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# Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

## Updates on the 41st session of the Human Rights Council

*Franciscans International envisions 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. We use advocacy as a tool to combat and curb human rights abuses, among others through our work during the most recent session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.*

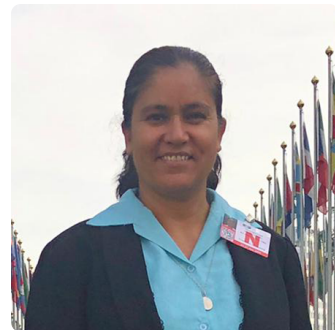
### *The Philippines*

Since President Duterte came to power in June 2016, his so-called 'war on drugs' has led to over 27,000 deaths. Extra-judicial killings by police and other vigilantes have overwhelmingly targeted poor people, who have little access to justice. The Catholic church in the Philippines, together with human rights organizations and other social movements, has taken a strong stance against these violations, condemning the violence, and providing support and protection to victims. Their efforts have been met with threats, including by the President himself. Together with its partners, FI has repeatedly condemned the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. In a major step forward during the session, the Council adopted a resolution that mandates a team from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to officially report on the situation in the Philippines, as a possible first step toward accountability.

### *Climate change and human rights*

It is increasingly clear that the impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by marginalized communities, such as people living in poverty. Looking toward the future, it is essential that efforts to combat global warming like as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development

## Our brothers and sisters at the Council



**Diana Muñoz Alba, FMM**

Director of the Betania  
Santa Martha migrant  
shelter

*"I can only call on  
international and  
national human rights  
organizations to help us  
break down the walls of  
xenophobia affecting our  
migrant brothers and  
sisters."*

As director of the Betania Santa Martha shelter in Mexico, Sister Diana provides material and spiritual support to migrants trying to make their way north.

Confronted by extreme poverty, violence, and the

exposed to the effects of climate change or excluded from measures to mitigate its impact. Over the last weeks, FI co-hosted several side-events, both at the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, which explored strategies to effectively connect the dots between climate action, sustainable development, and human rights.

### *Women's rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*

The 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Council coincided with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) examination of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Despite international attention on issues such as sexual violence during conflict, the position of women in the DRC remains extremely precarious. FI helped organized a side-event that looked at the many difficulties for women and girls in the DRC, and discussed strategies that authorities, civil society, and churches can employ to strengthen their position. We were joined by Sister Nathalie Kangaji Kayombo, SND, who used the opportunity to highlight the specific challenges faced by women and girls living in mining communities.

### *Venezuela*

The socio-economic and political crisis in Venezuela has had a dire impact on the human rights situation in the country. Hyperinflation, political instability, and food and medicine shortages have further aggravated the challenges faced by indigenous communities, including the Warao. FI hosted Melquiades Avila, a representative of this community, in Geneva. During the session he called attention to a wide range of problems affecting Warao, including the lack of access to medicines and hospital facilities, the increasing rates of childhood mortality, and the unequal exploitation of natural and mineral resources by the military as well as non-state actors.

## 30 years at the United Nations

Central America have left their homes in search of safety. However, they do so in a context that is increasingly hostile and many are left vulnerable to exploitation by cartels and government officials alike. Threats have even extended to Sister Diana and others working at the shelter.

Even though the journey is especially dangerous for women and children, Sister Diana has seen an increase of 200 percent of them arriving at the shelter in the last three months alone. In Geneva, she called on States not to let political considerations deter them from their obligation to protect the human rights of all migrants.



**Ashok Stephen, OMI**

Executive Director of the  
Centre for Society and  
Religion

*"We stand in solidarity  
with Muslims subjected  
to attacks, hostility,  
suspicions, and  
discrimination."*



On 16 July, the Conference of the Franciscan Family hosted an afternoon gathering in Rome to reflect on thirty years of human rights advocacy at the United Nations. Brother Michael Perry, Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor delivered the keynote address themed “Memory and Prophecy”. He was joined by Sister Diana Muñoz Alba, FMM and Mgr. Fridolin Ambongo, OFMCap and Archbishop of Kinshasa, two long-term grassroots partners of FI.

[Find out more...](#)

### About the Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is a UN body in Geneva with a mandate to promote and protect human rights around the world. Its 47 members, who are elected by the General Assembly, convene at least three times a year to investigate allegations of human rights violations and address thematic issues such as freedom of religion.

Because of its general consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, FI can take an active part in the Council’s deliberations. During sessions, we regularly deliver oral statements that highlight areas of concern and that become part of the official record.

We also invite Franciscans from the grassroots to join us in Geneva. Here, they work with our team and meet with diplomats and other stakeholders to provide testimony about the problems that affect their communities and advocate for effective solutions. Finally, FI organizes side-events, open to everyone attending the sessions, which provide a platform for Franciscans to interact with human rights experts.

**Oral statements**

**Side-events**

and Religion (CSR) began working with victims in Sri Lanka, soon after the civil war ended in 2009. Keenly aware of the deep religious and ethnic divisions left by the violence, Fr. Ashok made rehabilitation and dialogue a priority in his ministry. He also became an outspoken advocate for a meaningful transitional justice process that would ensure accountability for the human rights abuses committed during the thirty-year conflict.

The Easter Sunday attacks on three Churches and three hotels that killed 259 people dramatically inflamed tensions on the island. In Geneva, Father Ashok expressed his condolences to the victims but also expressed his solidarity with Muslims targeted in the aftermath of the bombings. He warned that the tragedy cannot be an excuse for a renewed crackdown on human rights or to further delay reconciliation, justice, and accountability for alleged war crimes

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The 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the Human Rights Council will take place from 9 September to 27 September 2019.

If you want more

we delivered statements on statements on the DRC, Japan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, West Papua, climate change, human trafficking, migration, and reprisals.

[More information...](#)

participated in side-events on Brazil, the Philippines, women's and girls' rights in the DRC, migration, climate change, and sustainable development and human rights.

[More information...](#)

Nations, please don't hesitate to contact us on [geneva@fiop.org](mailto:geneva@fiop.org) or by replying to this e-mail.



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