



Dominicans at the UN

Dominican Leadership Conference

Summer 2016

“Cry out as if you had a million voices, for it is silence that kills the world”

- Catherine of Siena

Paris 2015 and Beyond....

Do you remember the lead up to the UN Climate Summit in Paris last December? There was a great deal of excitement and a real sense of hope that world leaders would make the right decisions regarding the crisis of global climate change and its serious impact on the lives and livelihoods of people worldwide. So what happened in Paris and where do we go with it all?



Global temperature and National Commitments

There was agreement to limit the rise in global temperature to 2 degrees Celsius, and to work towards the more ambitious goal of 1.5 degrees. To this end, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was given a mandate to elaborate a plan to ensure the 1.5 degree rise by 2018.

Regarding national commitments, each nation was expected to provide its **Intended National Determined Contribution (INDCs)**, indicating how and to what degree it would work to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. However, when these contributions are tallied, they reflect a 2.7-3.5 degree increase in temperature. So much more work needs to be done in this regard.

The issue of finance

There was some increase in finances to assist countries to adapt to the negative impact of climate change. The United States alone pledged to double its contribution from \$400 million to \$800 million over a period of five years. Although there were many countries who wanted to propose a provision for new, **additional, predictable, adequate, accessible and sustained** financial resources, many of the developed countries would not agree to this – including the United States. Any “new” financial arrangements

would require that President Obama bring the Agreement to Congress for approval – and the US was trying to avoid this at all costs.

What’s missing?

The Paris Agreement is legally binding – and it is not. Countries are given considerable leeway in determining how to cut their emissions, but the agreement mandates that they report transparently on those efforts. The Paris Agreement is a treaty under international law, but only certain provisions are legally binding. The issue of which provisions to make binding was a central concern for many countries, especially the US, which wanted an agreement President Obama could accept without seeking congressional approval. This basically meant that the agreement could not call for binding emission targets or for new binding financial commitments.

And what about indigenous peoples, human rights and fossil fuel?

Disappointingly, the only reference to indigenous peoples and human rights is in one paragraph in the preamble; there is no reference in the text itself. This is problematic, in that if the reality of climate change is not intentionally connected to its negative impact on peoples’ rights to clean water and air, to land, to livelihood the discourse will lack any moral and ethical perspective. Obviously, if we hope to keep warming below 2 degrees C, we have to stop emitting greenhouse gases. However, the Paris Agreement is silent on the issue of fossil fuel. Small island nations wanted forceful language, calling for “zero global greenhouse gas emissions by 2060.” But others resisted.



However, on a hopeful note, at the recent meeting of the G7, the leaders of the US, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy Japan and the European Union said that they were determined to work towards the transition to an energy system that provides for a de-carbonization of the global economy. To this end, they have pledged to end government support for coal, oil and gas by the end of 2025.

Why is it important for us to act?

The Paris Agreement was opened for signatures on April 22nd and will remain open for signatures for one year. To date, the Agreement has been signed by 177 countries, and ratified by 17. Nonetheless we must be attentive to the ongoing process of ratification as well as to what our own country has agreed to do, because:

- Greenhouse gas emissions continue to escalate.
- Poorer nations have neither the funds nor the technology adapt or mitigate the consequences of climate change.
- Some countries bear more responsibility for climate change than others. ALL must reduce; some must do more so than others; and that means us!
- Small island nations are already experiencing rising sea levels that are jeopardizing their existence. Other countries are also seeing massive hurricanes, fires and drought. We cannot continue with “business as usual.”

And finally, as Pope Francis reminded us in his encyclical *Laudato, Si*, “*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. The Earth Charter asked us to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start, but we have not as yet developed a universal awareness needed to achieve this. We still lack the culture needed to confront the crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all.*”

As we reflect on our next steps as informed citizens here in the US, perhaps we need to ask ourselves how we can contribute to building the kind of culture that is needed to creatively deal with the crisis at hand. In this sense, perhaps our major work in the area of global climate change begins now

– **Paris 2015 and**



Beyond.

The World Humanitarian Summit

- Alandra Scott, DVUSA



In the wake of the past two decades, we have witnessed a myriad of overwhelming crises which have put international and national systems in focus. In light of these simultaneous and impending crises, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon convened the first ever [World Humanitarian Summit](#) (WHS) in Istanbul from May 23 - 24 2016. The intention was to reshape the field of humanitarian action. It was attended by 173 United Nations Member States, private sector representatives, and over 2000 people from civil society and non-governmental organizations, who, together, made an effort to “agree that we can and must do better to end conflict, alleviate suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability”

Today, people are deeply outraged at the way international and national systems have handled this global conundrum. We are witnessing the emergence of a palpable collective desire for change. And that is what the World Humanitarian Summit offered; a forum to reignite our common hopes and to share our dreams for the future of humanity and the planet. Following, I will outline the WHS [report](#) by the Secretary General and will also provide pieces of a critique by Teresa Blumenstein, from the Loretto Community and the NGO Committee on Migration, who was able to attend the Summit!

A vision for change

In his report on the WHS, Ban Ki-moon describes five key areas critical to the vision for change; (1) political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; (2) uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; (3) leave no one behind; (4) change people’s lives; (5) and to invest in humanity. Regarding political leadership, its resources should be focused on creating lasting peace and prosperity through preventing and ending conflicts and building peace.

However, in the last 10 years the number of civil wars have tripled, placing the international community in a state of constant crisis management. Over 80 per cent of humanitarian funding requested by the United Nations goes towards meeting life-saving needs in conflict settings.

Safeguard humanity

The second critical responsibility is to uphold the norms that safeguard humanity. The report reminds us that “The brutality of today’s armed conflicts and the utter lack of respect for the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law threaten to unravel 150 years of achievements and cause a regression to an era of war without limits” (13). The Summit encouraged Member States to recommit to protecting civilians and the human rights of all by respecting the rules that they have already agreed upon. We, too, must advocate for humanitarian responses using our own voices, for as St. Catherine of Siena reminds us; *“preach the truth as if you had a million voices. It is silence that kills the world.”*

Leave no one behind

The third core responsibility is the pledge to leave no one behind. It is the principal theme of the Agenda 2030 and reminds us of our responsibility to reach those in situations of conflict, disaster, vulnerability and risk first. We must continue to acknowledge and remember that we are one, what happens to one of us happens to us all. This first ever WHS is a test to identify where the international community stands in regards to the global commitment to leave no one behind. We need to continue to speak truth and protect spaces for voices to be heard. As long as people are not seen or heard they cannot be protected.

Change people’s lives

The fourth core responsibility is to bring about tangible change in people’s lives. The WHS Report emphasizes that [Agenda 2030 – Sustainable Development Goals](#), gives the international community an opening to greater and more authentic transformation, through differentiated yet common responsibilities.

This transformation must be radical. While providing relief and aid, the international community must not only look to the short term solutions, but must continue to strengthen its awareness and understanding of the root causes of inequality, conflict and injustice, therefore looking to long term solutions.

Invest in humanity

The fifth and last core responsibility is to invest in humanity. The report makes the point that our realities do not add up. Looking at our world’s combined knowledge, technology and resources, the levels of suffering we face today are totally unacceptable and preventable. We need to prioritize investing in people, and the infrastructures that will enable them to live quality lives, free from fear.

Teresa Blumenstein, a member of the Loretto Community and the NGO Committee on Migration, explained what she felt to be the most worthwhile outlook on the Summit. She describes the perspectives of young Syrian writers,

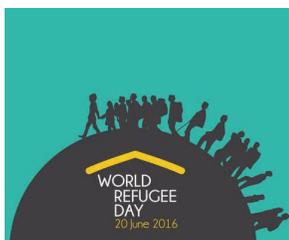


“To them, the pageantry, imagery, and luxurious nature of the event itself was unmistakably ironic. They were overwhelmed by the number of people in suits and ties and with the lack of women, especially Arab women, participating in the conference. Through their eyes, the dramatic and striking photos plastered around every corner of people on their worst days were images from the lives of people they know and love. Tote bags distributed to all Summit attendees were screen-printed with quotes from local Syrian women and bore the names of actual family members and friends of these young adults. From this standpoint, the Summit felt like a self-aggrandizing showcase of Global North compassion amid a noteworthy dearth of remedying action, The glamor, media attention, and obvious expenses incurred to organize the WHS demonstrated clear distinctions between the experience of humanitarian aid and the business of humanitarian aid.”

While taking both perspectives into consideration, it is important to mention that the consultation process leading up to the Summit was unprecedented and extensive and civil society is aware of the tremendous effort on the part of the Summit organizers. Teresa closes by declaring that while government representatives may have the rhetoric to talk about people in risk and vulnerable situations; *“the relegation of these populations to the margins of the Summit made it clear that the UN and its Member States are not yet prepared to put their money (or even their ears) where their mouths are.”*

It is up to us, members of civil society, to remind the UN and its Member States of their responsibility to place the needs of people and planet at the center of all UN processes. That is what Agenda 2030 is all about.

World Refugee Day 2016



The number of forcibly displaced people in our world today is the largest ever recorded. Sixty-five million people are refugees, internally displaced or seeking asylum, five million more than a year ago. At the end of 2015, there were 21.3 million refugees, 3.2 million people in the process of seeking asylum, and 40.8 million people internally displaced within their own countries.

The civil war in Syria alone, has led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in our lifetime, with no end in sight. So far, the war has displaced more than 11 million people. Millions more have fled ISIS's atrocities in Iraq, civil wars in Yemen and South Sudan, political violence in Burundi, and Boko Haram's rampages through Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Last year alone, U.S. humanitarian aid exceeded \$6 billion.

Here in the US, our Dominican brothers and sisters on the Iraq Coordinating Committee have worked tirelessly to remind us all of the plight of the Iraqi people, as well as that of Syrian refugees.

The Committee is calling on us to reach out in support of refugees in whatever ways we can. While there is no particular legislative request, the goal is to lift up the plight of refugees and call on legislators to support and welcome them. Our congresspersons too often hear from those opposing refugee resettlement and assistance. They need to hear our positive voices as well. Here are three ways we can help change the conversation:

1. **If possible before the July 1 recess**, contact your legislators using the message below. To send the message via email, go to the CONTACT page of the legislators' website and paste this message in the email:

While you are home for your Independence Day recess, I ask that you remember the Iraqi and Syrian refugee families who are seeking a place to call home.

As members of the wealthiest nation on Earth, we Americans—many of whom are descendants of refugees—have a responsibility to relieve the suffering of people who have lost everything: home, livelihood, and human dignity. Please find a way forward to welcome these vulnerable families who need our help. As people of faith we support your effort to welcome some of the world's most vulnerable people and we pledge to support the families who find refuge on our shores.

Please adjust the message accordingly if you send it after July 1st.

2. Sign the [#WithRefugees](#) petition on the [UN Refugee Agency's website](#).

The [#WithRefugees](#) petition will be delivered to UN headquarters in New York ahead of the UN General Assembly meeting on September 19. The petition asks governments to:

- Ensure every refugee child gets an education.
- Ensure every refugee family has somewhere safe to live.
- Ensure every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community.

DVUSA At the UN

Over this past year I have been blessed with the presence of Dominican Volunteer Alandra Scott. A graduate of Ohio Dominican University, Alandra has been an invaluable advocacy assistant. She has well represented the Dominican presence at the UN through her participation on the NGO Committees on the Status Women; Migration; Trafficking; as well as on the Working Group on Girls. Alandra will leave us in July to return to Ohio, where she hopes to attend law school and focus in public interest law!



And as Alandra leaves, I am happy to welcome Katherine (Katt) Maloney. Katt is a graduate of Molloy College, Rockville Center, NY, where she majored in Business Management and Philosophy. Her hope for the coming year is to create awareness among her own peers as well as with in our Dominican family as to how much human trafficking, child labor, and migration affect our lives, even when these events seem as if they are a world away. She also hopes to provide representation through her advocacy to those in these difficult situations so that their struggle is not in vain, and so that someday in the future, their realities are no longer considered part of "business as usual." She is looking forward to a year of learning a lot, working hard, and contributing in some small way to a more peaceful, just world.

So, thank you, Alandra, for the gift you have been to me and to the work here at the UN this year, and welcome Katt! So happy to have you on board!!



Happy Summer!!



Margaret Mayce, OP, DLC/NGO
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