



# Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary


NGO with special consultative status in the **Economic and Social Council** of the United Nations since 2013 and with the **Department of Public Information** since 2006.

## The UN Climate Conference (COP 23) - An RSHM NGO perspective

**COP 23 was the first UN climate Conference** since President Trump announced his intention to withdraw the United States from the **Paris Agreement**. Germany served as host for the Conference which took place from **6<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> November in Bonn**, with Fiji holding the Presidency and 35,000 participants from member states and Civil society attending. Thanks to the support of the Maryknoll Global Concerns (which is accredited to the UN Climate process) I was registered as an observer for the second week where I participated fully in the **“Bonn Climate Action Zone”**. It was an informative, enlightening and challenging 5 days. I participated in 28 different sessions and had wonderful opportunities to engage with people and groups, faith-based, professional and others from around the world who are working for climate justice.



At our most recent **RSHM General Chapter** we committed ourselves to “act in ways that demonstrate our respect for the earth and our responsibility for its sustainability” (GC 2013 p.3). “Sustainable Development for all” is one of the key themes that we address at the UN through our collaboration, networking and advocacy. Participation in COP 23 provided many opportunities to listen to voices that are being silenced, - the voice of the earth itself, and of many women who are on the frontline of threats from climate change and often serve as “first responders” in attempts to address humanitarian crises linked to climate change.

In this special edition of News from the UN, we highlight a selection of the many valuable sessions attended and insights gleaned.  We invite you to **explore further** Veronica Brand RSHM

### Through a Gender lens....

November 14<sup>th</sup> was **Gender Day**. I attended several sessions that featured panels of women leading initiatives from around the world; from Xai Xai Mocambique to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; from the Amazon region of Ecuador to the “first nations” of Canada, the Maori people of New Zealand and the nomadic pastoralists of northern Kenya. There was a strong focus on **identifying and addressing the main challenges that women face** in relation to climate change. These are too numerous to list but include:



- The strong, positive impact of gender-responsive climate policies on climate resilience is unrecognized
- Gender equality must be central to the concept of a “just transition”.

Good examples of initiatives from around the world highlighted the important role that women play at all levels of society in taking climate action. Grandmothers are trained to be solar engineers in India and Tanzania; the Solar suitcase (invented by a woman

*gynecologist*) provides lighting for delivery in rural settings without electricity. Off grid energy solutions are being developed by women.

**An important outcome of COP 23 was the formal endorsement of a Gender Action Plan**


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#### Some startling facts:

- **Only 1/3 of Member States’ Intended Nationally Determined Contributions to cutting carbon emissions take gender into account.**
- **Women have a smaller carbon footprint than men; their consumption habits have a lower climate impact.**
- **1.2 billion people worldwide have no access to electricity; most are rural women.**
- **Women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men from natural disasters.**


- Women are often viewed as “victims” and not as agents of climate resilience.
- Current climate adaptation and mitigation policies are gender-blind.
- Women are under-represented in policy making concerning climate issues; they have little access to climate finance.

### We are Still In

“We are Still in” was the alternative US delegation representing a coalition of cities, states, businesses, universities and faith groups present at the Climate Conference, and the largest cross section of the American economy yet assembled in pursuit of climate action. With over 2,500 signatories to **America’s Pledge**, the leaders represented 130 million Americans – more than half of the US population - and \$6.2 trillion of economic output. They asserted their promise to uphold the US commitments to reducing emissions, in spite of the Government’s reneging. If they were a country, their economy would be the third largest in the world, larger than all but two national parties to the Paris Agreement. The **“We are Still In”** network hosted 44 events in their pavilion and participated actively on panels and events throughout the Climate Conference.  [Watch the video...](#)



## The Living Forest Proposal


Whereas the Western world focuses on nature as a source of raw materials destined for human use, **Kawsak Sacha (the Living forest)** recognizes that the forest is made up of living beings which have relationships to one another. It is a proposal for living together with the natural world that grows out of the millennial knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples who inhabit the Amazonian rainforest. The economic system is seen as an ecological web; the natural world as a social world. In presenting the proposal, **Patricia Gualinga of the Sarayaku people, Ecuador**, noted that this calls for a recognition of protected areas, declaring them as zones that remain free of oil, mineral, and lumber extraction. Through our **RSHM NGO involvement in the NGO Mining Working Group** we try to defend the rights of local people and prevent the violation of human rights by extractive industries.  [Read more....](#)



## Applying the Principles of Laudato Si.



Tuvalu is a small Pacific nation of nine islands whose very existence is threatened by climate change. Speaking at the

Side Event sponsored by CIDSE, Caritas, CAFOD and Trocnaire on **A transformative Response to Climate Change : applying the Principles of Laudato Si**, the **Prime Minister of Tuvalu** highlighted the urgency of action saying “*Tuvalu is only 4 m above sea level. If nothing is done to bring the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees; the islands will go under water*”. He called on nations to heed the call of Pope Francis’ encyclical. “*If your children are predicted to go under water, what would you do? ...We must make decisions here; bring emissions down; keep the coal and fossil fuels in the ground. We can save Tuvalu, save the small islands and save the world*”.  [To read more](#) and access [helpful resources available from CAFOD](#)

*The climate negotiations are about “avoiding the unmanageable (adaptation) and managing the avoidable. (mitigation)”*

## Momentum for Change

At an event on 15<sup>th</sup> November the UNFCCC “**Momentum for Change**” **Climate Solutions** presented awards to **19 inspiring projects** from around the world that were shown to be innovative, practical initiatives by local groups to combat climate change, and that have the potential to be scaled up. These “**Lighthouse Activities**” are part of broader efforts to mobilize action and heighten ambition geared to implementing the Parish Climate Change Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. The activities awarded fell into 5 categories: **1. Women for Results**, **2. Financing for Climate-Friendly Investment** **3. ICT Solutions**, **4. Planetary Health**, and **5. Climate Neutral Now**.



 Read about the winning activities...  
 Watch [the video](#) *Fragments of hope*

## Attributing responsibility : Financing change

Humanity is on a pathway headed towards a 4 degree increase by the end of the century, with dire consequences for people and planet. We need to be on the 1.5 degree path. To achieve this, we need a sharp – and costly - reversal of the path we are on. *Who should pay for the expensive changes needed to mitigate the negative effects?*



At the first **Rio Conference on Sustainable Development in 1992**, it was recognized that countries have “*common but differentiated responsibilities*” to take action to address human-induced aspects of climate change. A panel of environmental scientists and lawyers explored some of the key issues related to climate mitigation and compensation. The director of science and policy and chief climate scientist at the **Union of Concerned Scientists (Dr. Peter Frumhoff)** explained that a simple, well-established climate model can be

used to quantify the amount of sea level rise and the increase in global surface temperatures that can be traced to **carbon emissions from the largest fossil fuel companies**. This amount is now “locked in” forever. He argued that as scientists further identify the role that climate change has played, courts of law and “the court of public opinion” needs to judge whether these corporations are paying their fair share to compensate for the damage and the adaptations that are necessary.

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## Climate Justice



**Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland** who heads a **Foundation** in her name that works to promote climate justice was a powerful speaker at several sessions. Her comment is revealing. “*The highlight of the COP for me was the clarity, urgency and humanity that grassroots and indigenous people brought to the COP. The value of their participation in Talanoas, side events and high level panels ensured the voices of frontline communities were heard by negotiators, Ministers and even Heads of State and Government*”.

 [Learn more....](#)



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