

Growing seeds of justice

Franciscans International's
strategic orientations from 2021 onwards



Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations

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Introduction

Franciscans International (FI) develops its advocacy activities with and on behalf of Franciscans. FI thus regularly defines internal and external objectives to reflect demands and changes on the ground. In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic further incited 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. This participative and interactive journey involved several phases:

1. An evaluation of our 2017-2020 strategic plan and of our internal objectives;
2. A process to redefine the strengths and limits of FI's advocacy mandate at the United Nations (UN);
3. A consultation process with over 50 Franciscans and other partners in several countries; and
4. The redefinition of strategic orientations to tackle 2021 and the coming years with clear intentions.

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.

In this document:

- Introduction
- Who we are
- What we do
- How we work together
- Our strategic orientations from 2021 onwards
 - PILLAR I
Equal Dignity
 - PILLAR II
Human Rights Paths to Peace
 - PILLAR III
Care for the Planet

Concretely, this means that FI wants to:

1 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.

Accordingly, FI's efforts to put human rights at the center of global policy-making processes (e.g. Global Compact on Migration, Sustainable Development Goals) are meant to be more selective than in the previous strategic plan. 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.



2 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 at the United Nations. FI is one of the rare international organizations that regularly and effectively do this in working to ensure that policy-making and pronouncements at the UN indeed reflect and address the realities experienced on the ground.

Communication initiatives – including a new and more accessible website, as well as translations of our contents into more languages – are to be launched to increase the visibility of local Franciscans' work, both at the grassroots and at the UN, towards the global Franciscan Family and relevant international partners.



Based on these main outcomes, the following section aims to first recall FI's constitutive elements before introducing our three main strategic orientations for the coming years, which are redefined so as to encompass Franciscans' main issues of concern while reflecting – with examples – the specific support and contribution FI can bring in several areas thanks to its unique position and mandate.





Who we are

FI is an international non-governmental organization in General Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC, whose purpose is to help secure human rights for the world's most discriminated against and marginalized people. Since its establishment in 1989, FI advocates 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.

FI has offices in Geneva and New York, where the main UN headquarters are located. FI's governance is composed of the Conference of the Franciscan Family which in turn appoints an International Board of Directors, representing the Catholic Franciscan Orders and Congregations, as well as the Anglican Franciscan communities.

Our **vision** is one of 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.

To realize this vision, our **mission** is to advocate at the United Nations for the protection of human dignity and environmental justice, using a rights-based approach.

What we do

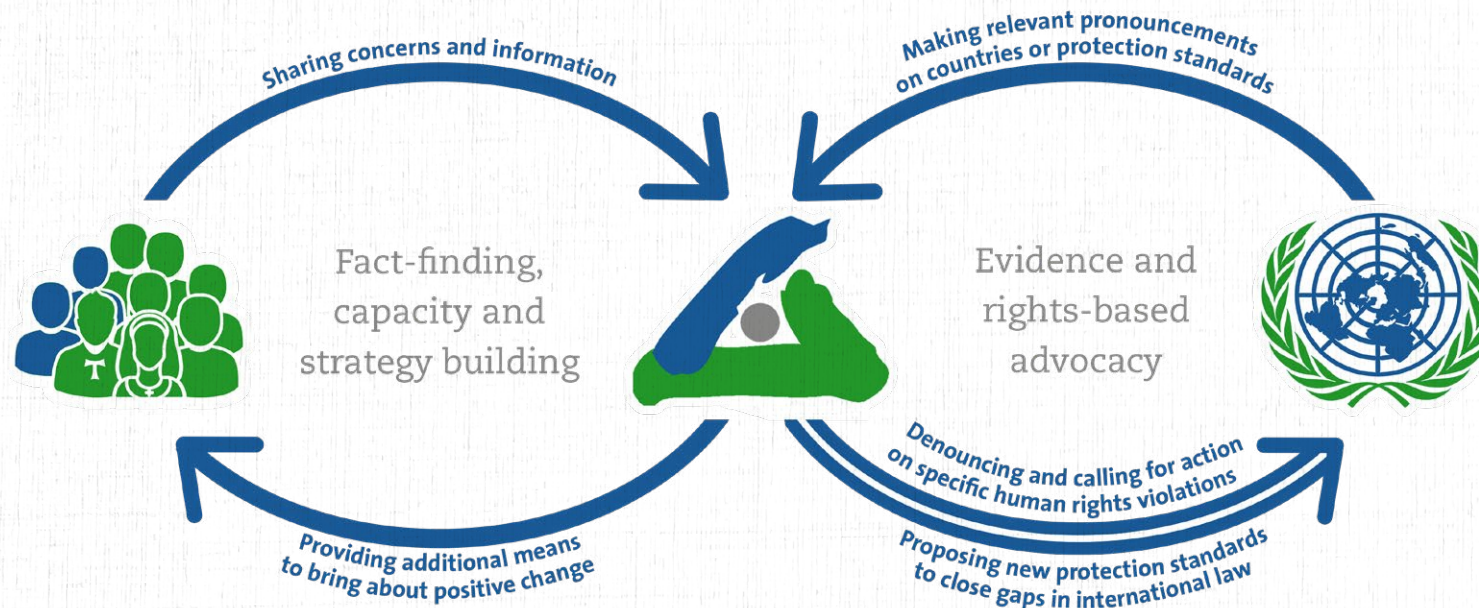
To fulfill this mission, FI builds on more than 30 years of experience in human rights advocacy to address the root causes of injustices. We do so by bringing cases of discrimination and violence committed against individuals and groups living at the margins to the attention of the UN, and by influencing UN decision making and standard setting processes accordingly.

According to their spirituality and values founded on simplicity, fraternity, peace, and care for creation, Franciscans very 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.

FI's added value lies in the combination of two distinctive features:

1. Its strong ties with Franciscans and their civil society allies who work at the grassroots with some of the groups that are most discriminated against, and
2. Its expertise in bringing these testimonies to the UN and effectively translating them into strategic interventions to hold States and other actors accountable, compelling them to address policies and practices that are harming human rights.

How we work together: advocacy loop



What impact can we make together through advocacy?

FI considers that advocacy is more than raising awareness on a particular issue or problem. It is about influencing decision-makers, so that they address systemic causes of injustices by changing policies, systems, practices and attitudes that trigger inequalities and deny human rights. Successes are fragile, however, and advocacy must be targeted and sustained over the years to achieve change and put human rights at the centre of policymaking.

Through its programs, FI adapts to the concerns and experiences brought by Franciscans and their civil society allies to design joint advocacy strategies that analyse and help addressing the root causes of the situation in front of the UN. In doing so, **FI makes an impact by:**

- **Bringing attention to underreported or urgent situations** – getting first-hand and verified information out of a particular country, thus making human rights violations visible to the international community, is often a first and necessary step. It gives a legal base to issues that could otherwise be dismissed as being only politically or religiously motivated. In addition, it can prevent a deterioration of the situation

and protect people from harmful policies and actions that would otherwise go unnoticed and continue in full impunity.

- **Holding governments accountable and demanding changes in policies and practices** – obtaining UN pronouncements that recognize the existence of human rights violations and require states to justify their actions that go against their international obligations is a continuous work-in-progress. Subject to uncertain political shifts, these joint efforts can compel states to develop or change policies and practices to improve the lives of affected communities or individuals.
- **Strengthening Franciscans and other partners working at the grassroots** – advocacy initiatives can have lasting impacts, beyond that which happens at the UN. Because we engage with partners on the ground, often with a long-term perspective, we not only act in solidarity, but also help them to progressively build relevant capacities and to find networks and contacts with whom they can join forces.



Our strategic orientations from 2021 onwards

Three main pillars structure the work of FI. They correspond both to the core values of the Franciscan charism, and to some key UN policy areas:

I. Equal Dignity

Amplifying the voices of those experiencing extreme poverty and social injustices – Denouncing policies that further or fail to address inequalities and marginalization.

II. Human Rights Paths to Peace

Promoting human rights in the prevention and resolution of conflicts – Denouncing policies that fuel conflicts and violence.

III. Care for the planet

Promoting transformation towards environmental justice – Denouncing policies that destroy the environment and fail to address the urgency of the climate crisis.

1st advocacy track Country and regional work

FI mainly addresses these pillars through its three regional advocacy programs, in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Americas. FI regional coordinators work closely with Franciscans and other partners to bring testimonies and cases of human rights violations to the UN and follow-up on them in a number of countries.



2nd advocacy track Standard-setting

When patterns of human rights violations occur in several countries, FI advocates to close existing gaps in international law and global policies and to improve the human rights protection framework based on evidence collected at the grassroots.



PILLAR I - Equal Dignity

Under this pillar, FI's objectives are:

- to ensure that key concerns of Franciscans supporting and working with people living in extreme poverty as well as other marginalized persons and groups are heard and acted upon by relevant UN bodies;
- to support the struggles, and contribute to the meaningful participation, of people living in extreme poverty as well as other marginalized persons and groups in the face of decisions that are affecting them;
- to achieve increased accountability of business actors for the negative impact that their activities have on the rights of people living in extreme poverty as well as other marginalized persons and groups.

Guaranteeing that Franciscans' concerns are heard

Documenting and **denouncing the multiple forms of discrimination, including racial, and the severe socio-economic inequalities that indigenous peoples and migrants, with whom Franciscans live and work, face in many countries** is at the core of FI's advocacy work. In that regard, severe discrimination and inequalities are key violations that affect the rights of migrants and other people on the move, such as in the Americas where the Franciscan Network on Migration is active.

Even more so in times of major crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants and internally displaced persons need strong advocacy to protect and assert their equal right to information, access to health care, adequate housing, food and water, and to be protected against arbitrary detention, racism and xenophobia, to name only a few. We will work to alert the UN and the international community to what is happening on the ground and to denounce what is forcing people to leave their homes.

Supporting people's struggles and meaningful participation

Many indigenous peoples struggle against the destruction of their territories by extractivist development models or other economic activities involving both the state and business actors. **Using human rights to support these struggles will contribute to the respect of people's equal dignity and better protections against violence and disempowerment.** The development of specific tools will ensure that affected communities and individuals can participate effectively in advocacy strategies and actions.

In West Papua for instance, FI builds on the longstanding involvement of Franciscans and other Catholic congregations with indigenous Papuans to create spaces of dialogue with the government of Indonesia at the UN. Acting as an intermediary between the local level and the UN, FI facilitates the strategic channeling of grassroots information and strives to make room for direct testimonies from those who are actually witnessing and experiencing human rights violations affecting indigenous Papuans.



Improving international accountability for business abuses

Based on these lived realities and grassroots work of Franciscans and other partners, and on their behalf, FI engages in important global processes towards new protections for the human rights of people living in extreme poverty and others who face discrimination.

In particular, **FI continues in its engagement in the negotiations of a future international treaty introducing new global binding rules for business accountability** in cases of negative human rights impact that often disproportionately affect the most marginalized.

PILLAR II - Human Rights Paths to Peace

In the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, FI aims:

- to give international resonance to specific human rights violations in situations of conflicts and within the context of peacebuilding and peacekeeping, as denounced by Franciscans working in affected areas;
- to extend advocacy and accountability avenues for Franciscans working on issues related to peacebuilding and peacekeeping beyond the scope of only the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva; to foster coordinated action at the UN between New York and Geneva;
- together with our allies, to influence the global debates on the role of human rights and climate change with respect to peace, especially within the overall UN reform.



Giving resonance to human rights violations in peacebuilding and peacekeeping

This second pillar is equally a fundamental piece of Franciscan values and the heritage of St Francis. Franciscans in a number of countries and FI have a long record of advocating for accountability for human rights violations in conflict and post-conflict situations. It is not rare that Franciscan sisters and brothers are among the only ones to stay with and provide support to populations affected by conflicts and systemic violence and repression.

This places FI in a unique situation to **provide much needed direct information to UN bodies and diplomats who are dealing with such issues often without being able to conduct direct investigations on the ground.** This has been the case in regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Venezuela and Sri Lanka for many years. In the coming years, FI will closely follow the situation in West Papua, the Philippines, and in Cameroon.



Extending avenues for accountability for human rights violations in peacebuilding and peacekeeping within the UN system

Based on the country specific work described above, FI can contribute to global debates and initiatives to **foster the increased integration of human rights into conflict prevention, and into peacebuilding and peacekeeping.**

This work especially covers the role of human rights and of the UN Human Rights Council within the broader UN reform and the better coordination of the three UN pillars of peace, development and human rights. It also includes a more systematic and coordinated use by FI and its allies of various UN mechanisms in both New York and Geneva.

PILLAR III - Care for the planet

More than ever and as shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, violations of human rights will increasingly arise in relation to environmental degradation and climate change. FI's strategic objectives under the third pillar "care for the planet" are:

- to strengthen the protection of the rights to water and to sanitation in all their dimensions (social, environmental, cultural, spiritual and economic) in specific situations that are of concern to Franciscans and the communities they live and work with;
- to achieve the international recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right;
- to strengthen the practical integration of human rights into climate change debates and actions, at all levels: local and national but also global with the establishment of a new UN Special Rapporteur mandate on human rights and climate change.

Protecting the rights to water and to sanitation in all their dimensions

FI has developed strong expertise and experience doing evidence-based advocacy for better protection of the rights to water and to sanitation. This includes among others to work on cases of pollution and toxic waste, like in the context of extractive activities.

FI will work with Franciscans in diverse regions of the world, such as Brazil and West Papua. Based on the concrete situations and concerns of local communities, **FI will ensure that the rights to water and to sanitation are dealt with in all their dimensions** (not only economic but also social, environmental, cultural and spiritual) **within the UN human rights system.**

Contributing to enhance the international protection of human rights within the context of gross and increasing environmental degradation and climate change

Thanks to their longstanding involvement on care for the planet, which was at the core of the teaching of St Francis of Assisi, **Franciscans are well positioned to contribute to global processes that will be key to environmental justice.** Two of these processes are of priority to FI and to our Franciscan and other partners at the grassroots: the international recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right; and the strengthening of the integration of human rights into climate debates and actions through the creation of a new mandate of a UN Special Rapporteur and continued work with such a mandate on this issue. These are major normative and institutional developments at the international level that are needed.

Concretely, FI will relay the local concerns including those generated by climate change impacts in the Pacific, such as on the Solomon Islands.



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