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Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

Franciscans challenge myths around migration

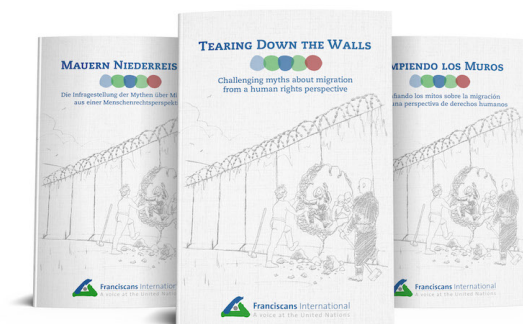
Our latest publication challenges some of the prevailing myths about migrants, and people on the move more generally. “Tearing Down the Walls” draws on the many challenges faced – and shared with us – by sisters and brothers supporting migrants on the ground. It then connects their experiences to relevant international human rights norms and commitments made by States. Our aim is to provide anyone working with migrants and other people on the move with positive arguments rooted in human rights to promote their rights and dignity.

The publication was officially launched on 26 November, with a short presentation of its contents by Franciscans international (FI). The welcoming remarks were provided by Cardinal Michael Czerny S.J., who expressed his appreciation of the dedication shown by many followers of St. Francis and their deep self-understanding of ‘being on the move’. He was joined by representatives of religious networks supporting migrants in Brazil, Guatemala, and South Africa, who provided testimony on how these prevailing myths continue to affect people on a daily basis.



“It is my hope that this publication may help Franciscans, other faith-based groups, and civil society organizations to counter the misconceptions and the xenophobic and racist discourses that underpin abusive policies on human mobility.

Faced with those injured by the dark traits of a closed world and still lying by the roadside, we are invited by Pope Francis to make our own the world's desire for fraternity, starting with



website in [English](#), [German](#), [Italian](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Spanish](#).

Recovering better after COVID-19

In April, FI published two statements looking at the early impacts of COVID-19 [on human rights in general](#) and in relation to [extreme poverty and environmental justice](#). At the time, it was already clear that many of the urgent crises exacerbated by the pandemic were rooted in existing and systemic problems. Throughout the last months of 2020, we have continued to highlight the immediate challenges faced by our sisters and brothers across the world. At the same time FI is advocating for the structural and long-term changes needed to truly "[recover better](#)".

A human right focus on climate change and a healthy environment

COVID-19 has put a magnifying glass on the costs of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. The impacts of climate change, which are already felt directly in many parts of the world, affect all human rights. FI has been working toward new approaches and policies at the United Nations that reflect this new reality.



FI's Outreach Officer Benedict Ayodi OFMCap meets with members of the Franciscan Family in Kampala, Uganda.

The 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council met in September in a hybrid form, combining virtual and in-person participation. Together with over 850 other civil society organizations, FI [called on the Council](#) to recognize a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right. Human rights are not static and, since the Universal Declaration was adopted in

are "Fraterni tutti",
brothers and sisters all."

Cardinal Michael Czerny
S.J.

*Under-Secretary of
the Migrants and
Refugees Section of the
Vatican Dicastery for
Promoting Integral Human
Development*

**Our sisters and
brothers at
the United Nations**



**Alexandro Farini
Rangga OFM**
*Province of St. Francis,
Herald of Peace*

Before starting his
licentiate in Pastoral
Theology at the Pontifical
Lateran University,
Brother Alexandro worked
with the Franciscan
commission for Justice,
Peace and Integrity of
Creation in West Papua,
Indonesia. Here, he was

realization of these rights and also opens up new avenues for civil society to take action. For example, after the UN General Assembly declared access to clean water and sanitation human rights in 2010, FI followed up with a [practical guide](#) to help people working at the grassroots to address challenges of poverty and access to water.

How to hold businesses accountable for human rights abuses?

Issues around climate change and environmental degradation often overlap with questions about the responsibilities of transnational corporations, especially those in extractive industries. Franciscans have a long history of engaging on the impacts of mining, be it at the local, national, or international level. We recently delved into this work, both past and present, during a [webinar](#) organized with the OFM JPIC as part of the Laudato si' Revolution campaign.



Franciscans meet online to discuss business and human rights in the context of Laudato si'

Negotiations in Geneva

At the international level, FI takes a leading role among civil society organizations in supporting the UN's efforts toward establishing binding international rules for business and human rights. For the past six years, a working group has held annual negotiations in Geneva to agree on such a treaty. Throughout this process, FI has provided its technical expertise but also offered a platform for grassroots experiences. In October 2020, this was done through a [webinar](#), where we examined how the draft treaty could help communities in Zambia and Chile obtain justice for the damage caused by pollution and waste from mining activities.

This webinar was organized during the 6th session of the above-mentioned UN working group that took place in a hybrid form. The COVID-related restrictions on UN meetings made negotiations and direct interaction among

publishing *memoria*

Passionis. In reference to the sharing of collective 'memories of suffering' as a process of reclaiming agency, these periodicals document ongoing human rights violations in a region that remains the most heavily militarized of Indonesia and is still largely inaccessible to international observers.

Having written several books on the subject, Brother Alexandro remains committed to defending human rights in West Papua while studying in Rome. At the Human Rights Council, he called attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in West Papua where new restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly were recently imposed, ostensibly to combat COVID-19.

Together with FI, Brother Alexandro called on the Indonesian government to immediately open access of West Papua to the

inputs and engagement by various States and civil society actors, which will continue to improve the text for the future steps. Thanks to good coordination and great solidarity within civil society, as well as supportive UN staff in the secretariat of the working group, the participation of those who couldn't make their way to Geneva as in the previous years could still be very active.



*A 'hybrid' meeting at the United Nations in Geneva. UN
Photo / J.M. Ferré*

Follow-up on achievements at the national level

FI also supports Franciscan efforts toward more business accountability at the national level. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for example, the profits made by extractive industries typically do not benefit local communities. Worse, the pursuit of this wealth has fueled a long history of violence and exploitation. Franciscans, together with the wider Catholic church, have been instrumental in supporting a revised Mining Code aimed at addressing some of these problems, which was finally adopted in 2019. The regulations include important provisions to ensure that communities are consulted about the local impact of extractive projects and receive a fair share of the revenues.

However, two years later, this new code remains largely unimplemented. During the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council, FI organized a [webinar](#) with religious community leaders and other experts from the DRC. Here, they could not only share problems specific to the DRC but also elaborate on what actions the international community could take and how these challenges could be avoided in similar efforts in other countries.

including to journalists and humanitarian organizations. You can watch his full statement [here](#).

With Franciscans in Brazil we launched a short social media campaign in September to highlight some of the findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on toxic wastes after his visit to the country.



ways to connect Franciscans at the grassroots to the UN in New York and Geneva, including by organizing a number of virtual discussions. You can find the recordings of all these events online.

- [Tearing Down the Walls: Challenging myths about migration from a human rights perspective](#)
(E-launch of FI's new publication; English / Spanish)
- [Patterns of systematic persecution and criminalization of indigenous defenders in Guatemala](#)
(A discussion with human rights defenders and the former UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples; English / Spanish)
- [The responsibility of business on human rights: Franciscan action at the UN from the perspective of Laudato si'](#)
(Webinar organized with the OFM JPIC as part of the Laudato si' revolution; English)
- [Human rights abuses and environmental degradation - what the treaty can bring](#)
(Webinar during the 6th session of the open-ended working group on transnational corporations; English)
- [Privatization and the rights to water and sanitation](#)
(A conversation with former UN Special Rapporteur Léo Heller; Spanish)
- [DRC: The Revised Mining Code, new national governance, and COVID-19](#)
(Webinar during the 45th session of the Human Rights Council; English).



Franciscans

International also:

- Delivered [statements](#) to the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Brazil, Guatemala, Kiribati, the Philippines, and Indonesia as well as on climate change, the right to a healthy environment, the right to water, and the rights of indigenous peoples.
- Visited the Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet with members of the Franciscan Family.
- Joined "The time is now!", a [global call to action](#) to recognize the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.
- Joined a [call to action](#) to

community to re-commit
to peace and mainstream
this in the response to
COVID-19.

- Urged all States to heed the UN's call to "recover better" from COVID-19 on the occasion of International Human Rights Day 2020.

