



# DOMINICANS AT THE UN

Dominican Leadership Conference

Spring 2015

*“Cry out as if you have a million voices, for it is silence which kills the world.”*

*-Catherine of Siena*

## 2015 At The UN: A Year Like No Other



This year marks the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, which was established in 1945 on the three pillars of peace and security, human rights and development. In its [founding Charter](#), we read the following: *“We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights...to promote social progress and better standards of life...to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors...to promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples, have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.”* Perhaps at no time since its humble beginnings in the wake of World War II, is reference to this Charter more important; as is the acknowledgement that in 1945, the entire focus was only on human security.

United States, Europe, Canada, among others, have fueled the level of development that has made our current lifestyles possible. All indications are that this will have to change significantly if we, as a global community, are to move into a future that will sustain not only ourselves, but those who come after us.

### The Future We Want: Is It Possible?

In the outcome document from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO + 20), entitled [The Future We Want](#), the Member States of the UN stated *“We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature. We call for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development that will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead efforts to restore the health and integrity of Earth’s ecosystem.”* To this end, Member States agreed to work towards the establishment of a Post-2015 Development Agenda, which would continue the work of the Millennium Development Goals, but go beyond their initial focus – which was only on the developing world. This new agenda will be comprised of 17 [Sustainable Development](#)

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The landscape has changed mightily over these 70 years, and the UN today has been deeply challenged to shift its understanding of peace and security, human rights and development to include the relationship of all of this to our planet. Needless to say, in many respects this has been a tough sell, as it challenges the very ways in which the

## 2015 At The UN: A Year Like No Other (continued)

[Goals](#) (SDGs), which work to integrate the three dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental. But this is not the only process that the UN is engaged in at the moment.

### SDGs: A Way Forward?

The SDGs, 17 in number, signify an effort to integrate the three dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental. This in itself is major, as it is a movement out of the long held silo-mentality of the UN, and an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all things. Unlike the MDGs, which focused solely on the developing world, the SDGs are *universal* in scope, applying to all countries within the context of their respective national realities. This brings into play the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities* (CBDR), one of the Rio Principles which were a part of the outcome of the 1992 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, more commonly known as the [Earth Summit](#). According to CBDR, all nations have a responsibility to contribute to our common, sustainable future; but not every nation bears the same degree of responsibility. It is in the area of climate change that this becomes an extremely contentious issue.



The scope of the SDGs is ambitious, as it encompasses the commitment to end poverty; reduce inequality within and among countries; ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; and deal with climate change and its impact on the world's most vulnerable populations and on Earth's own ecosystems. Right now, the great unknown is whether or not the world's leaders will exercise the political will that is desperately needed in order for these goals to be achieved. This will require a major shift in their understanding of who they are in relationship to the peoples of the world, and the planet. In Sep-

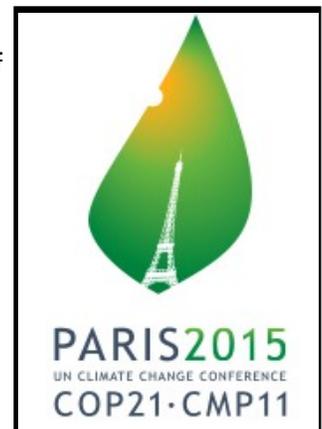
tember, the abiding hope is that the General Assembly will formally adopt these Sustainable Development Goals as its Post-2015 Development Agenda. But...

### Will There Be Financing for Sustainable Development?

Another significant piece of the development issue is that of financing. To this end, the UN will convene the **Third International Conference on Financing for Development** in July, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The ambition of Member States at this conference will be to eradicate poverty and hunger, to achieve equitable and sustained economic growth and sustainable development, to protect the environment, and to promote peaceful and inclusive societies where no one is left behind. Key issues from previous conferences will be addressed, including outstanding pledges of Official Development Assistance; debt; trade; and technology transfer. The contentious issue of **private financing** for development will also be part of the conversation. While we do need the involvement of the private sector – i.e., corporations – in creating a way forward, there is great resistance worldwide among civil society organizations as to just how far the corporate reach will extend. The private sector is profit-oriented. Will it be willing to shift its focus in favor of people and planet? Which brings us to yet another significant event taking place this year, which has the potential to usher in an unprecedented level of international cooperation for the common good.

### Paris 2015 and Counting...

In December, the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) will meet in Paris for the hoped for adoption of a set of binding climate targets that will be critical to whether or not we will move into a sustainable future. The issue of carbon emissions, as well as climate financing for [mitigation and adaptation](#) and the transfer of technology, especially for the world's most vulnerable populations, will be addressed. The United States has pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions between 26-28% on 2005 lev-



## 2015 At The UN: A Year Like No Other (continued)

els by 2025. Given the fact that historically, the US is the largest emitter of these gases, this is the moral and ethical thing to do. Nonetheless, President Obama's efforts to truly lead in this important area are being severely undermined by many in Congress. Meanwhile, 14 of the 15 hottest years measured have been in the first 14 years of the 21st century, with 2014 being the hottest year on record.

In remarks at a workshop on the Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Development: "Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity," held in Vatican City in April, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that if there ever was an issue that requires unity of purpose, it is climate change. *"Science tells us we are far off track from reducing global emissions. This is morally indefensible."* He goes on to say *"Future generations will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities."*

### A Sign of Hope?



At the spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund / World Bank in Washington, DC, a coalition of eight governments called for a phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies as a

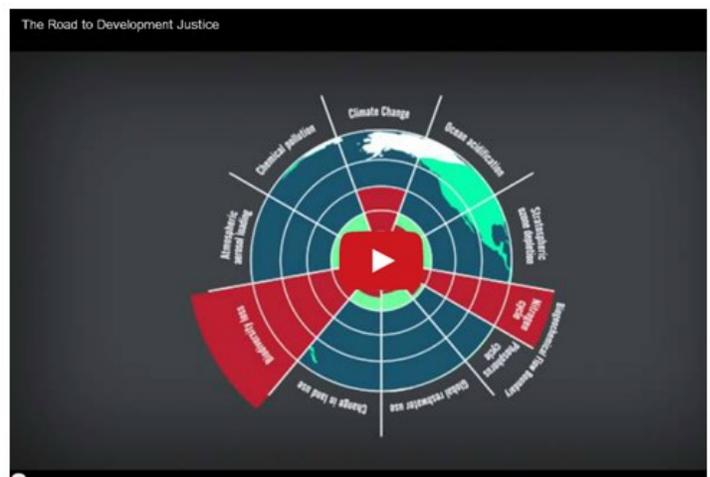
lead-up to the Paris conference. The [Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform](#) include Costa Rica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. France has become the first additional country to endorse the statement. In part the statement reads. *"Fossil fuel subsidy reform has both economic and environmental benefits, thereby supporting our shared global commitment to sustainable development."* In 2013 alone, governments around the world spent more than \$548 billion on fossil fuel subsidies. Just imagine how this money could be used...

### What Is Earth Asking of Us?

It has been said that ours is the first generation that can end poverty, and the last that can take concrete steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. ***This can be done. But... will it be done?*** While we may not be part of the negotiations involved in this all-important conference, we can make our voices heard, at least in terms of our own government. If you have not already done so, I urge you to go to the Dominican Sisters Conference [Paris 2015 and Counting](#) website, and write, or call President Obama, as well as your representatives, urging them to take the moral high-road and ***lead*** in this situation, which holds for us both great promise, and great peril.

I close with the wisdom of Thomas Berry, from whose insights and spirit we can all draw as we do whatever we can do for the sake of all of God's good people, and Earth - this one sacred place which we all call home.

***"We need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we will let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us... We will go into the future as a single sacred community, or we will all perish in the desert."***



[Click here](#) or on the video about to watch "The Road to Development Justice."

## Finding the Moral Voice: The 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

Kelly Litt, Dominican Volunteer

One of the main goals of the UN is to promote and establish international peace and security. One way in which that can be realized is through disarmament. The **2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)** was held in New York 27 April to 22 May 2015.

According to United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the Non-Proliferation Treaty “is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.” This treaty represents a commitment to the goal of disarmament by both states that are currently nuclear weapon free and states that possess nuclear weapons. There are currently 190 states that have signed on to the treaty, including five nuclear-weapon states: the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom.

At the opening session of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, many members states insisted that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is a crime against humanity and pressed for a complete exclusion of the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons in all military documents. The Ambassador of Sweden explained it well by saying that the “status quo is unsustainable,” and “putting human beings first at the heart of nuclear disarmament is key.”

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, the Holy See and the [Global Security Institute](#) hosted an event at the United Nations entitled: **Nuclear Weapons and the Moral Compass**. This event brought together numerous leaders from various religious backgrounds to discuss the moral implications of living in a nuclear weapons filled world. Many popes including Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis were mentioned for having criticized nuclear weapons,

warning of their danger, and pressing for disarmament.

Archbishop Bernadito Auza, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Na-

tions, explained that morality has a large role to play in disarmament. Pope Francis explained that “peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples;” peace cannot be found through weapons and armaments. Through the lens of morality, nuclear weapons are unjustifiable. They are diverting vast money and resources away from development, alleviating poverty, mitigating climate change, providing education and healthcare, and other necessary developmental and financial initiatives.

In his message at the [Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons](#), Pope Francis called for an “ethic of solidarity which encourages peoples to work together for a more secure world, and a future that is increasingly rooted in moral values and responsibility on a global scale.” Through nuclear weapons, humans are pretending to be gods and are justifying the potential destruction of entire populations for their own national interest. However, there are no victors in nuclear war, only victims.

Some individuals argue that there is morality in warfare, but nuclear warfare is in a category all of its own – nuclear weapons are not proportional, they are indiscriminate between civilian and soldier, and they create mass killings of innocent citizens, men, women, and children alike. Nuclear weapons are simply contrary to international humanitarian law and they send the message that people are expendable. Is a world free of nuclear weapons merely utopian thinking? Will the world ever know peace? Working toward disarmament is still urgent nonetheless. We must begin to appeal to the human conscience rather than self-interest. As the NPT is the



## Finding the Moral Voice (continued)

cornerstone in the pursuit of disarmament, we must ensure that this frozen debate left over from the Cold War includes the moral voice in order for the world to know peace.

### Actions you can take to advocate for complete disarmament:

- Hold governments accountable to their agreements, especially the Non-Proliferation Treaty
- Write, call, and visit officials to discuss their

position on issues of disarmament

- Stay informed with current events and news related to nuclear weapons by checking out the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#), [Reaching Critical Will](#), and the [Global Security Institute](#)
- Facilitate discussions in your own community
- Write, call, and thank officials who are showing strength and leadership to achieve complete disarmament

## 2015 at the UN: National Events and Observances

| MAY         |   |               |   |
|-------------|---|---------------|---|
| 21 May      | <a href="#">World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development</a> | 20 June       | <a href="#">World Refugee Day</a>   |
| 24 May      | <a href="#">International Women’s Day for Peace and Disarmament</a>           | 26 June       | <a href="#">United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture</a> |
| 25 May      | <a href="#">Memorial Day</a>  | <b>JULY</b>   |   |
| 29 May      | <a href="#">International Day of UN Peacekeepers</a>                          | 4 July        | <a href="#">U.S. Independence Day</a>   |
| 31 May      | <a href="#">World No-Tobacco Day</a>  | 11 July       | <a href="#">World Population Day</a>  |
| <b>JUNE</b> |   | 18 July       | <a href="#">Nelson Mandela International Day</a>                                  |
| 5 June      | <a href="#">World Environment Day</a>   | 30 July       | <a href="#">International Day of Friendship</a>                                   |
| 8 June      | <a href="#">World Oceans Day</a>  | 30 July       | <a href="#">World Day Against Trafficking in Persons</a>                          |
| 12 June     | <a href="#">World Day Against Child Labor</a>                                 | <b>AUGUST</b> |   |
| 15 June     | <a href="#">World Elder Abuse Awareness Day</a>                               | 9 August      | <a href="#">International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples</a>               |
| 17 June     | <a href="#">World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought</a>               | 12 August     | <a href="#">International Youth Day</a>   |
|             |   | 19 August     | <a href="#">World Humanitarian Day</a>  |
|             |   | 29 August     | <a href="#">International Day Against Nuclear Tests</a>                           |

## DOMINICAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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