



Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

Dear Franciscan Voice reader!

In the context of the restructuring of Franciscans International we are in a process of developing a new communication strategy including the publication of Franciscan Voice. However we would like to update you about FI's advocacy activities and send you the report of the first trimester of 2013.

We wish you an interesting reading.

Yours

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HIGHLIGHTS of FI ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES, January - April 2013

Africa

1. Cameroon

In the last few years, the public hospitals of Yaoundé and other cities in Cameroon have been confronted by the phenomenon of the disappearances of newborn children. The Franciscans partners in Cameroon received information that these children are kidnapped for illegal adoption purposes. This practise is allegedly carried out with the acquiescence of hospital and state officials. Br. Boniface Diezoumbe, a Franciscan friar from Cameroon, reported to FI about child trafficking practices in public hospitals in Cameroon, as well as trafficking in girls in northern Cameroon. In March 2013, FI invited Br Boniface to Geneva to address this issue before permanent missions' delegates and UN staff. Br Boniface called on the members of Council to ask Cameroon to conduct an independent and impartial investigation on trafficking and bring perpetrators to justice. He also presented the case to the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking. During the UPR session on Cameroon 15 countries raised the issue of kidnappings and child trafficking in Cameroon.

2. Benin

In December 2012, Franciscans-Benin organised two raising awareness campaigns on infanticide based on witchcraft beliefs (of the so-called witch children), respectively in Brignamaro and Kerou, Northern Benin. The campaigns were organised by Franciscans-Benin, in collaboration with representatives of religious congregations, traditional leaders, local authorities, journalists and FI. The aim was to raise awareness of such a harmful traditional practice, sensitize local populations and traditional leaders against infanticide, and provide effective legal protection for children. This campaign was supported by the French Embassy in Benin. In March 2013, during the UN Human Rights Council, FI invited *Sr. Madeleine Koty* and *Br. Auguste Agnoupe*, two Franciscans from Benin, to continue advocacy work at international level. They had meetings with diplomatic delegations of France, Holy See, Italy, Mexico, and Romania. Br. Auguste delivered a statement during the HRC and Sr. Madeleine also made a statement during a HRC public conference on birth registration. Following a long meeting with FI and Franciscans partners, H.E Séraphin Lissassi, committed to address the issue both with the Government of Benin and with the International Community through the organisation of a conference. In addition, FI was asked by UNICEF Benin to contribute to the national Child Code, by proposing key amendments to the Bill. FI proposed significant changes to the current Draft of the Child Code on the definition of infanticide and on the issue of Birth Registration.

The Americas

3. Peru

The Government of Peru is planning to build the 2nd largest gold mine in the world in Cajamarca region, northern highlands of Peru. The local people of Cajamarca and human rights defenders have been protesting against this project which is believed to affect between 3,000-16,000 hectares of fragile mountaintop wetlands including numerous lakes, rivers and marshes that supply the region's drinking water. Thanks to the assistance of FI, *Ms. Mirtha Vasquez, Ms. Ofelia Vargas, and Mr. Pablo Sánchez*, representatives of Group for Training and Advocacy in Sustainable Development (GRUFIDES) in Peru, travelled to the United States in March 2013. The visit was aimed to a series of advocacy work for the protection of human rights defenders in the context of the mining expansion in Cajamarca, Peru. This includes a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the repression of peaceful protest and public participation in Peru. In March 2013, on the occasion of the Human Rights Council, FI made a public statement raising concerns on the issue. FI statement provoked a long reaction from the Government of Peru in response to FI concerns.

4. Jamaica

Jamaica is confronted with several structural injustices, including the problem of poverty, access to food and unemployment. On the invitation of Franciscan Sisters of Alleghany in Kingston, FI conducted one day training and a fact finding mission. The aim was to discuss the role of human-rights advocacy in Catholic Social Teaching and to analyze together the pressing structural injustices using the United Nations (UN) Mechanism to promote human rights. FI also investigated questions related to environmental injustice and sustainable development with a visit to Porziuncola Farm, a local sustainable agriculture and tourism initiative led by *Sr. Grace Yap*. FI was also able to consult with the Director of Jamaica Environmental Trust to discuss challenges related to bauxite mining and high-impact development projects on the island. FI will incorporate the information gathered through this mission into its advocacy for a more just and sustainable development agenda at the UN, to provide follow-up information on Jamaica's Universal Periodic Review recommendations, and to monitor Jamaica's upcoming review before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Asia-Pacific

5. India

More than 65% of the Christian population in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are from Dalit and Tribal backgrounds. *Fr. Nithiya ofm cap*, the executive secretary of the office of Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences shared some concerns with FI related to discrimination against Dalits. Christians run many schools and colleges in these countries but Dalit and tribal face denied access. Many Diocese and religious congregations have social welfare schemes in the name of Dalit and Tribal uplift, but they have not yet directly changed the human rights situations of Dalit, especially on issues concerning education and employment. FI is working to address abuses and discrimination against Dalit and other Tribal groups. In order to be more effective, FI re-established the relationship with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), a leading advocacy alliance on Dalits. Recently, FI has been extremely active in contributing to the work of IDSN. During the Human Rights Council Session in March 2013, FI co-organized the side event with IDSN "Ensuring Access to Justice For Dalits: Good Practices And Key Challenges" with the presence of *Ms. Rita Izsák*, UN Expert on minority issues. During the event experts shared good practices and key challenges. The main challenge for FI and other NGOs remains the real implementation of existing policies.

6. Indonesia

In the regency of Manggarai Timur, in the Indonesian Province of East Nusa Tenggara, the Serasi indigenous community was particularly affected by mining activities, especially in respect to indigenous land grabbing. The manganese waste of this company has contaminated the agricultural lands of the region. The activities of this mining company are considered the main cause of the significant decrease of rice and corn crop. If the mining activity continues, the survival of Serise community will be threatened. *Fr. Peter Aman ofm*, the coordinator of JPIC, informed FI that the community - led by Serise leader - filed a complaint against the company for land-grabbing. The police, instead of investigating the circumstances, arrested Mr. Amon and three other leaders. They were all brought to court and sentenced to five months in 2012. To address this and other injustices, during the Human Rights Council of March, FI denounced the failure of the Government of Indonesia to guarantee the human rights of indigenous peoples. FI also called for a more consistent human rights-based approach in implementation of development projects.

Europe

7. Germany

Tea and Lina are two young women victim of trafficking in Germany. Tea is originally from Nigeria. Her life changed since a Nigerian man brought her to Italy. He promised education and school. Unfortunately, this man forced her to child-prostitution in Germany. She got pregnant while she was still under-aged. She applied for asylum in Düsseldorf and was assigned to Herten. Her asylum application was declined at first, but with the help of a psychological expertise, Tea was granted permanent residency in Germany. Tea is pursued even today by traumatizing experiences of her childhood and youth. Lina, another girl, was born in Macedonia. She was 15 years old when she was sold by her own father to a 50-year-old man in Belgium. She could escape from him and now she lives illegally in Germany. These cases were brought to the UN attention by Sister Stephanie (a Franciscan sister from Germany). *Sr. Stefanie*, has been working for more than 25 years with refugees and victims of human trafficking. She came to Geneva in March 2013 to denounce injustices linked to migration, trafficking and prostitution. She presented the two cases in front of 23 diplomatic delegations to the UN in Geneva. Sr Stefanie also a bilateral talk with the diplomatic representative of Germany during which she called on the Government for more concrete actions. Sr Stephanie also asked the Government to more effectively protect victims of trafficking through – for example - temporary or permanent residence permit. The obligation to protect victims is based – inter alia - on humanitarian and compassionate factors, as stipulated in the article 7 of UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) which has been ratified by Germany.