



Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

Summary of Franciscans International's co-sponsored side event "Climate Change and Human Rights: The Way Forward in the HRC"

On March 6th, Franciscans International co-sponsored a side event to the 28th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland entitled "Climate Change and Human Rights: The Way Forward in the HRC". The event featured a diverse panel of six experts, researchers, and activists who each commented on their experiences and concerns related to the topic, and responded to questions and comments posed by attendees. The well-attended discussion was held in parallel to the Council's proceedings for the day, which were focused on how the UN and state parties might address the increasingly interconnected issues of human rights and climate change. The panelists each spoke on what they see as the greatest challenges posed by climate change for the realization of universal human rights, particularly in developing and low-lying nations. Many of them expressed frustration with the lack of tangible steps state governments and international bodies like the UN have taken to combat the recognized effects.

The President of the Human Rights Council, Joachim Rucker gave the events opening remarks. He stressed the importance of guiding states towards more aggressive, large-scale changes in the face of climate change, which is inherently a global issue. He believes that a paradigm shift in policymaking and overall mindset needs to occur for states and individuals to make lasting, sustainable changes.

FI's major contribution to the event was arranging for Miss Pelenise Alofa from Kiribati, a low-lying island nation in the Asia Pacific, to sit on the panel. She gave a powerful testimony on the direct impact that rising sea levels have had on her community and stressed the urgency in which climate change, and the plight of its victims, must be addressed. She presented photos of a high tide overcoming a final sea wall and the destruction it caused to a nearby hospital. She fears for the future of her people, who are likely to become climate refugees when their territory is eventually overtaken by increasingly high tides. Among her recommendations, she particularly stressed the importance of drafting solutions that integrate human rights at every level. She also joined her fellow panelists in stressing the importance of installing a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change. Pelenise gave the final words of the event, imparting her nation's blessing of good health, peace, and prosperity and the need to share these virtues with others in consideration of the topic at hand.

Some of the other issues that the panelists specifically addressed included: the desertification of important water sources in Kenya, the increase in size and frequency of climate driven natural disasters, the need to include local communities in forming and carrying out future plans, and how funds that are raised to assist those affected by climate change might most effectively be implemented.

Events like this that foster constructive dialogue and raise awareness on the effects of climate change are of particular importance given the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference that will be taking place in Paris later this year. The evidence and resolutions that will be presented and hopefully agreed upon during that time will dictate the direction state parties take to change patterns of consumption, curb pollution, and collaborate to combat the immediate and long term impacts of climate change. Franciscans International looks forward to continuing its involvement in climate discussions and is committed to advocating for nations like Karabati that face immediate challenges in the face of climate change. The event flyer with the full list of panelists is attached.