little attention so far. “I am calling on the international community to help our leaders with reconciliation and mediation,” she says. “If we can get people to sit together and see what can be done to resolve the situation, peace could be achieved.”

Franciscans in Guatemala join a protest calling attention to the violations committed against migrants

© Franciscan Network for Migrants



Migration and displacement

Across the world, a multitude of factors, including extreme poverty, persecution, and insecurity, continue to drive cross-border migration and internal displacement. Simultaneously, climate change has become a 'threat multiplier', exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and creating new ones. For example, erratic weather in Central America's 'Dry Corridor' has devastated crops, plunging people into acute food insecurity and triggering displacement. Nevertheless, adequate international protection mechanisms in the context of climate-induced displacement are still lacking. To better understand these challenges, FI co-organized a series of consultations with affected communities and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change. These were followed by a submission to the Special Rapporteur as well as two side events at the Human Rights Council to raise further awareness about these challenges.

Continuing its past engagement in the Americas, FI further enhanced the capacity of the Franciscan Network for Migrants (FNM) by facilitating training sessions on international human rights advocacy and documentation, including during their annual meeting in El Salvador. We also supported FNM in developing new digital tools to centralize their data on human rights violations, thus improving the documentation of these abuses. Based on this information collected at the grassroots level, FI raised critical issues such as the regularization and protection of migrants through its statements and submissions to the UN while also disseminating visual tools mainstreaming these issues.

FI also brought attention to the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), forced to flee their homes to escape the violence of often-overlooked armed conflicts in Mozambique and West Papua. FI facilitated the sharing of first-hand testimonies from grassroots partners with the UN, stressing the severe lack of food, drinking water, and access to healthcare for displaced persons. At both the national and international levels, we offered concrete recommendations to the governments of Indonesia and Mozambique to improve the situation of IDPs.

When it comes to human rights violations affecting migrants, Europe is no exception. Pushbacks on land and at sea, harassment, criminalization, and ill-treatment have become common occurrences. Although human rights concerns related to migration are not novel to the continent, recent events such as the conflict in Ukraine, new anti-migration policies, and the repercussions of climate change have aggravated the situation. Through its new Europe Regional Program, FI has started to collect information and build alliances in the British Isles and in the Mediterranean region, enabling us to bring the concerns of Franciscans and their allies to the UN.

"Migrating without information is as if you were walking down the street blindfolded. You don't know where to go and what to do."

Alejandra Conde,
La72 shelter





Alexandro Rangga OFM:

“They don’t answer our questions.”

When Brother Alexandro takes the floor at the United Nations to denounce the human rights violations he has witnessed, he follows a long tradition. Nearly sixty years ago, Friars Minor in Indonesia first began to protest the repressive behavior of soldiers ahead of the 1969 Act of Free Choice – the UN-mandated referendum meant to settle the question of West Papuan independence. In the decades that followed, Franciscans became more vocal and organized in their opposition to the marginalization of Indigenous Papuans and were among the first to raise this at the UN.

“Because of this long history and the lack of freedom of choice, many in Papua only focus on their civil and political rights,” says Brother Alexandro. “They forget about their economic, social, and cultural rights.” Crackdowns on protests and harassment of human rights defenders are frequent in West Papua. However, the government is also stimulating the development of palm oil plantations and other large agro-industrial projects, seizing communally owned lands without the consent of Indigenous communities. Ongoing fighting between the military and separatist groups has displaced over 60.000 people, depriving them of healthcare, education, and food.



People displaced by fighting in West Papua, Indonesia
© Franciscans International

Journalists, UN experts, and humanitarian organizations are not allowed to visit West Papua. In their absence, Franciscans and other faith-based groups are one of the few sources of reliable information about the human rights violations taking place – some so serious that they spurred the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to raise the alarm in 2023. Seeing the deep-rooted and structural inequalities, the Franciscans are also looking beyond the UN to support Indigenous Papuans. Together with Parish priests and local authorities, they are developing new programs to empower communities to claim their rights. Even so, this is an uphill struggle.

“It is still difficult to get the attention of the UN on Papua because we have so many human rights issues around the world,” says Brother Alexandro. “We can see that the government does not have data to counter the information provided by civil society. Still, they don’t answer our questions.”



An end to impunity

An essential part of Franciscan International's work is to advocate for robust mechanisms to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are held accountable. This is vital not only to end impunity and prevent further abuses but also to facilitate effective reparations and, in situations of armed conflict, foster peace. Yet, in many countries, these processes are frequently hindered due to weak rule of law, corruption, repressive policies, or limited access to justice for victims and their families.

This is the case in the Philippines, where a new administration has not kept its promise to end the so-called 'war on drugs'. To convey the challenges faced by its victims to the UN, FI hosted Mrs. Amelia Santos, whose husband was one of the over 30,000 victims of extrajudicial killings that devastated some of the poorest communities in the country. To date, the 2016 killing of her husband has not been investigated. At the Human Rights Council, she elaborated on the ongoing arbitrary violence and the climate of impunity that prevails. Together with FI, she called for strong UN engagement to ensure accountability, including through reconfiguring and renewing the UN Joint Programme, which provides technical assistance to the government.

In Sri Lanka, much remains unclear about the alleged failures of government officials that allowed the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which killed more than 270 people, to take place. Nevertheless, in 2023, a Catholic coalition made



*Franciscans in the Philippines
consult communities threatened
by gas exploitation*
© Franciscans International

important gains toward transparency and justice for the victims. In January, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court found that government officials were responsible for failing to prevent the attacks and ordered them to compensate the families of victims financially. Partners supported by FI, including the Archbishop of Colombo, were instrumental in the investigation. More broadly, FI also asked diplomatic missions and UN Special Procedures to call on the government to take steps toward transitional justice and to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which has been used to arbitrarily arrest activists. Following these efforts, we conducted a training and fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka, laying the foundation for continued advocacy.

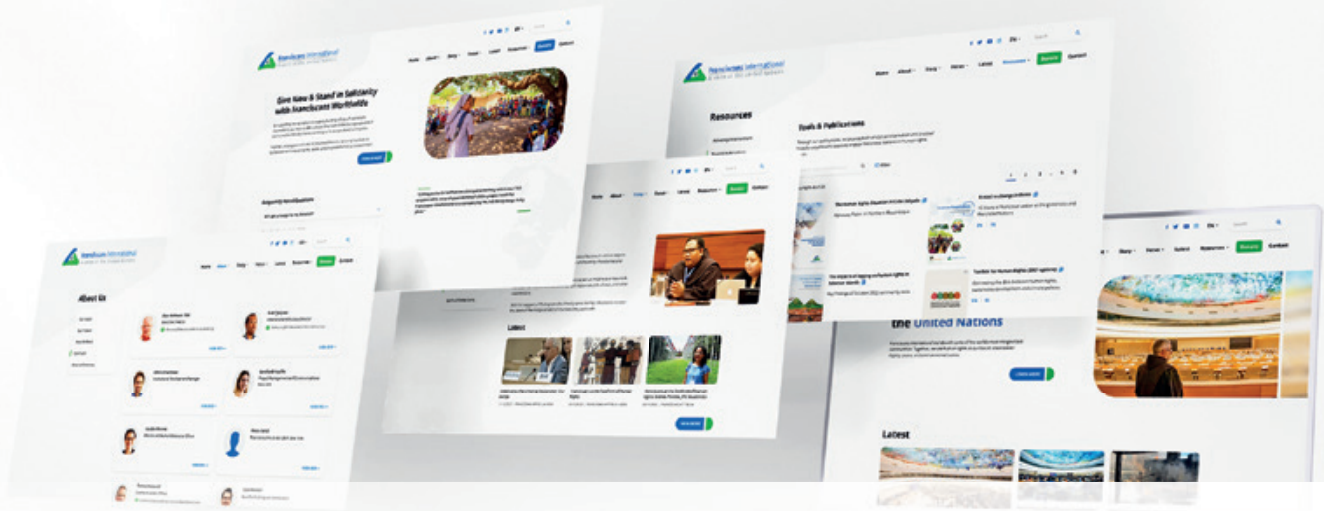
Reprisals against human rights defenders (HRDs) are not exclusive to Sri Lanka. In Indonesia and Guatemala, the criminalization, attacks, and harassment of environmental activists, Indigenous leaders, and journalists are widespread. FI offered a platform to grassroots representatives from both countries to speak out and address different UN mechanisms. For example, we engaged with the Expert Mechanism on Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to demand accountability for abuses committed in the context of the militarization of Indigenous lands. We were also encouraged to see the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide speak out against extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests in West Papua, bringing visibility to the gross human rights violations taking place.

"I saw my husband, his face covered with mud and blood [...] From that day, I made a promise to myself, not for me but for my children - I won't stop to seek justice."

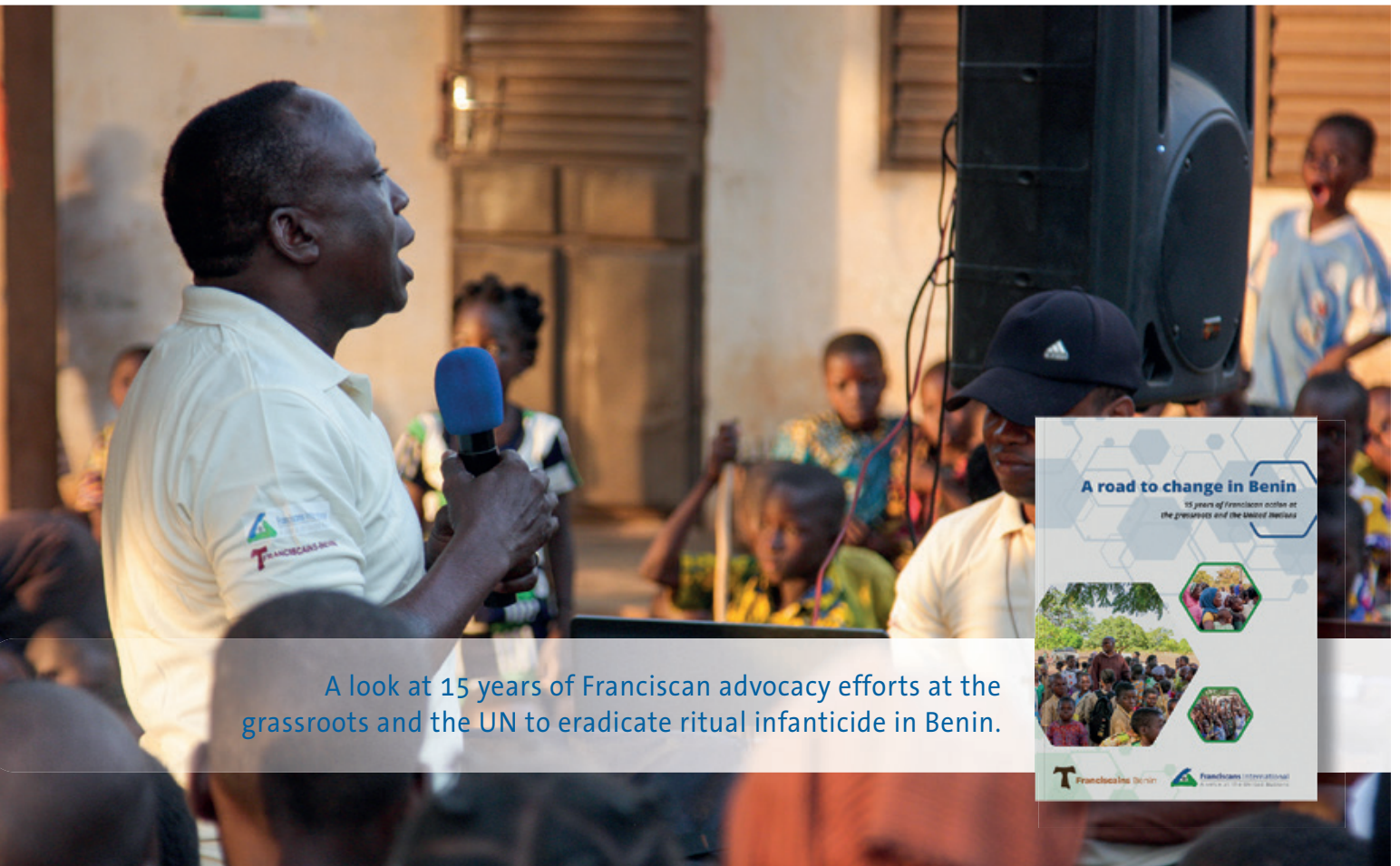
Amelia Santos, Human rights defender from the Philippines



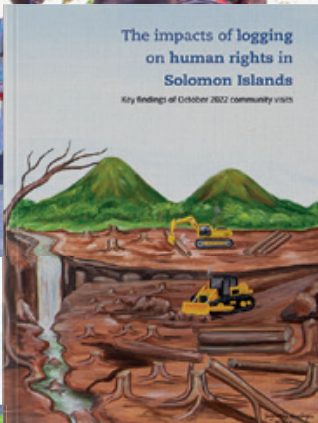
/ Launched in 2023 /



A new website that offers improved access to resources and Franciscan stories



A look at 15 years of Franciscan advocacy efforts at the grassroots and the UN to eradicate ritual infanticide in Benin.



Community consultations in the Solomon Islands expose the real costs of logging.



An advocacy paper providing insight into violent conflict and internal displacement in Mozambique.

/ Africa Program /



Uganda

Human trafficking remains pervasive in Uganda, where people – including children – continue to fall victim to forced labor and sexual exploitation. Through a series of workshops, FI previously built the capacity of Franciscans in Uganda to document these violations. This enabled us to raise the situation of victims of trafficking during the country's examination by the UN Human Rights Committee. Together, we also highlighted the risks faced by human rights defenders, journalists, and members of the political opposition. In its concluding observations, the Committee echoed many of our recommendations, particularly regarding policies to combat human trafficking and the right to peaceful association and assembly.



Mozambique

In northern Mozambique, violent conflict has forced thousands of people to flee their homes, putting them in a situation of protracted internal displacement. At the Human Rights Council, FI remains one of the few organizations raising the risks and challenges faced by those displaced, including a lack of access to food, drinking water, and adequate housing.



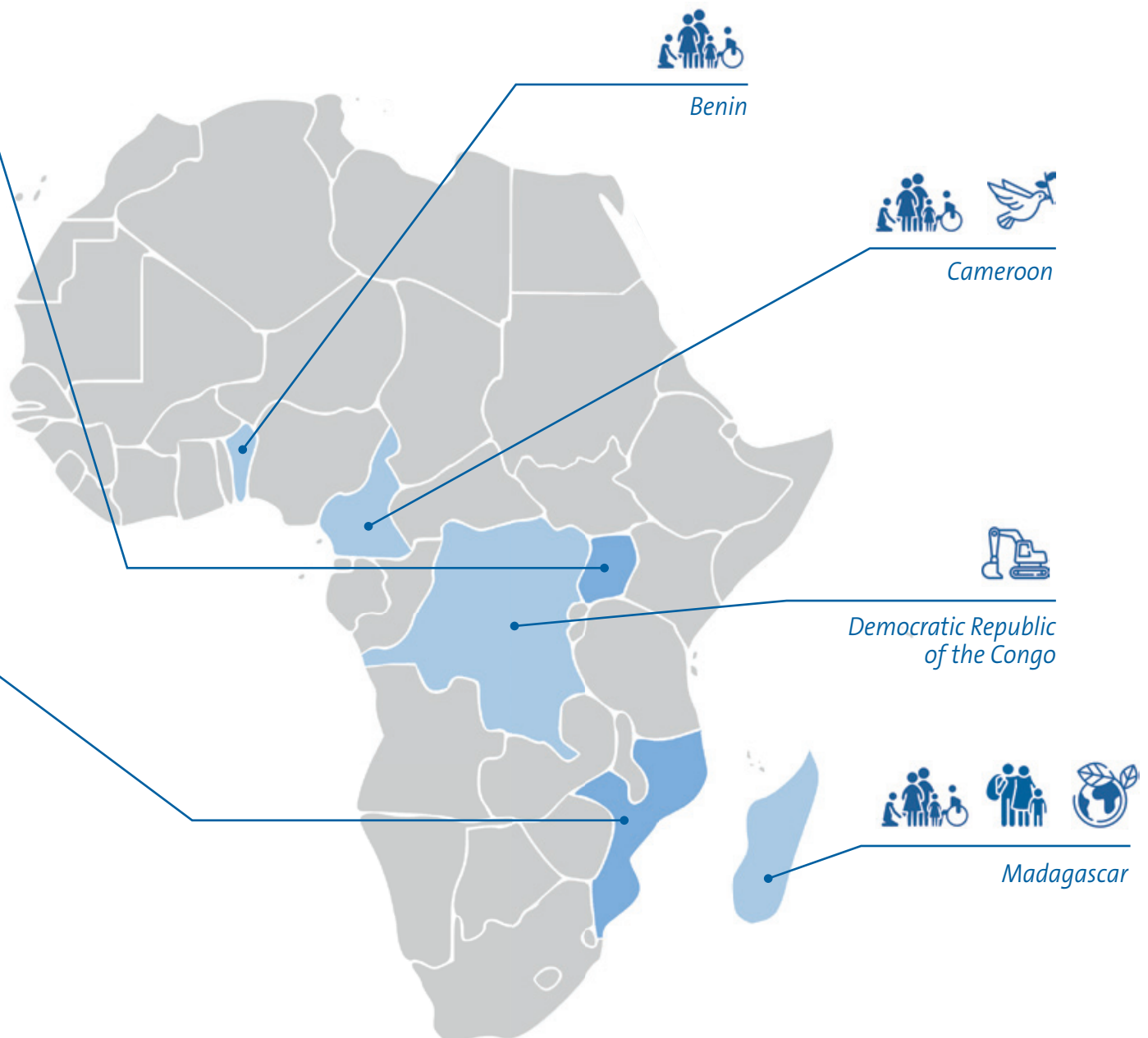
Following a 2022 fact-finding mission, we launched a report outlining the root causes of the conflict, its consequences, and recommendations to improve the situation. In October, FI also hosted a Franciscan sister who supports internally displaced persons in Cabo Delgado province. While in Geneva, she shared firsthand information with key stakeholders at the UN and raised the importance of regulating business activities in the context of conflict over natural resources.

Uganda
© Franciscans International
Participants during a FI training in
Kampala

Mozambique
© Franciscans International
Franciscan sisters visit a camp for
Internally Displaced Persons in
Nampula Province

the Africa program in a nutshell

- Supported 13 local groups in 5 different countries.
- Hosted 3 partners from Benin, Cameroon, and Mozambique.
- Delivered 6 statements during relevant UN sessions.
- Submitted 2 reports and 1 letter of allegation to the UN, including on labor trafficking in Uganda, the violent conflict in Cameroon, and a mining collapse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Published 2 advocacy papers on Mozambique and Cameroon, and 1 paper on our work in Benin.
- Organized 1 side event on our work with Franciscains-Benin to end ritual infanticide.



/ Americas Program /



Mexico



Guatemala



Over the past years, civic space and the rule of law in Guatemala have seen a worrying decline. This context, where special interests have coopted the judiciary and activists are routinely criminalized, negatively impacts a broad range of human rights. FI hosted three partners from Guatemala, including a representative from the Franciscan JPIC group, during various UN sessions. Our partners used FI's presence in Geneva and New York to raise issues affecting Indigenous Peoples, human rights defenders, and migrants.

This advocacy, amplified by our other interventions and submissions, was a way to keep Guatemala high on the UN's agenda. We were encouraged to see some of our recommendations echoed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other diplomats. With the election of a new president running on an anti-corruption platform, FI remains committed to serving as an advocacy platform for local civil society organizations building a better way forward.



Panama



Brazil



A change of government offered renewed hope for change after a period characterized by harmful environmental policies. In March, the new administration accepted all recommendations made during its Universal Periodic Review related to the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. While welcoming this as a strong positive signal, FI called for the swift implementation of these measures and emphasized that violence against Indigenous communities is still ongoing.

FI invited Bishop Vicente Ferreira and Brother Rodrigo Péret OFM to Geneva, where they met with the UN Special Rapporteurs on toxic wastes, human rights and environment, and the right to health. While at the UN, they presented a letter written by victims from Brumadinho, where a mining disaster killed over 272 people and contaminated water sources, resulting in severe health issues. Five years later, they are yet to receive adequate reparations. During the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, Brother Rodrigo also raised this case in meetings with States and civil society.

Guatemala
© Franciscans International
Indigenous human rights defenders
from Guatemala at FI's Geneva office

Brazil
© Franciscans International
Monsignor Vicente and Brother
Rodrigo at the United Nations in
Geneva



Haiti



Colombia

the Americas program in a nutshell

- Supported 10 local groups in 7 different countries.
- Hosted 7 partners in Geneva from Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama.
- Contributed to 1 regional capacity-building workshop of the Franciscan Network for Migrants in El Salvador.
- Submitted 4 reports to the UN, notably on the human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples and on harmful migration policies.
- Delivered 17 statements during relevant UN sessions.
- Organized 3 side events on climate-induced displacement and regularization of migrants and 1 consultation with the Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change.
- Collaborated with partners to publish 6 infographics in English and Spanish on current trends in migration, regularization processes, and climate displacement.

/ Asia-Pacific Program /



Sri Lanka



FI continues to support efforts at the UN by a broad Catholic coalition to demand accountability for the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, as well as human rights violations in the northern and eastern provinces stemming from the civil war. In 2023, we hosted several Sri Lankan representatives in Geneva, including Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, who demanded transparency about the political in-fighting that allowed the attacks to happen. More generally, this coalition has raised concerns related to the ongoing transitional justice processes and disproportionate measures in the prevention of terrorism.

In August, FI supported a human rights workshop in Sri Lanka and seized the opportunity to conduct a fact-finding mission by visiting several Franciscans and affected communities. Together with our Franciscan partners, we identified other human rights issues that should be raised at the UN, including situations of modern-day slavery on tea plantations.

the Asia-Pacific program in a nutshell

- Supported 22 local groups in 5 different countries.
- Hosted 10 partners in Geneva from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.
- Conducted 3 country missions, including fact-finding and capacity-building workshops on human rights advocacy in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.
- Delivered 9 statements during relevant UN sessions.
- Submitted 1 report on the impacts of logging on human rights for women and girls, 1 letter of allegation, 1 urgent appeal, and 1 open letter to the Government of Indonesia on attacks against human rights defenders and journalists.
- Launched 1 publication on the adverse impacts of logging in the Solomon Islands.
- Organized 2 side events on the lack of accountability for extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and on the situation of internally displaced persons in West Papua, and 1 event in the Solomon Islands for the launch of our publication.



Myanmar



The Philippines

Despite a new administration taking power in 2022, the victims of human rights violations committed during former President Duterte’s so-called ‘war on drugs’ are still waiting for justice. Worryingly, attacks against human rights defenders and other violations have continued under the new government. In March, FI invited the widow of one of the over 30.000 victims of extrajudicial killings to speak at the UN Human Rights Council to share her testimony and reiterate a call for the systematic investigation and prosecution of extrajudicial killings.



FI also visited the Philippines for a national workshop on human rights advocacy that brought together Franciscans and civil society representatives. Beyond looking at the rampant impunity in the Philippines, the training also addressed concerns about environmental degradation due to development projects, such as mining and oil refineries.



Indonesia



Solomon Islands

The Philippines
© Franciscans International
Franciscans visit communities opposing
gas exploitation in the Verde Island
passage

Sri Lanka
© Franciscans International
Workers on a tea plantation
in Sri Lanka

/ Europe program /



Ireland and the United Kingdom

In December, FI traveled to the UK to learn more about the newly adopted “Illegal Migration Act” and the controversial Rwanda deportation scheme. We also used the opportunity to visit Catholic organizations that provide support to migrants at a community level and reinforced relationships with the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the Friars Minor. The delegation had several high-level meetings with representatives from Parliament, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. This visit was also an excellent opportunity to follow up on similar findings and contacts made during a visit to Ireland in September.

A new regional program

In September 2023, Franciscans International launched a fourth regional program covering the European continent. This program was established in response to the rising concerns of Franciscans about human rights violations in Europe, particularly those affecting migrants and refugees.

We started an extensive mapping in 2023 to identify key issues and build connections with Franciscan partners, allies, and other stakeholders to decide how to shape our joint UN advocacy most effectively. This engagement is driven by the needs of Franciscans and other partners working on the local and national levels. If they determine that their work can benefit from raising these issues at the UN, FI aims to provide the technical expertise and support to develop and implement a sustained advocacy strategy.



Italy

The Mediterranean Sea region

After a visit to Malta, FI participated in the third Mediterranean Meeting in Marseille, a Church-led initiative that aims to find shared solutions to the challenges in the region, in particular relating to migration. The event was attended by Pope Francis, French President Emmanuel Macron, 70 Catholic bishops, and 120 youth representatives. We used the opportunity to explore future collaborations with members of the newly created Franciscan Mediterranean Network and gather more information about the alarming situation in the region, where over 28.000 migrants have died or disappeared in the past decade.



Malta

UK and Ireland
© FI meets with the Chief Commissioner
of United Kingdom's Equality
and Human Rights Commission

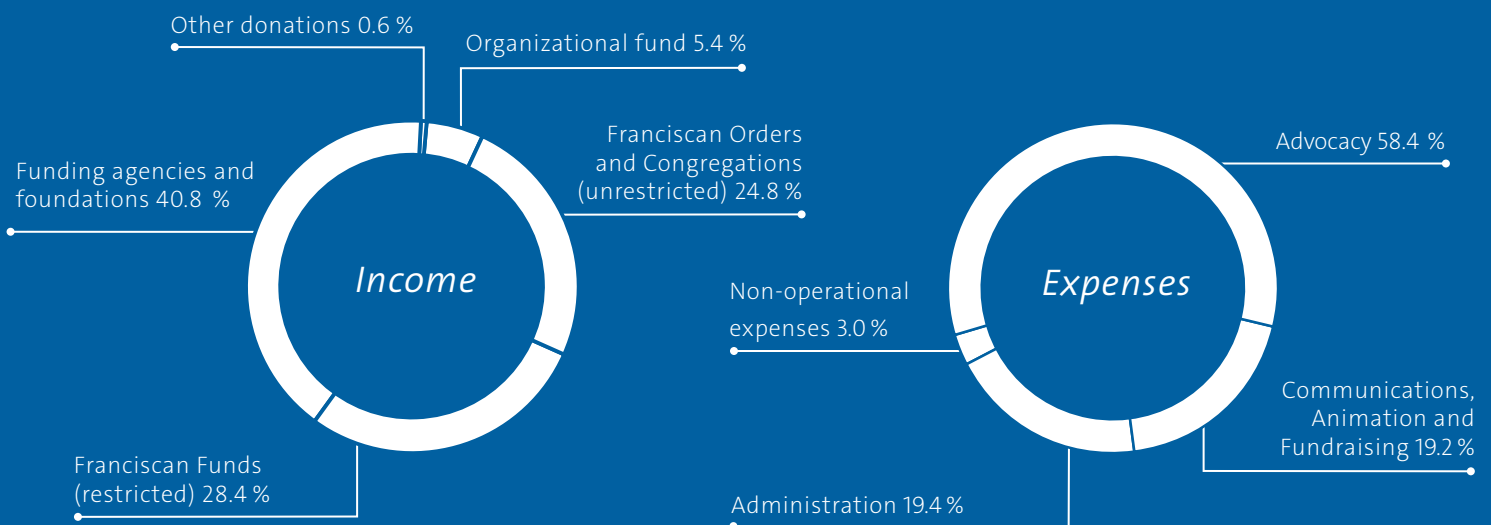
Mediterranean
© Youth representatives at the
Mediterranean Meeting in Marseille

Financial Report 2023

Reviewed by PricewaterhouseCoopers SA

<i>Income</i>	<i>1.210.828 CHF</i>
Franciscan Orders and Congregations (unrestricted)	300.072
Franciscan Funds (restricted)	343.650
Funding Agencies and Foundations	493.652
Other Donations	7.273
Organizational funds	66.181

<i>Expenses</i>	<i>1.210.828 CHF</i>
Advocacy	707.015
Communications, Animation and Fundraising	232.153
Administration	235.244
Non-operational expenses	36.416



Help us protect human dignity and the environment

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 dignity and the environment.

To donate, you can

- Go to www.franciscansinternational.org/donate
- Send a bank transfer:
Name of account holder: Franciscans International
Address of account holder: Rue de Vermont 37–39, CH 1202 Geneva

Bank Name: UBS SA
Address: Route de Florissant 59, CH 1206 Geneva
SWIFT/BIC: UBSWCHZH80A
IBAN: CH69 0024 0240 3573 8401 F
- For donations in euros, we kindly ask you to use the following account:
IBAN CH85 0024 0240 3573 8461 W
- If you're in the United States, you can also make a check payable to:
Franciscans International
246 East 46th Street
Apt. 1F
NY 10017-2937, New York
United States



Franciscans International is a registered non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible in Switzerland, the United States, and Germany. For more information on how you can support our work, please contact donations@franciscansinternational.org

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.

We are also grateful to the following funding entities for their generous funding in 2023: Brot für die Welt (Germany), Dreikönigsaktion (Austria), Fastenaktion (Switzerland), Franciscan Missions (United States), Franziskaner Helfen (Germany), Franziskaner Mission (Germany), Miseen Cara (Ireland), Misereor (Germany), Rose Marie Khoo Foundation (Singapore/Switzerland), Trócaire (Ireland).

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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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