



January marked the beginning of a new year and a chance to focus on some UN events held outside of New York. As you may know, the United Nations in Geneva is the seat of the main UN Human Rights bodies and the headquarters of some of the most significant UN agencies and programmes. These include the Offices of the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, and the **High Commissioner for Refugees**, the **Human Rights Council** and the main UN agencies and programmes dealing with the issues of migrants, humanitarian affairs, health, HIV AIDS, trade and development among others.

In mid-January we had our first experience as **RSHM NGO of the UN in Geneva**. On her return from the Zambezi Region, Veronica RSHM attended a special inter-sessional meeting of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The session focused on the promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this issue of News from the UN we share some information on the main themes emerging.

➔ [Read more about it...](#)

Bridging the gap....

In this year we celebrate the **70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** as a globally agreed and universally applicable legal and ethical framework protecting the minimum requirements of a dignified life, Human rights can guide the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals while the SDGs contribute to the realization of human rights. Despite this, there is a growing awareness of serious gaps and the need to bridge them. Some of the gaps that were highlighted during the Human Rights Council meeting included.

- The **gap** between words on paper, **commitments** made by member states and their **actual implementation** on the ground.
- The **SDG accountability gap**: the lack of legally binding accountability mechanisms.
- The **gap between Geneva and New York**: between those working on human rights and those working on development
- The **gap threatening inclusion**: - minority groups, including those with disability, are often left behind in planning and implementation



“Inequality is a Human Rights issue..... Water, housing, education, health are not just commodities for sale to the few but services to which all human beings have a right”.
Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner of Human Rights

Climate Justice



In her keynote presentation to the meeting, **former Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson**, noted that climate change is global threat to human rights and a driver of inequality. She underlined the urgency and importance of a people-focused, rights-based approach to addressing climate change. The recent report prepared by the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** “*defines the boundaries of sustainability within which the SDGs must be implemented*” she noted. The world is not on track to meet the 1.5 degree Celsius goal and it is always the most marginalized and vulnerable who are most impacted by extreme weather events linked to climate change. The importance of a rights-based approach to development applies equally to all the Sustainable Development Goals.

➔ [Watch the short video](#)



The problem of wealth and inequality

Jeffrey Sachs, economist and director of the **Sustainable Solutions Network** did not mince his words about the core problem relating to inequality and human rights in the world today. “*We live in a rich world that doesn’t achieve basic human rights because the rich do not do their job... The irresponsibility of the rich is the biggest denial of human rights on the planet*”. Noting that the wealth of the 2,000 top billionaires in the world has increased 7 fold since the year 2000, while there is no overall increase in the wealth of the poorest 50% of humanity he highlighted the importance of addressing the financing issue. “*Without a breakthrough in financing we will not achieve the sustainable development goals*”. He called for the fulfillment of the **0.7% of GDP commitment** made by developed nations but seldom achieved and the need for progressive taxation systems which would provide needed resources from the 2,208 billionaires in the world to supplement efforts to achieve universal health care and basic education in the poorest countries.





“Even it up”

Reducing inequality within and between nations lies at the core of Sustainable Development Goals. **SDG 10** is one of the goals due to be reviewed at the UN High Level Political Forum in July 2019. Despite the commitment made by all UN member states to achieve a world where “no one is left behind”, achievements are slow. In January each year **OXFAM International** publishes its report on global inequality. At the heart of their startling report this year is the key assertion: “Today’s levels of inequality and poverty are a choice. We can continue to choose to reward

those who are already rich, or we can choose to fight inequality and end poverty. We can choose to build a Human Economy instead, where the richest people and corporations pay their fair share of tax, and use those valuable resources to fund public services and social protection for all. We could free billions of people from a life of poverty”. What does this stark choice ask of us in relation to our RSHM mission?

➔ [Read more](#) about the OXFAM report.

“Towards an Economy of Life”.



“**Financing for Sustainable Development: Towards an Economy of Life**” was the theme chosen for the 5th annual Symposium on the **Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organisations in International Affairs** held at the United Nations HQ on January 29th. The symposium was organized by 6 ecumenical and inter-faith

coalitions, in conjunction with the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development. Notable among the themes explored by four panels during the day was the “**Faith-based Perspectives on Economic Justice as a Moral Imperative**” and the importance of integrating human rights in financing for sustainable development”. As the **Permanent Representative of Zambia to the UN, Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe** noted in his opening remarks, faith based organisations “*speak with the heart and with conviction*”, and serve as “*the moral compass of our societies*”. Highlighting the critical importance of their work to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, he challenged them to deter the unethical conduct of Governments and the private sector, noting in particular the problems of illicit financial flows, unjust tax practices and corruption. A follow-up workshop was held on January 30th to highlight shared challenges and identify opportunities for joint advocacy and action.

➔ [Read more....](#)

Fast Facts on wealth inequality:

- **Wealth** is becoming ever more concentrated in the **hands of a few**. Last year **26 people** owned the same amount of wealth as the **3.8 billion people** in the poorer half of humanity.
- During 2018, the wealth of the world’s billionaires increased by **\$900 billion (\$2.5 billion each day)**. Meanwhile the wealth of the poorest half of humanity **fell by 11% in 2018**.
- The **ten richest people in the world** have a combined wealth valued at **\$720 billion**.
- The failure of developed countries to deliver on the promised **0.7% of GDP as ODA** means that there has been an annual shortfall of **\$200 billion**
- The super-rich are avoiding taxation on **\$7.6 trillion** worth of their assets in offshore tax havens.

RSHM News Briefs

Brazil mining disaster: Tears of Mud and Blood



January 25th marked the 129th anniversary of death of **Fr. Jean Gailhac**. From now on it will also be remembered by RSHM as the day of the deadly collapse of the tailings dam in **Brumadinho, Minas Geras, Brazil**

and the consequent “*mud tsunami*” which led to an unprecedented human and environmental disaster. As of January 31st there were 110 certified deaths and more than 250 people missing. The tragic loss of life and livelihood highlights the growing call for stronger corporate accountability, with the need for greater emphasis on the safety and quality of life of **PEOPLE** and **PLANET** rather than on maximizing corporate **PROFIT**. At the UN our RSHM NGO joins others in advocating for a UN legally binding treaty on business with respect to human rights.

➔ Read the statement issued by [RSHM Brazil](#) and the one from [Churches and Mining Network](#).

Global Network of RSHM Schools

On 25th January a group of 7 international exchange students from Brazil and Colombia visited the United Nations and then spent some time learning about our RSHM NGO at the Church Center, thanks to the initiative of **Marymount**



School of New York who are hosting them for this month. The members of the **Global Network of RSHM Schools** represented among the students were **Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria (CSCM)– Belo Horizonte (Brazil)**, **CSCM Vitória (Brazil)** and **Marymount School Medellin, (Colombia)**. We were also glad to learn firsthand about some of the issues relating to sustainable development that the girls are addressing in their schools.

Distribution:

General Council Team; Provincials/ Regionals
JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools; UN Interest Group
Translation: Maria Luisa Pinho RSHM