

# The FRANCISCAN VOICE

 Franciscans International  
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A monthly update from Franciscans International

February 2011

## Protecting the rights of the child

I vividly remember his small thin body and big brown eyes, which followed me everywhere in the classroom. Gift missed a lot of school so it was difficult for him to keep up in class. When I spent some extra time with him he was very keen to learn and touchingly grateful for the special attention. Three weeks after my last class with Gift, I was devastated to hear that he had died, from complications related to severe malnutrition.

This year FI is putting special emphasis on addressing justice issues related to children. Sadly it is a long list, which includes: child soldiers; 'witch children'; and children who are trafficked for sexual abuse. In March, FI is organising a conference at the United Nations focusing on 'Child abuse and traditional practices which are harmful to children' to highlight these issues. We are working to effect change in every country, through promoting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A child's happiness or even life, could depend on our prompt action wherever we are...

Sr. Denise Boyle fmdm  
Executive Director FI

## Discrimination Against Women



Two Franciscans attended the United Nations to highlight gender injustices affecting Kenyan women and girls such as including literacy, education, and health. Sr. Patricia Ndunge Kasina LSOSF, and Jane Mary Wangari SFO, previously worked with FI, Franciscans and women at the grassroots to collate and submit an official report and deliver an oral statement to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women as part of the country's general human rights review.

On 19 January Ms. Wangari delivered an oral statement that drew the Committee's attention to the fact that healthcare remained a serious concern in Kenya, where maternal mortality rates were still very high. Lack of proper nutrition was also a serious issue with regards to HIV/AIDS treatment. She asked the Kenyan Government to increase the number and training of healthcare professionals and sexual and reproductive health services, as well as other concrete measures to combat gender based discrimination.

She told FI: "We were pleased that many of the report's recommendations were

addressed and, we hope, will be worked on. We will continue to work with FI and at the grassroots and to network more with others working on the same issues worldwide to ensure that government policies are respected.”

### Americas Programme Update



After many years of faithful service, Fr. Elias Mallon, S.A., Sr. Kathie Uhler, OSF, Sr. Gloria Oehl, OSF and Heather Metcalfe are leaving their ministries at Franciscans International (FI). The New York Office is downsizing due to financial constraints.

“We thank them for their strong example and commitment to peace and justice in the spirit of St. Francis, and wish them well in their future endeavors,” says Fr. Michael Lasky, OFM Conv., Regional Director of the Americas, who will remain working on the Americas Programme with the help of two volunteers.

FI will continue to attend the non-governmental organisation Working Group for the United Nations Security Council and the 49<sup>th</sup> Forum on Civil Society focusing on the eradication of poverty. FI is also organising its sixth annual pre-conference seminar in preparation for the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) this month and a Conference on Sustainable Development in May. On International Woman’s Day on 8 March, FI will welcome the winners of the Human Rights Competition to New York to learn more about FI, to visit the United Nations and to participate in FI’s side-event on Trafficking.

With help from staff in all three FI offices, the Americas Programme is committed to in-country grassroots trainings for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Brazil, Bolivia and Jamaica in 2011.

### Asia Pacific Programme Celebrates Third Anniversary



On the third anniversary of the opening of the Franciscans International Bangkok office, over 50 national and regional Franciscan leaders from 13 countries will meet in the capital to review, reflect, and advise on the work of the Asia Pacific programme.

Over three days in February, the participants will review FI’s regional work of the last three years; visit the United Nations ESCAP where FI is accredited, hear from FI’s President of the International Board, Fr. John Doctor, OFM and Executive Director, Sr. Denise Boyle, fmdm; and strategically plan the programme’s projects.

“The challenge for Franciscans and FI today, is how best to respond throughout the Asia Pacific region to the enormous suffering of our people, caused by natural disasters and systemic injustice. We believe it is only together as the Franciscan Family, that FI will be able to determine the appropriate Franciscan response, through our unique ministry at the United Nations,” says Mr. Mateusz Tuniewicz, Regional Director of the FI

Asia Pacific Programme.

### Stop injustice at grassroots

FI highlighted the important role that Franciscans and civil society play in ending human rights injustices and bringing change during a short training with OFM Conventual brothers in Assisi in January.

The training focused on human rights and advocacy at the United Nations (UN), and how to use official reporting mechanisms to address systemic injustice. Based on the principle that “every human has rights”, FI indicated the importance of speaking up and taking action whenever we witness injustices.

### Competition Winners Visit United Nations



Five winners of the Human Rights Competition will spend a day at the United Nations (UN) with Franciscans International (FI). Their essays and artwork, selected from over 50 other students' in the US and UK, best answered the question: “Why Do Human Rights Matter to Me?”

From the UK, Chloe Holliday and Christine Milroy, of Turnbull High School, East Dunbartonshire, won the junior category (14-18 years) with their mask, designed on the theme of the Right to Learn and judged to be ‘thought-provoking’. The senior category winner (18-21 years), Briony Pitkin, from the University College of St. Mark and St. John, Plymouth, submitted an ‘exemplary piece of creative writing’ calling to stop human trafficking. They will visit the UN in Geneva in March and participate in an FI co-organised event with Amnesty International on “Child abuse and traditional practices which are harmful to children”.

Says Briony: “I was inspired to participate in the competition by reading about the work of FI and about the basic human rights that everyone has. I was shocked to read how, in the case of human trafficking, the right of freedom can be taken away; nobody has the right to do this, no matter how vulnerable people appear to be. It horrified me to discover that this is the fastest growing illegal enterprise in the world and 75% of those trafficked end up in the sex industry. I can't begin to comprehend how scary this must be for those who have been trafficked.”

American winners, Peter Wojtechko, from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart High School, Pennsylvania, and Gretta Hollister, at the University of St. Francis, Illinois, impressed the judges with their ‘poignant’ essays which both highlighted freedom and respect for mankind. They will travel to New York City in March to spend a day at the UN and participate in the FI “Speak Up” campaign to end the trafficking of women and girls. They will be honored as the competition winners during this event.

Says Gretta, the senior category winner for the US: “My essay was about the importance of human rights to every individual, no matter what his or her race, culture, religion, or language is, and the importance that we honour those God given gifts. The way we can do this is by appreciating the rights we have in this country and loving our neighbors. It is

too often that we do neither”.

Keep watching for more news on how to enter the FI Human Rights Competition for 2011.

### **UK Winners & entries**

Junior category: Chloe Holliday and Christine Milroy, Turnbull High School, East Dunbartonshire

Senior category: Briony Pitkin, University College of St. Mark and St. John, Plymouth

### **US winners & entries**

Junior category: Peter Wojtechko, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart High School, Pennsylvania

Senior category: Gretta Hollister, University of St. Francis, Illinois

### **Trafficking Testimonies on Film**



A short film is being made to raise awareness about trafficking. ‘To whom it may concern’ includes stories from religious communities about the women and children they have helped, the best practices to eliminate it and the effects of governmental policies. FI, together with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SND), solicited the testimonies and in just one month received 36 responses from 18 countries.

The film will preview on 8 March in New York during the side-event, "Trafficking First Hand: Stories, Policy & Best Practices". There will also be a panel discussion with Sr. Mary Soh, FMM about her work with trafficking survivors in Singapore, Ms. Anke Strauss of the IOM about government policy and Sr. Helene Hayes, GSS on the best practices she learned while researching trafficking around the world.

‘*To Whom It May Concern*’ is produced by Artfully Unforgotten, a non-profit that uses art to advocate on behalf of vulnerable communities. It will soon be available online for religious leaders to share with parishes and communities to raise more awareness on the trafficking of women and girls.

Date for your diary: "Trafficking First Hand: Stories, Policy & Best Practices", on 8 March, from 15:00 to 16:30, at the International Social Justice Commission (221 East 52nd Street, New York).

### **Franciscan Spirituality Today**



FI proudly supported and attended a two-day conference led by Richard Rohr, OFM, and sponsored by TSSF, in early September 2010 at St James’s Church, London. Over 100 Franciscans from all orders, mostly tertiaries, heard how: "The greatest vocation is not the contemplative, nor is it the active, but the utter art form of putting the two together."

Fr. Richard covered four themes: non-dual thinking, creation, emerging Christianity, and action and contemplation today. In encouraging open-minded and forward thinking, he said that we must not try to put Almighty God into a neat box but that we need to see Christ at work in other religions, because he is the creator God of all not just the God of the Christians. Further that if we are to be peace makers in our relationships and in the wider situations of groups, nations and cultures, we have to have peace within ourselves.

It was an exciting opportunity for FI to meet Fr. Richard again, to support the event and to join other participants, including the TSSF Study and Prayer Group, who are also actively praying and working for world peace and justice.

### **UK Lectures on New Islamism**

Hear Fr. Elias Mallon, S.A, speak on *Franciscanism and Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

21 May 2011: Hilfield Friary, Dorchester

23 May 2011: Greyfriars Lecture Series, Oxford

27 & 28 May 2011: Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury

### **Get Involved**

We are in need of volunteers who can translate English documents into Spanish. Please contact [r.lead@fiop.org](mailto:r.lead@fiop.org)