




Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations



Franciscans International
Annual Report 2020

Imprint

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Cover photo: © SFM JPIC – Franciscan brothers distribute food during a Covid-19
lockdown in the Philippines

Franciscans International Annual Report 2020

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/ Letter from the President /



The annual report before you covers a year unlike any in recent memory. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all of us and has touched every aspect of our daily lives. As Franciscans, our tradition has always placed us closest to those who are disadvantaged and live on the margins of society. They, as is so often the case, are the ones who have suffered most in this crisis. Throughout the world, our sisters and brothers have dedicated themselves to directly care for those affected by the pandemic, be it through providing food, shelter, or spiritual care.

However, we cannot close our eyes to the underlying causes that allowed this situation to arise. The rise and profound impact of Covid-19 are inextricably linked to existing inequalities and the ongoing destruction of our Common Home. Our fight against these trends must include the realization of the promises that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is with this goal that Franciscans came to the United Nations and why we continue to advocate there today.

The challenges that lie ahead, as well as our willingness to meet them head on, are reflected in Franciscans International's new strategic reflections for 2021 onwards. These will provide a solid framework to continue our common ministry at the United Nations. It also expresses our ambition to reinvigorate and further reinforce the linkages between the human rights forums in Geneva and New York, and Franciscans working at the grassroots.

On behalf of the International Board of Directors and the Conference of the Franciscan Family, I wish to express my gratitude to all the individuals, orders and congregations, and other organizations that continue to make this work possible. We also recognize the important work of our sisters and brothers who work tirelessly to support their communities and who have spoken out at the United Nations, at times placing themselves at risk for doing so. Finally, we express our deep appreciation for the dedication and creativity of FI's staff throughout this difficult year.

Fraternally,

Joseph Rozansky OFM
President of the International Board of Directors

/ Letter from the Executive Director /

With the emergence of Covid-19, 2020 has been a trying year for all of us. Franciscan sisters and brothers on the ground, the communities they assist, and Franciscans International as a whole have been impacted by the situation. While everything was shutting down, it became more challenging to advocate for human rights at the UN, as several governments took advantage of the Covid-19 measures to trample on human dignity and to set back efforts on the prevention of climate change.



However, FI and its partners were quick to adapt to the new situation: we increased online consultations and workshops with field partners in lieu of country visits, we facilitated the online participation of Franciscans at key UN events, and we organized virtual side events that allowed us to have a greater reach than we normally would have had. For example, we held virtual events on the impact of the mining industry in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Philippines, and on the dangers human rights defenders face in Guatemala, which were all attended by people who would have been unable to do so had these events been held in Geneva or New York.

Throughout the year, we were also conscious of how crucial it is to keep a strong and fruitful connection with Franciscans at the grassroots, beyond online exchanges. Not only do they provide us with first-hand information on human rights situations, but they are also key to accurately address these situations to UN mechanisms and state representatives. Our commitment to nurture and grow that collaboration is reflected in our 2021 – 2024 strategic plan that we carefully put together after extensive discussions and assessments. With it, it is our desire to continue to address national, regional and global human rights issues that we greatly care about.

Fraternally,

Markus Heinze OFM
Executive Director

/ Franciscans International in numbers /

Influence

Empower

Over **600**



Franciscan Family members reached in 13 gatherings

4



In-country consultations

23



Franciscans and other partners advocating at the United Nations

102



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

10



(virtual) Advocacy events and conferences

67



Advocacy interventions and submissions at the United Nations

16



United Nations outcome documents influenced

64%



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



Justice and
accountability



Marginalized
groups



Migration



Right to water
and sanitation

/ Where we work /





/ 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 (UN) 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 a number of 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. 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 that also includes a representative of the Anglican Franciscans, 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.



Franciscans demonstrate to demand a constitutional right to water
© JPIC El Salvador

/ Strategic orientations from 2021 onwards /

FI regularly evaluates and defines its internal and external objectives to reflect needs and changes on the ground. In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic further motivated us to take stock of our joint work with Franciscans and other partners, FI staff and its International Board of Directors conducted a strategy development process to prepare for the future. Interviews with Franciscans and other partner organizations, internal debates and assessments, as well as a true desire to ensure the continued relevance and impact of FI's work, all these guided our steps during this journey.

This process led to a renewed and reaffirmed commitment to develop long term relationships with Franciscans and other partners who are explicitly willing to amplify their concerns for human dignity and the environment at the international level and to advocate for change.

Concretely, this means that FI wants to:

- Refocus its advocacy on regional and country-level issues, as identified by local Franciscans and their allies. More time, energy and capacities are now being put into FI's regional programs that directly engage with people and issues at the grassroots through capacity-building, as well as joint advocacy strategies and actions.
- Make its efforts to put human rights at the center of global policy-making processes more selective than in the previous strategic plan (2017-2020). Priorities now include FI's coalition work to obtain new protection standards at the UN to address the ongoing climate crisis and promote environmental justice, a UN treaty to hold businesses accountable for human rights violations, and peace and security debates at the UN in New York on countries where we are active. All are processes that deeply resonate with the work done by Franciscans and their partners at the grassroots.
- Further build on and promote one of FI's main added values: to bring Franciscan sisters and brothers, other grassroots activists and, at times, affected individuals themselves before the UN. We are one of the rare international organizations that regularly and effectively do this while working to ensure that policy-making and pronouncements at the UN indeed reflect and address the realities experienced on the ground. Communication and outreach initiatives – including a new and more user-friendly website, as well as translations of our contents into more languages – are underway to increase the visibility and accessibility of local Franciscans' work, both at the grassroots and at the UN, towards the global Franciscan Family and relevant international partners.

A summary of FI's strategic orientations can be consulted on our website.



/ Advocacy in 2020 /

Defending human rights in times of Covid-19

The emergence of the novel coronavirus in December 2019 had an immediate impact on the work of Franciscans International. On 13 March 2020, the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council was suspended as the United Nations offices in Geneva closed. The UN headquarters in New York followed shortly thereafter, and several key UN sessions and summits were either postponed or cancelled altogether. Throughout 2020 it has been difficult to host people in Geneva and New York – one of the direct ways in which FI enables Franciscans to engage with stakeholders at the UN – or to conduct in-country factfinding mission and capacity building workshops.

However, the most immediate impact was felt by our Franciscan brothers and sisters on the ground, who were serving with already marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Sudden lockdowns and loss of income meant that more people relied on them for support. As borders shut, migrants were caught without access to essential services. FI also relayed numerous reports of the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 and related measures on indigenous communities. In some countries, the Covid-19 pandemic served as a pretext to further repressive policies, crack down on civil society, or roll back environmental protections.

As 2020 progressed, FI explored new strategies to ensure that the concerns of our partners could still reach the UN. The testimonies we received from them were relayed to the UN through various formal and informal channels. It also formed the basis of two statements FI published on Covid-19 and human rights in April 2020, with the first highlighting the experiences of Franciscan brothers and sisters across the world and the second focusing on extreme poverty and environmental justice.

The Human Rights Council gathers in a 'hybrid' format
© UN Photo



As some UN sessions resumed in a digital or 'hybrid' format, FI took advantage of the new situation by offering a platform to those that might not be able to attend these sessions in person, even under normal circumstances. Virtual discussions were organized by FI and its partners instead of the traditional side events during UN sessions, oftentimes opening these meetings up to larger audiences.

Although Covid-19 has been at the forefront of most deliberations at the UN in 2020, it has also been evident that the impacts of the pandemic are exacerbated by underlying human rights issues. Environmental degradation, extreme poverty, and the lack of fulfillment of the rights to water and sanitation have all contributed to aggravate its consequences. As such, throughout the year, FI has committed itself to keep a strong focus on its three thematic pillars of human dignity, peace and reconciliation, and care for our planet.

*Flooding due to erosion on the
Solomon Islands*
© Society of St. Francis



Preserving our Common Home

Although the impacts of the ‘triple planetary crisis’ of biodiversity, climate, and pollution are increasingly felt directly in communities around the world, an international response that meets the scale of this crisis is still lacking. Covid-19 dealt a further blow to these efforts, with the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), considered as an essential opportunity to reassess the commitments made by States under the Paris Climate Agreement, being postponed until late 2021.

Nevertheless, Franciscans International has continued to push for meaningful action, including by building momentum for two processes that consider environmental issues from a human right perspective. The first is the creation of a new mandate for a UN expert leading the work on climate change and human rights. In several statements to the UN, FI laid out the arguments for such a Special Rapporteur, emphasizing that the Human Rights Council currently lacks the means to address climate issues in a comprehensive way and that this mandate is essential to ensure that the impact of climate responses on the rights of people, especially the most marginalized and disadvantaged, are properly considered.

The second process is the global recognition of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right. In September, FI endorsed a call to action, signed by over 850 organizations, to urgently do so. Although this right is already recognized in some domestic and regional laws in different forms,

the threats against it transcends borders and can only be addressed globally. Doing so would provide new legal and policy avenues to demand stronger action from States to curb the effects of climate change, of pollution and to preserve biodiversity. It is also closely interconnected with the enjoyment of other human rights. Examples of this were highlighted in a second call to action signed by FI elaborating how the right to a healthy environment can help realize the rights of the child.

On a parallel track, FI has raised issues related to climate change during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism that examines the human rights records of UN Member States in four-and-half year cycles. To this end, FI also made a statement during the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council that welcomed the increasing interest and discussions toward a more adequate and systematic inclusion of climate change related issues during the UPR and made recommendations on how to build on this positive momentum.

In country specific instances, FI used the UPR of Kiribati – a State whose very existence is threatened by climate change – to commend the country’s commitment to implement inclusive and community-based climate initiatives and stress the importance of combatting this crisis in a global context. FI also relayed concerns about climate issues during the UPR of Australia and in a submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As start of a new partnership with the Anglican Franciscans in the Solomon Islands, FI also submitted a UPR stakeholder report on industrial logging and its downstream consequences on the environment and livelihoods.

“In campaigning against extractive logging, we might seem like David against mighty Goliath, but we trust in God’s help and in the partnerships, we are forming with other groups working for the same goal.”

Brother Christopher John SSF,
Minister General





*Brother René Flores OFM
during community consultations in
El Salvador*
© JPIC El Salvador

In El Salvador, Franciscans and other partners launched a campaign on the right to water – a key advocacy topic in this country affected by severe shortages and pollution. FI supported their call for a constitutional amendment to recognize the rights to water and to sanitation, including by facilitating communications with the UN Desk Officer for El Salvador and in other UN forums in Geneva and New York. For instance, on 15 October FI organized a consultation with the Network on Transboundary Waters in Central America and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to water and sanitation to further reinforce the connections between advocacy at the local and international levels. That same day, the Congress of El Salvador voted in favor of the constitutional amendment. FI and its partners now work to ensure that this amendment is ratified by the new legislature.

FI also emphasized these links between different levels of advocacy work throughout its other events. For example, during the UN's annual High Level Political Forum (HLPF) we organized and participated in three events covering a range of issues including extreme poverty, the right to water, the environment, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Here, human rights experts and diplomats were able to engage with experiences brought from the grassroots to draw concrete lessons for future action, linking sustainable development, climate policies, and human rights compliance.



Brother Benedict during a climate protest in Poland
© Franciscans International

Franciscans and human rights: Brother Benedict Ayodi OFM Cap

Benedict Ayodi was born in Kakamega, Kenya, in a family of 7 siblings and raised with a strong Catholic education. Coming in contact with Capuchin Franciscan missionaries after college, he decided to devote himself to the life and charism of Francis of Assisi and joined the First Order.

Working for human rights and peacebuilding has been a constant in his life. His involvement and deep connection to this cause stem from his fierce commitment to Franciscan values and his wish to "amplify the voices of those suffering in our society to find peace, harmony, and justice."

In order to do that, he became a curate in a parish while serving as the regional director of the Damietta Peace Initiative (DPI), a grassroots-based peace project promoting the values of justice, peace, interfaith dialogue and care for the

environment in Eastern Africa. He also acted for six years as the director of the international office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) for the Capuchin Franciscans in Rome and served on the steering committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) between 2015 and 2020.

It is in 2008 that Brother Benedict first encountered FI, delivering a statement on the post-electoral violence in Kenya at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. He then continued his involvement with the organization and he served as a member of FI's International Board of Directors for 6 years. In the fall of 2020, he became part of FI's staff, as the new Outreach Officer, spearheading our efforts to deepen FI's relationships with its brothers and sisters and raise awareness on human rights issues among them. Brother Benedict will be based in our New York office.

/ Africa program /

In 2020, FI started a reorientation of its Africa program. This decision was motivated by a combination of factors, including the changing circumstances on the continent and the evolving needs of the Franciscans we work with. In some instances, the success of ongoing projects also meant that FI's support can now be scaled down. We expect to finalize this process, which aims at fostering new partnerships and ensuring that FI's priorities align with the needs of Franciscan brothers and sisters at the grassroots, by the end of 2021.



Benin

For over a decade, Franciscans have been combatting the ritual infanticide of so-called 'witch children', combining local sensitization campaigns with international advocacy to push the government to implement better legislative protections – an effort that was cited by UNICEF as a best practice for collaboration between grassroots and international advocacy. Franciscans in Benin are refocusing some of their efforts in response to these dynamics and hope to build a shelter in the North of the country. However, when needed, they also continue their work at the UN. For example, Brother Auguste Agoukpé OFMCap of Franciscains-Bénin visited Geneva to successfully raise this issue at the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which published its concluding observations on Benin in March 2020.



The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Franciscans, together with the wider Catholic Church, have played an instrumental role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as it underwent several political transitions in the past years. FI and partners have been particularly attentive to developments in the mining sector, an industry that has fueled human rights violations for decades. In 2020, we delivered statements to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Human Rights Council. We also organized a webinar during the 45th Session of the Council where religious community leaders and other experts from the DRC discussed ongoing problems with the implementation of the 2018 revised Mining Code and what lessons could be learned for similar efforts elsewhere.



Zambia

THE AFRICA PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

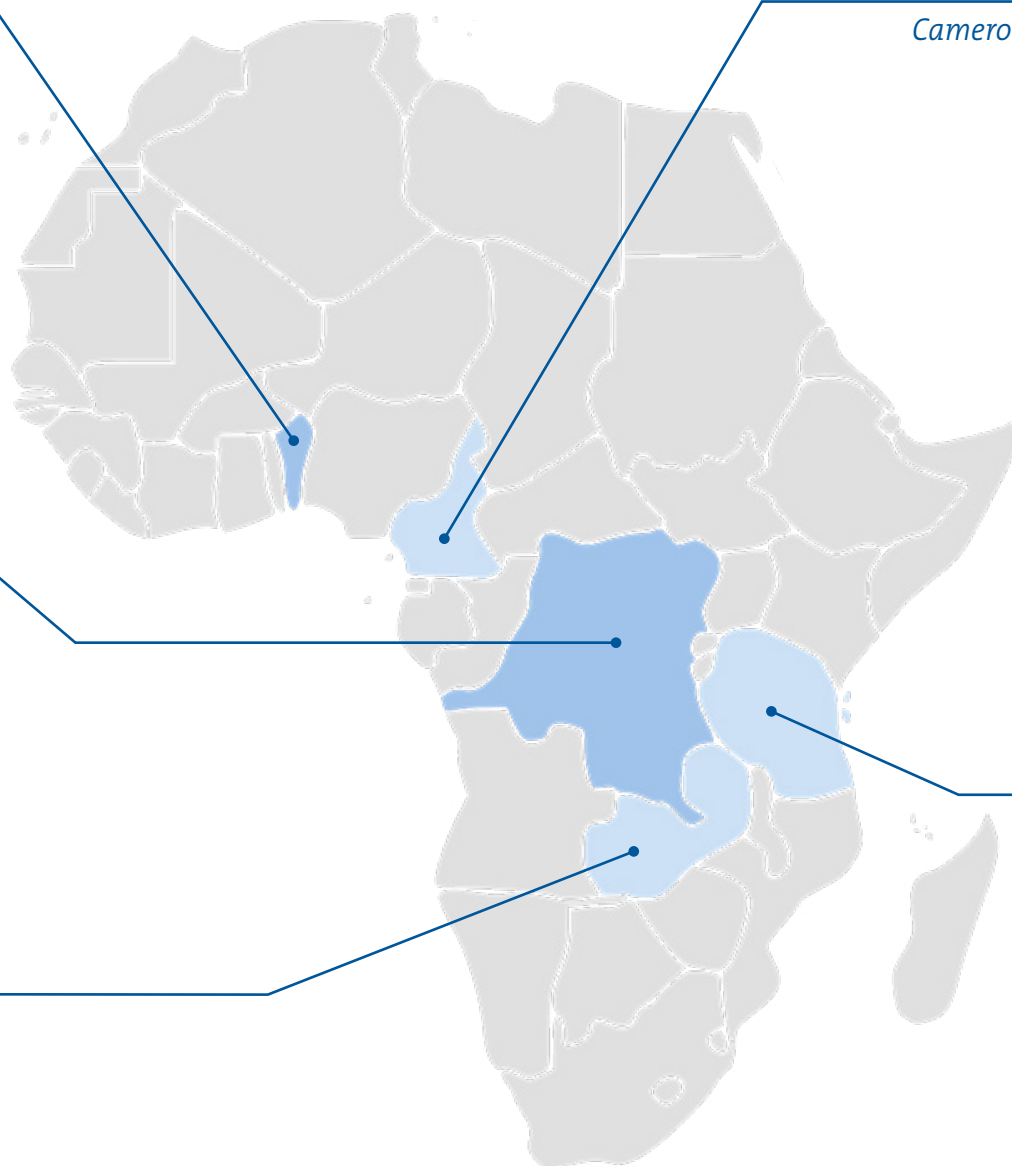
- Hosted one partner from Benin in Geneva and facilitated online interventions of two additional partners from the DRC;
- Submitted three reports to the UN on the mining impact in the DRC, reproductive health and children's rights in Benin, and discrimination against the Anglophone minority in Cameroon;
- Delivered 2 oral statements during relevant UN sessions on the issue of mining in the DRC;
- Participated in UN review processes by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for the DRC and Benin;
- Organized one online side event on the impact of the DRC's revised Mining Code on local communities;
- Conducted 2 country visits to the DRC and Tanzania to explore new partnership opportunities and collect information on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.
- Held consultations and strategy-building workshops with 28 Franciscan Superiors in Tanzania and 43 participants from local civil society and regional dioceses in the DRC respectively.



Cameroon



Tanzania



“Many organizations that support migrants, including Franciscans, have been attacked, threatened, harassed, and stigmatized by state authorities and non-State actors.”

Fray Armando Gonzalez OFM,
Franciscan Migration Network

Migration and human dignity

The closing of borders and other travel restrictions in 2020 did little to reduce migration across the world. However, Covid-19 further exacerbated the difficult situation faced by many people on the move. In late March, UN experts warned of a surge in racism and xenophobia due to the pandemic, not least against asylum seekers and migrants. As restrictions were implemented, Franciscan partners reported that migrants and asylum seekers were left without information and access to healthcare, food, shelter and other essential services. Many were left stranded when administrative authorities were paralyzed, with little capacity to cope with these unplanned long transits. These and other testimonies were captured and highlighted by Franciscans International in its first statement on Covid-19 and human rights in April 2020.

FI's work on migration throughout the year was focused on the Americas, where numerous factors such as violence, extreme poverty and climate change continue to drive human mobility unabated after the exodus caravans in 2018 and 2019 made international headlines. FI further reinforced its collaboration with the Franciscan Network on Migration (FNM). Originally founded by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) commission of the Order of Friars Minor in April 2018, this network has grown to include different branches of the Franciscan family and now links together shelters from Central America, Mexico and the United States.

*A Franciscan brother accompanies
a group of migrants*
© RED Franciscana





A woman and child in the town of Kabwe, Zambia, which suffers from heavy lead pollution due to nearby mines

© Lawrence Thompson

The brothers and sisters that work in these shelters do so in an environment that has grown increasingly hostile to both people on the move and those that seek to support them. In July, Fray Armando Gonzalez OFM was invited by FI to address the Human Rights Council, where the FNM made an official statement at the UN for the first time. In his statement, Fray Armando denounced the threats, attacks, and stigmatization against people supporting migrants. He also warned that the militarization of borders in the region has not deterred migration but instead forces people to seek out alternative, and often more dangerous, routes anticipating some of the issues faced by the exodus caravan of October 2020.

FI also visited a Franciscan project in Brazil that support migrant populations, in order to develop and strengthen partnerships. Throughout 2020, FI raised information and concerns relayed by Franciscans in the Americas to the UN, including through several statements at the Human Rights Council and a number of submissions to UN Special Procedures. The testimonies gathered in these Franciscan shelters is also reflected in a more comprehensive advocacy diagnosis on migration dynamics in Northern Central America, Mexico and the United States launched by FI and the FNM in early 2021.

Despite this strong engagement on issues in the Americas, misconceptions about, and growing hostility against people on the move are a global phenomenon. In November 2020, FI launched “Tearing Down the Wall,” a new publication that challenges myths about migration from a human rights perspective. By connecting the first-hand experience of Franciscans to international human rights law and relevant mechanisms, it offers concrete handholds to people working to support migrants and refugees.

/ Americas Program /



Mexico



Guatemala



Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Guatemala are working in environment that's increasingly hostile, especially for the many working to protect their lands and waters against the threats posed by the development of new megaprojects. In 2020 alone, over 1,000 aggressions against HRDs were reported. This has been further accentuated by the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the different indigenous peoples in this country. Throughout the year, FI has shed light on several emblematic cases of human rights violations such as the imprisonment of the prominent indigenous leader Bernardo Caal Xol, the adverse impacts of extractive industries on enjoyment of the right to water, and the consequences of Covid-19 related measures on the human rights situation in the county. This advocacy work brought positive results as several of these concerns were taken up by UN human rights committees and experts, who in turn raised these issues with the government of Guatemala.



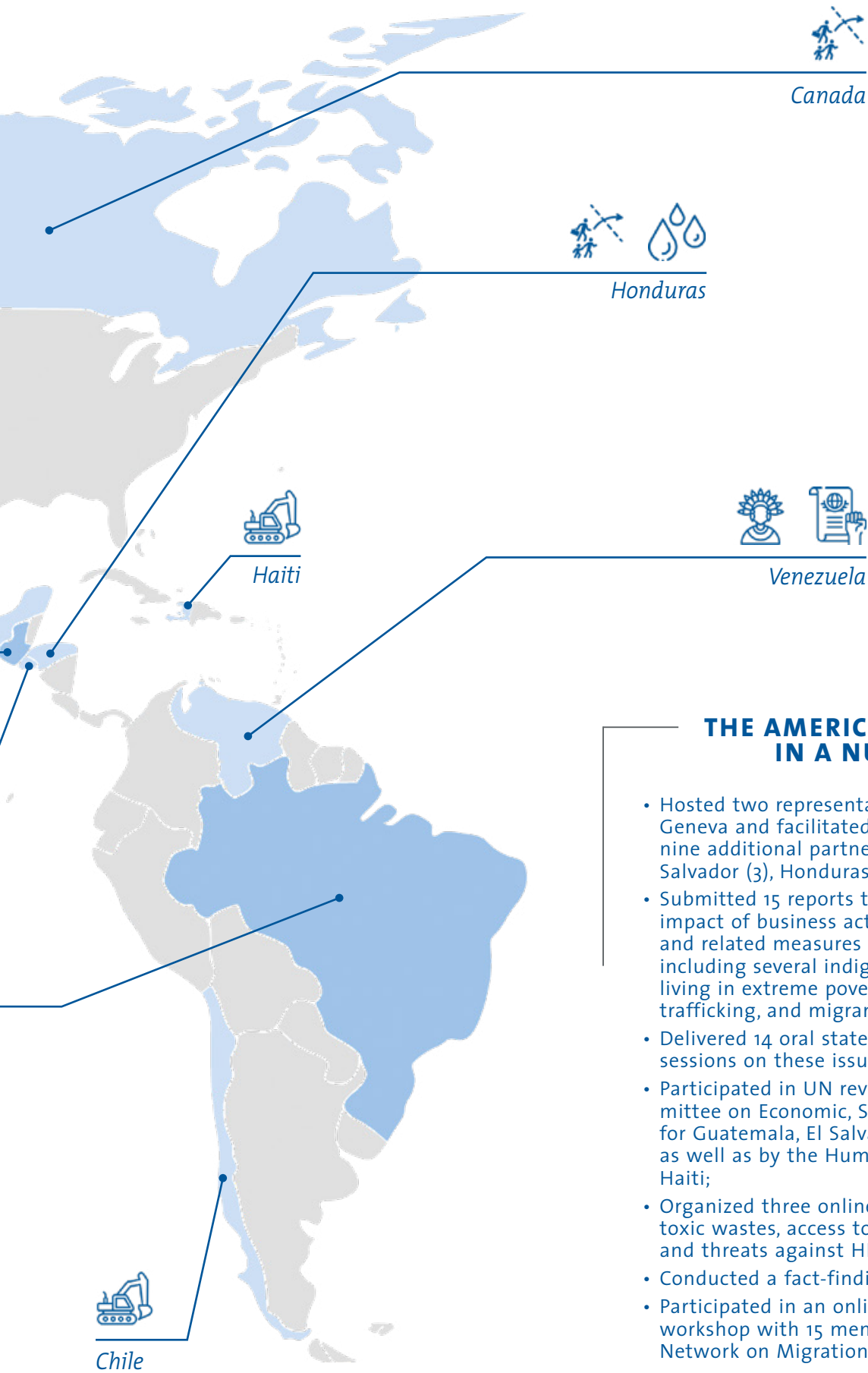
El Salvador



Brazil



Franciscans, together with the wider Catholic Church, have taken a strong stance against the deterioration of human rights in Brazil that is affecting large parts of society, including indigenous peoples, minority groups, and marginalized and poor communities. To better support them FI's Americas program coordinator went to Brazil for a two-week mission in January 2020. This was an opportunity to deepen contacts, exchange information and build advocacy strategies with different Franciscan groups and local communities. These included a Franciscan project with migrants in São Paulo, sisters fighting alongside indigenous peoples against racial discrimination and evictions in Mato Grosso do Sol, and deeply affected communities by mining industries in Minas Gerais including by the breach of a tailing dam in Brumadinho. FI relayed the first-hand information that was gathered through strong UN submissions to expose the facts and recall Brazil's human rights obligations.



Canada



Honduras



Haiti



Venezuela



Chile

THE AMERICAS PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

- Hosted two representatives from Brazil in Geneva and facilitated online interventions of nine additional partners from Guatemala (4), El Salvador (3), Honduras (1) and Brazil (1);
- Submitted 15 reports to the UN on the adverse impact of business activities and of Covid-19 and related measures across the continent, including several indigenous peoples, people living in extreme poverty, victims of human trafficking, and migrants;
- Delivered 14 oral statements during relevant UN sessions on these issues;
- Participated in UN review processes by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, and Sweden, as well as by the Human Rights Committee for Haiti;
- Organized three online events on mining and toxic wastes, access to water in Central America, and threats against HRDs in Guatemala.
- Conducted a fact-finding mission to Brazil; and
- Participated in an online strategy-building workshop with 15 members of the Franciscan Network on Migration.



“Tearing Down the Walls” is available in English, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish
© Franciscans International

Tearing Down the Walls

Throughout the world, hostile and xenophobic discourses are on the rise against migrants, refugees, fueling hostile policies against them. These perceptions often stand in stark contrast with the reality on the ground – a reality that is witnessed daily by Franciscan sisters and brothers around the world that work to support and protect people on the move.

In November 2020, FI took their testimonies as the foundation for “Tearing Down the Walls,” which aims to dispel common myths and misconception around migration. The publication also connects the first-hand experiences and challenges of Franciscans to relevant articles in international human rights law, providing concrete handholds for people to take action.

The publication also touches on something more profound: in the foreword of “Tearing Down the Walls”, Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ, the Under-Secretary of the Vatican’s Migrant and Refugee Section notes that the concept of ‘being on the move’ is deeply ingrained in the Franciscan understanding, with Francis telling his followers that they should spend their lives as “pilgrims and strangers” in the world.

It is perhaps no surprise, Cardinal Czerny concludes, that, “Inspired by St. Francis’s openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, color or religion,” many of his followers have dedicated themselves to supporting migrants and refugees around the world in a time when both ‘old factors’ such as violence and poverty as well as ‘new factors’ like climate change are forcing people from their homes.

Business and human rights

The negative impacts of business activities, especially those occurring across borders, on human rights, as well as the obstacles encountered by those seeking accountability for these violations, remains a priority concern for Franciscans International. Our engagement at the UN on this issue is in part informed by the experiences of Franciscans shared through our regional programs. These Franciscans serve among people whose lives have been deeply affected as a consequence of corporate negligence, or where the environment and livelihoods are threatened by the development of new industrial projects.

Since its establishment in 2014, FI has taken a leading role in the engagement of civil society with the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations (IGWG), where UN Member States deliberate a new legally binding instrument (a treaty) to regulate business activities in international human rights law. While in past years FI hosted religious leaders and representatives in Geneva to share the challenges faced by their communities, the process is now moving to a more technical stage.

Although the Covid-19 restrictions made negotiations and direct interactions between States much more difficult, FI and other members of the civil society “Treaty Alliance” were still able to suggest improvements to promote greater accountability for corporate abuses, some of which are reflected in the latest proposed text of the draft treaty. Among these were our suggestions to recognize the concept of “transgenerational harm”, reflecting the concerns shared by partners that the impact of pollution and toxins will also affect future generations, the inclusion of State-owned enterprises in the definition of “business activities,” and a reference to free, prior and informed consent for indigenous people who are often affected by development projects.

FI also used the 6th session of the IGWG in October to organize an event looking at cases from Zambia and Chile that exemplify the legal obstacles to access and obtain justice in this context. The discussion explored both actions that can already be taken and gaps that need to be addressed by the future treaty on business and human rights. In the case of Chile, which involves a Swedish mining company dumping toxic wastes in the town of Arica, FI also raised the issue with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). Part of our recommendations were reflected by the Committee, including by its request to the Swedish government to provide information on legislative and policy gaps identified through court cases, including those relating to Arica.

Throughout the year, FI placed a strong emphasis on the human rights situation in Brazil where Franciscans have a long history of engaging on issues around mining. A particular area of concern has been the situation in Brumadinho, where corporate negligence and poor regulation led to a dam collapse in January 2019 that killed over 270 people. FI’s Americas Program Coordinator attended the one-year commemoration of the disaster during a factfinding mission to the state of Minas Gerais with Franciscan partners.

Following this visit, the ongoing difficulties faced by the community, including in seeking reparations for the victims from the corporate owner of the dam, were also raised at the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council by Mgr. Vicente Ferreira, the auxiliary Bishop of Belo Horizonte, whose diocese includes

“We came into direct contact with the UN Special Rapporteur on water and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Without FI acting as an intermediary, we would have no way of reaching these spheres of influence at the United Nations.”

David Paredes, Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala.

Brumadinho. This issue was again raised during the 45th session of the Council by Dom Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo, President of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, who warned that the government is seeking the further flexibilization of environmental licensing procedures, instead of ending the prevailing impunity in mining related cases.

Following the disaster, FI also worked closely with its partners on the ground to provide information to, and facilitate meetings with, the Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes during his country visit to Brazil in December 2019. The findings were presented to the Human Rights Council by his successor in September 2020. In order to draw due attention to this report, FI launched a series of infographics in English and Portuguese, highlighting the key findings and recommendations.

Bishop Vicente Ferreira and Brother Rodrigo Péret OFM outside the UN in Geneva

© Franciscans International





The Franciscan Catechist Sisters working alongside the Guarani-Kaiowás

© Franciscans International

Standing with Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

Land is a cornerstone in the culture of the Guarani-Kaiowás, significant in both life and death. Nevertheless, the history of the indigenous people in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul have been marked by forced evictions to make way for logging and large-scale agriculture: first for cotton, later for coffee, and now for soy farming. Those that can remain face poverty, poor healthcare, and constant threats. Nearby farms have polluted the land and the water. In 2019, UN experts even documented incidents where airplanes sprayed indigenous schools with pesticides.

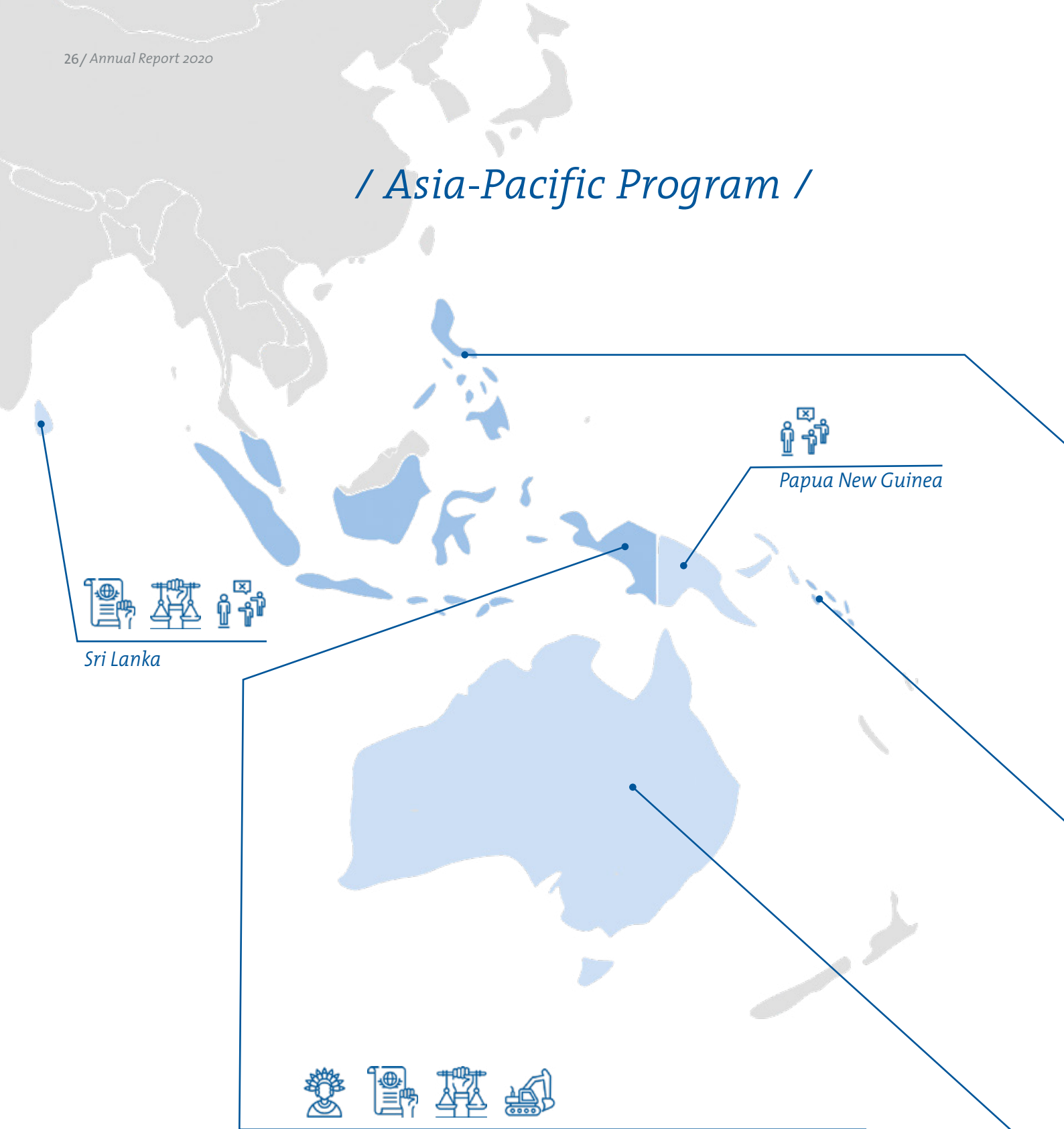
For the past eight years, the São Paulo Community of the Franciscan Catechist Sisters has supported the Guarani-Kaiowás, providing care and offering capacity building to the leaders of all the indigenous territories in the region. "The example lived by Francis of Assisi is very clear: to live among the poor as minors," says Sister Cristina Souza. "Together with the indigenous people, we try to be the fraternal and solidary presence that puts itself at service,

even though we are persecuted for the denunciations we make for the violation of the rights of these peoples."

More and more, indigenous leaders are seeking international human rights spaces to expose the reality of their lives and denounce the violations against them. FI, together with partners from Brazil such as the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI) of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, has raised these issues in different UN forums, providing a platform for indigenous leaders to speak out.

"I believe that this international advocacy must be expanded and intensified, so that indigenous rights are protected, and the world knows what is happening to the people of Mato Grosso do Sul," says Sister Cristina. "Especially at this time in our history, when the State does not only refuse to guarantee these rights but has also started to function as a mechanism against Creation and environmental rights."

/ Asia-Pacific Program /



Sri Lanka

Papua New Guinea

Indonesia / West Papua



Although simmering tensions repeatedly flared up across West Papua, FI and the Coalition for West Papua found that the situation has become characterized by stagnant and reoccurring patterns in their annual human rights report. With the region mostly closed to journalists and international observers, the deep and historical roots of the Franciscans continue to be one of the few remaining sources of reliable and verified information. We relayed specific concerns through a number of UN submissions and statements, including to the Human Rights Council, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Human Rights Committee, and a number of Special Procedures.

THE ASIA-PACIFIC PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

- Hosted two partners from Indonesia in Geneva and facilitated online interventions of six additional partners from Sri Lanka (4), and the Philippines (2);
- Submitted 13 reports to the UN on the adverse impact of climate change, Covid-19 and related measures, discrimination against several groups in the region;
- Delivered 13 oral statements during relevant UN sessions on these issues;
- Participated in UN review processes for Indonesia, the Solomon Islands, and Australia.
- Organized the online events respectively on accountability for human rights violations in the Philippines and on impunity and shrinking civic space in Sri Lanka;
- Conducted a country visit to Indonesia and participated in the annual meeting of Franciscans in West Papua, which included a training 16 people.



The Philippines

Franciscans in the Philippines have stood in vocal opposition against the government's so-called war on drugs marked by violence and extra-judicial killings, while offering support and pastoral care to the victims who are overwhelmingly from communities living in poverty. For the past four years, they have regularly shared their testimonies at the Human Rights Council, which responded by asking for an official investigation into the situation in 2019. The findings presented in June 2020 concluded that there were no realistic domestic ways to pursue justice in the country itself. Despite strong push-back from the government, civil society organizations including FI made sure some key concerns were still reflected in the text of the subsequent Council resolution.



Solomon Islands

Financial interests and rampant corruption in the Solomon Islands have created a situation where environmental laws remain unimplemented. The scale of industrial logging has increased over the past decade, with significant consequences downstream such as the pollution of water sources and landslides, loss of soil fertility and livelihoods, the exploitation of workers and human trafficking. FI has been developing a new partnership with Anglican Society of Saint Francis to monitor the situation and gather information for a submission ahead of the examination of the Solomon Islands under the UPR, which urges the government to adopt a comprehensive climate adaptation and mitigation policy.



Australia

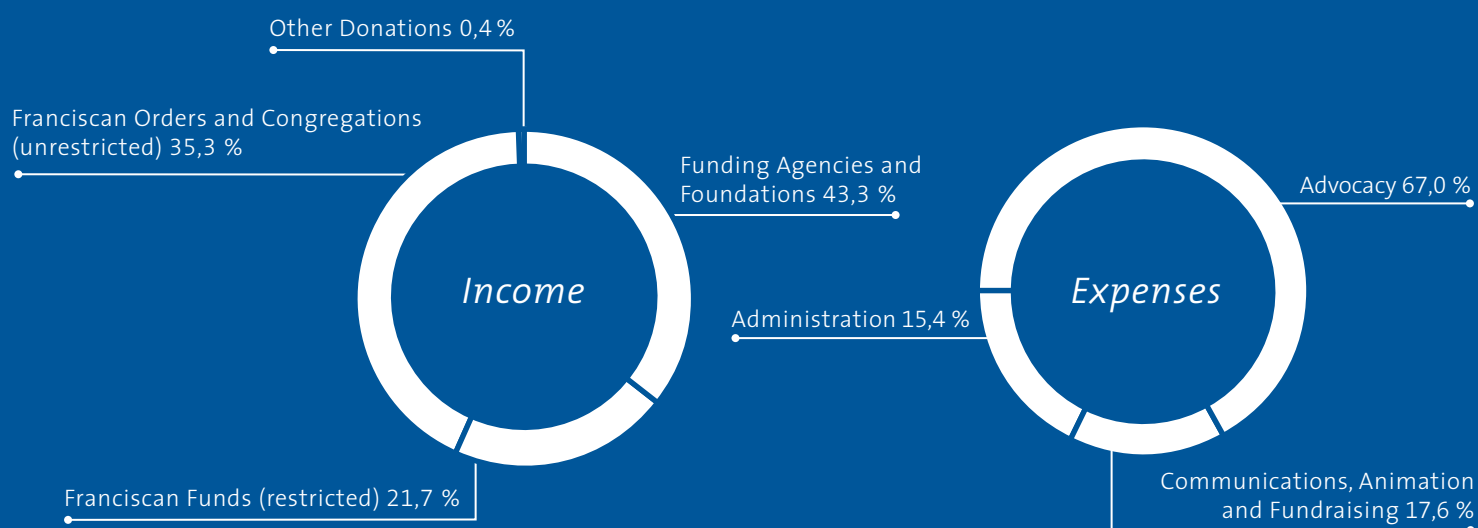
Financial Report 2020

Reviewed by PricewaterhouseCoopers SA

<i>Income</i>	<i>CHF</i>
Franciscan Orders and Congregations (unrestricted)	388'947
Franciscan Funds (restricted)	231'286
Funding Agencies and Foundations	476'815
Other Donations	3'994
<i>Total income</i>	<i>1'101'042</i>

<i>Expenses</i>	<i>CHF</i>
Advocacy	723'434
Communications, Animation and Fundraising	166'024
Administration	191'015
<i>Total operating expenses</i>	<i>1'080'473</i>

Total non-operating income and expenses	20'546
<i>Result of the year</i>	<i>23</i>



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Franciscans International is entirely dependent on donations from Franciscan orders and congregations, funding agencies, foundations, 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.

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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

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Franciscans join a climate protest outside the UN in Geneva
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Donor acknowledgement

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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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