



Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

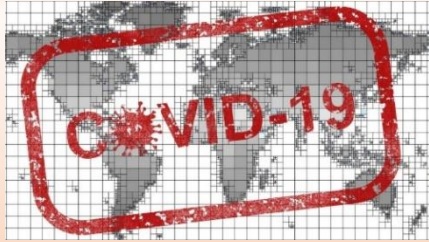
NGO with special consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2013 and with the Department of Public Information since 2006.

News from the UN # 109

RSHM at the UN

March/April 2020

As we share this March/April issue of **News from the UN** we are facing a very different world than the one we knew when we compiled the February edition. As the **Secretary General, Antonio Guterres**, noted in a virtual briefing on March 19th,



“We are facing a global health crisis unlike any other in the 75-year history of the United Nations — one that is spreading human suffering, infecting the global economy and upending people’s lives”. A month later, full or partial lockdown measures affected all but 5 countries and close to 98% of the students in the world were out of school. the Secretary General noted *“The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency... an economic crisis, a social crisis and a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis.”*

In this issue, we share some of the ways in which the pandemic has impacted the United Nations and its functioning and offer some glimpses into the ways in which the UN and its agencies and collaborators are responding to this global crisis.

 [Watch the WHO video](#)

New ways of working at the UN during COVID 19

With New York being the epicenter of the **COVID 19 pandemic**, the UN has faced challenges at all levels of its functioning at its HQ. Within a space of 5 days in mid-March, the 193 member states of the UN went from full functioning in an in-person capacity with translation into 6 languages to a *‘working from home’* mode, that respected social distancing and local state and city restrictions to minimize the spread of the virus. New protocols had to be developed and adaptations made at short notice.

★ The largest meeting of the year – the **Commission on the Status of Women** - was effectively cancelled, less than a week before 16,000 registered participants from more than 180 countries were expected to arrive from around the world. Instead, a 2 hr opening session was held and the meeting suspended to be resumed at an unknown future date.



★ The **President of the UN Security Council** for the month of April presided over online virtual meetings of the 15 members of the

Council from the Dominican Republic, with online briefings. Ways have yet to be established to circumvent the normal in-person voting procedure that is unique to the Security council.

★ For the first time ever, several **General Assembly resolutions** were passed without a vote by employing the **“silence procedure”**. Instead of lengthy negotiations, draft proposals were circulated with the proviso that if no objections were raised by a specified time and date, they would be adopted by consensus. One resolution adopted called for the United Nations system, *“to mobilize a coordinated global response to the pandemic and its adverse social, economic and financial impact on all societies”* and a second one called for international cooperation to *“ensure global access to medicines, vaccines*



and medical equipment to face COVID-19”.

Our thematic **NGO committees and other Civil Society advocacy groups** have also had to adapt quickly to using online conferencing technology such as Zoom to hold regular meetings, conduct webinars, prepare advocacy statements and collaborate on joint projects. The challenges abound, but the availability of technology enables us to work together.

★ In late March, our **RSHM JPIC / NGO** team held its first virtual meeting on Zoom in two sessions by language group of Animators. We are now planning a follow up virtual meeting in late May in which we will work with our 7 Area Animators, using translation..



Global Advocacy in a time of COVID 19.



In July 2019 our **RSHM General Chapter** identified **JPIC / UN NGO** as a priority and called us to *“Intensify, in particular, working to change unjust structures, involving others in advocacy at all levels, addressing issues of global inequality, migration and care of the Earth and communicating this involvement through our network”*. This is challenging in ‘normal’ times, but even more so at a time of “lockdown” due to **COVID 19!** One of the ways we have tried to do this is by supporting calls for action that are in harmony with our RSHM values and commitments in mission to those most in need of justice.

“We collaborate with others as we journey together - women of prophetic hope who proclaim that all have a place in our “common home.” (RSHM General Chapter 2019)

Some examples of these advocacy initiatives are:

- **Signing on to many statements** in the name of the **RSHM NGO** through civil society Networks. One example: a call to the Global Financial Institutions to suspend debt collection and expand debt relief to poorer countries as they face the social and economic impact of COVID 19.
- **Collaborating with other religious NGOs at the UN** to draft joint statements highlighting the vulnerability of those who are homeless to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- **Engaging in online campaigns**, using social media to support the Secretary General's calls for a strong response plan to COVID 19 as well as a global ceasefire.
- **Participating in online Zoom dialogues** about the impact of COVID, receiving firsthand testimony from indigenous peoples in the Amazon, women land defenders at the Canadian / US pipeline sites, and volunteers working with **migrants at the US / Mexico border**.

Some UN-led initiatives around the world to fight COVID 19



On March 25th, the UN Secretary General launched an initial \$2 billion **Global Humanitarian Response Plan** to fund the fight against **COVID-19** in the world's poorest countries. By 30 April, \$1 billion has been pledged by generous donors.

Fast facts from UNICEF:

- *The worldwide closure of schools has no historical precedent. **188 countries** have imposed countrywide closures, affecting **1.5 billion of the world's student** population.*
- *While **more than 2/3 of countries** have introduced a national distance learning platform, only **30% of low-income countries** have been able to do so.*
- ***368.5 million children across 143 countries** who normally rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition must now look to other sources.*
- ***17 million internally displaced children, 13 million child refugees in camps or crowded settlements and 1 million child asylum-seekers** are among those most likely to be excluded from social protection.*

UNDP (UN Development Programme) has been supporting vulnerable countries since the very early stages of this crisis, using “*solidarity flights*” to deliver more than two million surgical masks and providing life supporting medical equipment such as X-ray machines, infrared thermometers, infusion pumps, protective suits, gloves and hand sanitizer to countries lacking supplies. [➡ Read more...](#)

UN Women has been able to use innovative ‘block chain’ technology to ensure that cash continues to reach vulnerable **Syrian refugee women** involved in its cash-for-work programmes at during ‘lockdown’ in the Refugee camps in Jordan.

UNICEF has partnered with **GOAL Zimbabwe** to establish an innovative public health and hygiene awareness campaign reaching half a million of the most vulnerable people in Zimbabwe using specialised mobile trucks for outreach. This has proved effective in spreading preventative messages relating to COVID-19. [➡ Read more....](#)

UNESCO has launched the **Global Education Coalition** which aims to deploy distance learning solutions and support countries in scaling up good practices to reach children and youth who are most at risk of being left behind.

UN agencies working with partner organisations engaged in humanitarian work have collaborated to produce a **children's story book** in 38 languages to help young children cope with the COVID 19 crisis, - protecting themselves, their families and friends and managing difficult emotions linked to the crisis. [➡ Read more](#)



EARTH DAY 2020

22nd April marked the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. Never before has its urgency been so apparent as now when we see the link between human interference in the fragile, ecological balance of our “common home” and the emergence of the novel coronavirus. The links between climate change and the pandemic have been highlighted in a number of webinars over the month of April. With the number of extreme climate events growing exponentially, the current model of development and deforestation of natural habitats encroaching into forest space drives the emergence of novel coronaviruses. *“Not only do deforestation and desertification – caused by human activities and climate change – pose major challenges to sustainable development, they have also affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the fight against poverty and have led to the emergence of new health threats in the form of pandemics”.* [➡ Watch the short video](#)



Commemoration of Earth Day included **inter-faith prayer and reflection** and virtual participation in the first **24 hour round-the-world webinar** organized by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. This used the theme of happiness to link sustainable development experts, solutions, and stories from around the world in this unique first of the kind event.

Distribution

General Council Team; Provincials/ Regionals, JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools; UN Interest Group *Portuguese translation by Maria Luisa Pinho,*

[➡ Learn more](#)