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Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

Updates on the 42nd session of the Human Rights Council

Franciscans International (FI) 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 at the most recent session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The right to water

The industrial megaprojects such as mines or dams too often have a devastating impact on local water resources and on human rights in general, sometimes decades after such projects have been shut down. FI has been supporting international efforts to create more accountability for human rights abuses caused by business activities, working with various UN human rights bodies. As part of this work, FI has mobilized its partners supporting communities affected by megaprojects to document the concrete impacts of such projects on human rights and the environment, including on the rights to water and to sanitation. As a result of this mobilization, FI could provide specific inputs for the report of Mr. Léo Heller, the Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation.

Indeed, Mr. Heller has dedicated his latest report to this very topic, which entails a new framework identifying a 7-stage cycle for megaprojects, proposing for each stage concrete measures to prevent and mitigate the impacts on the rights to water and to sanitation. Ahead of the presentation of the report to the UN General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur and FI organized a side-event during the Council where partners from Colombia, Guatemala,

Our brothers and sisters at the Council



Fr. Angel Cortez, OFM

Co-Executive Secretary of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP)

“What have we done to deserve this?”

The Catholic Church has been outspoken in its criticism of President Duterte and his ‘war on drugs’ since the current administration took office in 2016. Formed in 1972 to oppose abuses and injustices under the Marcos regime, the AMRSP is now again on the forefront fighting a new human rights crisis.

Fr. Angel and his fellow brothers and sisters at the

work with.

The Philippines

Over 27,000 people have been killed by police and vigilante groups since the current government started its so-called ‘war on drugs’. The victims of these extra-judicial killings are overwhelmingly from poor communities where there is little or no access to justice. During its 41st session in July, the Council adopted a landmark resolution that asked the High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on the situation as a first possible step toward accountability for these crimes.

However, since then critical voices – including human rights defenders, journalists, and religious and indigenous leaders – have faced reprisals by the government. Meanwhile, democratic norms in the Philippines are increasingly under attack. Together with international and local partners, FI hosted human rights defenders who work directly with victims to share their experiences and refute the government’s claims that no violations are being committed.

Indonesia

On 19 August, violent protests broke out in the provinces of Papua and West Papua sparked by video footage of security officials attacking Papuan indigenous students in Java and calling them derogatory and racist names after they had taken down an Indonesian flag outside their dormitories. The authorities responded by deploying at least 6,000 troops to the island and shutting down internet for several days. Although the flow of information has been restricted, numerous deaths have been reported.

FI has worked with the Papuan Franciscan Family for over two decades, as they advocate to end the ongoing human rights violations in the provinces. During this Council session, we co-hosted a side-event where West Papuan human rights defenders and church leaders were able to provide an update on the latest developments. FI also called on the Indonesian government to respect the rights of protestors and engage in a constructive dialogue.

Global Climate Strike

they can continuously assess the needs of the families and children of victims. Through the Night Watch program, they stand guard over the bodies of those recently killed. Fr. Angel himself has conducted the Requiem Mass for many of the victims.

Despite the threats they face – in some instances issued by the President himself – the church leaders have been unwavering in its support for the dignity of the victims and the protection of their families. In Geneva, Fr. Angel shared his personal testimony while also providing his insights on the broader situation in the Philippines.

Oral Statements

During this session, we delivered statements on the right to water covering several issues including the impact of megaprojects and transboundary challenges between Honduras and El Salvador. FI also called attention to the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

[More information](#)



On 20 September, an estimated 4 million people worldwide took to the streets to demand stronger climate action by their governments. FI joined the protests in Geneva and New York. In the days before the marches, our team also took in the first Peoples' Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival,

which brought together 200 non-governmental leaders and activists from all over the world. You can find the Summit's final declaration [here](#).

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.

FI organized and participated in side-events covering the right to water and the impact of megaprojects, our recent follow-up visit to El Salvador, and the human rights situation in the Philippines and West Papua.

[More information](#)

The 43rd session of the Human Rights Council will take place from 24 February to 20 March 2020.

If you want more information about our work at the United Nations, please don't hesitate to contact us on geneva@fiop.org or by replying to this e-mail.



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