In July the UN ECOSOC High Level Political Forum was held in full virtual format. It is one of the first major intergovernmental meetings with universal participation and broad stakeholder engagement since the onset of the COVID 19 crisis. Over the course of the 11 day period, 18 official sessions were held, with 194 Side events, 9 Special Events and 10 Exhibitions. In her concluding remarks, the President of ECOSOC Mona Juul, said: we “cannot revert to the old normal...normal was part of the problem—all of our discussions have underlined recovery as presenting a rare opportunity to shape the new normal”. Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of progress on the SDGs were presented by 47 countries, with 26 presenting for the first time, 20 for the second time, and 1 for the third time. Countries were given the option of livestreaming their presentation, sending pre-recorded presentations, or mixing these two options. During the 2020 High Level Political Forum two RSHM countries - Zambia and Mozambique - presented their Voluntary National Reviews for the first time.

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a process through which UN member states assess progress made in achieving the SDGs and the pledge to leave no one behind. The purpose is to present a snapshot of where the country stands in SDG implementation, with a view to help accelerate progress.

Introducing the 2020 Sustainable Development report, Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted that before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress toward achievement of the SDGs remained uneven and the world was not on track to meet the Goals by 2030. Some gains were visible, but the number of people suffering from food insecurity was on the rise, the natural environment continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate, and dramatic levels of inequality persisted in all regions. Change was still not happening at the speed or scale required.

With the advent of COVID 19 - the achievement of the SDG 2030 Agenda has become even more challenging, but ever more necessary with the unprecedented health, economic and social crisis threatening lives and livelihoods of millions. “At the start of this Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, I call for renewed ambition, mobilization, leadership and collective action, not just to beat COVID-19 but to recover better, together – winning the race against climate change, decisively tackling poverty and inequality, truly empowering all women and girls and creating more inclusive and equitable societies everywhere”

“COVID 19 is a wake-up call from nature. Our lives depend on a healthy planet. Let’s seize the moment and change course toward more sustainable lifestyles.”


3 billion people worldwide lack basic handwashing facilities at home, the most effective method for COVID 19 prevention.

Violence against women and girls has increased by 30% in some countries since the COVID 19 lockdown measures were introduced.

Service cancellations will lead to 100% increase in deaths from Malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa.

School closures kept 90% of all students out of school, reversing years of progress on education.

COVID 19 may result in a 6% drop in Greenhouse gas emissions in 2020. But this is still short of the 7.9% annual deduction required to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C.

Wildlife trafficking disrupts ecosystems and contributes to the spread of infectious diseases.

Remittances, an economic lifeline to many poor households in low and middle income countries, are projected to fall by $445 billion in 2020.

71 million people are being pushed into extreme poverty in 2020.

60% of countries have overcrowding in prisons, risking the spread of COVID 19.
75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Seventy-five years have passed since Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced the agony & devastation caused by atomic bombs dropped on them on August 6th and 9th 1945. The same fateful year saw the birth of the United Nations. In a video message for the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted that the birth of the UN is forever intertwined with the death rained down on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He said that Hiroshima and its people have chosen not to be characterized by calamity, but instead by “resilience, reconciliation and hope”. He noted that the survivors, known as hibakusha, are “unmatched advocates for nuclear disarmament” who have turned their tragedy into “a rallying voice for the safety and well-being of all humanity”. Although the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons remains elusive, 75 years later, efforts to work towards the full ratification and entry into force of both the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty are ongoing. Watch the video

International Day of Indigenous Peoples

COVID-19 presents a serious threat to the health and survival of indigenous peoples, with mortality rates often double that of the general population. On August 10th a Commemoration of the International Day of Indigenous Peoples was held virtually, focused on the theme “Indigenous Peoples’ Resilience”. As the panel of indigenous representatives from 5 continents highlighted, indigenous peoples continue to face numerous challenges that are exacerbated under COVID. Notable among these are the lack of potable drinking water, inadequate medical services, food insecurity, land grabbing and encroachment on their territories as well as stigma and discrimination. However, from the Artic North to the rainforests of the Amazon and Central Africa, from remote Asian villages to the Namib desert, indigenous peoples are seeking their own solutions to curbing the pandemic, drawing on traditional knowledge and practices and challenging discriminatory policies. Watch the short video

Amazoniza-Te Campaign.

The Amazon and its people are continually targeted for exploration without limits, something that puts the entire life of the territory at risk, with grave consequences for the planet as a whole. With the advance of the COVID 19, the situation has become even more alarming. Deforestation, fires, land grabbing and mining, have actually been intensified. On July 27th, the Amazoniza-te Campaign was launched by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) in partnership with REPAM and other ecclesial and civil society organizations. It is designed to raise awareness among the Brazilian population and heighten international public awareness about the danger to which life in the Amazon, its territories, its populations, is being exposed. The campaign focuses on three areas: a) the vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities to contamination b) acceleration of the destruction of the Biome and c) systematic violation of environmental protection legislation with a move to deregulation. As Bishop Erwin Krautler noted...the “Amazoniza-te Campaign” is an invitation, a call and an opportunity to live solidarity with the forest and with the peoples of the region, and to mobilize people in the care and defense of life. Read more

For RSHM Collaborators/ Extended Family

The RSHM JPIC NGO international team, after a series of zoom meetings, decided to give priority to Care for the Earth (our Common Home) for the next few months. The Season of Creation, from 1st September to October 4th, will be the focus, using material from the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM). We are invited to work with parish groups, school groups and ecumenical groups and others. All of you who arrange an event or activity during this time are encouraged to register the event with GCCM, who will put it on their map – and then send photos, so they can show all that is happening throughout the world. Learn more

TEN years : Recognition of the human right to water.

2020 marks the tenth year since the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution 64/292, which explicitly recognized the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation. Several events during the HLPF celebrated this, highlighting the even greater urgency given to the issue by the centrality of access to water as a means of addressing and mitigating the global health pandemic. “Wash your hands” is not equally available to all! Sanitation and Water for all is a global partnership of member states, civil society, UN agencies and the private sector. It’s aim is to coordinate high level action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively. Read the call to action. Watch the short video...

Distribution

Institute Leadership Team; Provincials/ Regionals, JPIC Animators; Global Network of RSHM Schools; UN Interest Group
Translation by Maria Luisa Pinho, RSHM