



The Carmelite NGO: Our United Nations Ministry

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Chief Administrative Officer of the Carmelite NGO



A meeting of our NGO Coordinating Committee and Staff (Fatima, Portugal, 2018)

The Carmelite NGO came into existence in 2001 as a vehicle to coordinate and promote the Carmelite's commitment to justice, to work in solidarity with like-minded organizations and individuals, and to connect with the United Nations and its global efforts to promote equitable and sustainable development.

For those who may not know, "NGO" stands for Non-Governmental Organization. Often, NGOs are described as "civil society organizations." The precise meaning and usage of the term can vary, but is generally meant to describe non-profit organizations that are typically involved in service or humanitarian efforts. In the U.S., we would usually describe them as non-profit organizations.

The Carmelite NGO's top priorities include poverty, climate change, human trafficking, and freedom of belief and cross-faith solidarity. We have been particularly outspoken in our endorsement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015-2030), and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Our concerns for these issues of justice are expressed in three primary ways: Encounter/Solidarity, Education/Advocacy, and Engagement with the United Nations.

First, we have members of our Carmelite family—including active members of our NGO—across the globe working with the poor and others in need. Pope Francis has encouraged all of us to build and sustain a "culture of encounter"—to know and to be in solidarity with those on the margins of society. In places around the world we have sought to create and sustain this culture of encounter.

Another way we have engaged with our priority issues is by our education and advocacy. We publish this quarterly bulletin, *CarmeNGO*, as well as our *One Page* e-newsletters to inform our colleagues and supporters of our work and the pressing issues with which we are engaged. We have created a curriculum for secondary school students and an adult study guide that teach *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment.

A good example of our work that is about both encounter and education is what Fr. Hariawan Adji, O.Carm., is doing in Indonesia. He wrote a special report on religious pluralism in that country and organized a conference there on freedom of belief. He has also been involved in the creation of "study houses," centers of learning where poor Christians and Muslim students can gather for learning, sharing and enrichment.

Finally, our NGO works within the United Nations system, as well as in coalition with other UN-engaged NGOs. I will refer to this essential aspect of our work as our United Nations Ministry and it is the focus of the remainder of this article.

While being officially headquartered in New Orleans and led by Sr. Jane Remson, O.Carm., our NGO, for most of its history, has maintained either a full-time or part-time presence in New York, which has kept us close to the United Nations and connected to other civil society organizations.

Our association with the United Nations includes the following:

- We have special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.
- We also have an affiliation with the Department of Global Communications (formerly known as the Department of Public Information).
- We have observer status within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- We are accredited to the UN Environment Program and the UN Environment Assembly.m

Because of our affiliations with the above UN organizations, we are able to attend various conferences that they organize, typically on an annual basis.

ECOSOC has two major commissions with which we have engaged: The Commission on Social Development and The Commission on the Status of Women. They each host a major gathering at UN Headquarters in New York each year. While the Commissions themselves meet (each for nearly two weeks), there are numerous “side events” taking place. These side events are organized by NGO’s, UN offices, and member States to educate and activate interested parties on key issues like poverty, homelessness, human trafficking, the exploitation of women, and other pressing global social problems. Since our founding, the Carmelite NGO has had a presence at most of these annual gatherings.

Our environmental work, particularly on climate change, has also brought us to UN meetings. Fr. Eduardo Agosta Scarel, O.Carm., is a member of our Executive Committee, as well as a climate scientist. (He has been one of Pope Francis’ advisors on climate change). Fr. Eduardo has attended several UN climate change conferences and has even shared his research at these gatherings.

The Carmelite NGO has also been represented at other UN-sponsored gatherings, such as Financing for Development and UN-Habitat meetings. (Financing for Development is a process within the UN that promotes global financing in the service of sustainable development. UN-Habitat is about the promotion of

socially and environmentally sustainable cities and communities.)

Representatives of our NGO—staff, interns, or members—have attended not only these major gatherings noted above, but many other conferences, seminars, and briefings at the United Nations, including meetings of the Security Council and General Assembly.

Having a presence at the United Nations in New York—and occasionally elsewhere like UN facilities in Geneva and Nairobi—helps us to stay informed of the important work of the global community, which includes the work of member States, civil society organizations like ours, and programs of the UN. In turn, our presence and engagement informs these entities of our values, commitments and work.

The Carmelite NGO is just one of many Catholic NGOs with UN affiliations. In fact, many of them come together in an informal group called Religious at the UN (RUN). Representatives of these Catholic NGOs meet monthly to share information and to network and



The four action areas of the Carmelite NGO

collaborate. Our presence at the UN and affiliations with various UN programs is very noticeable and important. Individually and collectively we are doing our best to put into practice vital aspects of Catholic Social Teaching.

Another coalition of civil society organizations with which we have been involved is the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons (CSTIP). This group of several dozen organizations—Catholic, other religious, and secular—meets monthly to share information and to collaborate on efforts to combat modern slavery and human trafficking.

Our United Nations Ministry is an essential part of the Carmelite NGO mission. It provides a portal to the international solidarity that we seek to build and that is necessary if we are to effectively take collective action to respond to the cries of the poor and the cries of the earth.

I conclude with these words of Pope Francis as he addressed the participants in the Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs in December, 2017:

I express my deep appreciation for your efforts to bring the light of the Gospel to the various peripheries of our world, in order to defend human dignity, to promote the integral development of peoples, and to meet the material and spiritual needs of so many members of our human family. I encourage you to work always in a spirit of communion and cooperation with other Catholic NGOs and with the representatives of the Holy See, as an expression of the Church's commitment to the building of a more just and fraternal world.

We invite you to visit our website: www.carmelitenngo.org. There you can find valuable resources and information about our projects. The website can be viewed in either English or Spanish.

We also invite you to follow us on...

Facebook: [facebook.com/TheCarmeliteNGO](https://www.facebook.com/TheCarmeliteNGO)

Twitter: [@CarmeliteNGO](https://twitter.com/CarmeliteNGO)

THE UNITED NATIONS AS A MINISTRY

By Sr. Jane Remson O.Carm.

“With zeal am I zealous for the Lord God of hosts.” The Carmelite NGO was created in 2001 as a response to the challenge put forth by this motto. The Carmelite NGO assists the men and women of the Carmelite Family in advocating on important global issues, such as; education, freedom of belief, human rights, and sustainable development.

The goal of the Carmelite NGO is to actively participate in creating a more peaceful, just and loving world by advocating and caring for the spiritual and human needs of the human family and the environment. To accomplish this, the Carmelite NGO has chosen to actively participate at all levels of decision-making that affect the world. A way to accomplish this is by affiliating with the United Nations.

Why affiliate with the United Nations?

- The United Nations offers a structure for us to put faith into action.
- The United Nations is the only global forum open to all peoples to work for consensus standards for a more just, humane, and peaceful world.
- The United Nations is the only world body where structural injustices can be addressed, exposed and at least in part alleviated.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* states, the 'common good' is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social

groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”

In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis gives us a blueprint on how to care for the common good. He writes in LS #157, “Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable right ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. Outstanding among those groups is the family, as the basic cell of society. Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obligated to defend and promote the common good.”

The Carmelite NGO addresses the common good by its support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Pope Francis announced his support for the SDGs during his speech to the General



Fr. Eduardo Agosta Scarel O.Carm. and Renato Rallo were participating in COP 23 in Bonn in 2017.

Assembly of the United Nations in 2015. The Carmelite NGO works to achieve all 17 SDGs, but has a special focus on Goals #13 and #16. Goal #13 states that climate action demands us to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Goal #16, promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. (<https://www.globalgoals.org>).

Through its participation in the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Carmelite NGO has become a credible authority on climate change. What is COP? The COP is the supreme decision making body of the Convention (the Convention is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of which the Carmelite NGO is affiliated). All States that are Parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, at which they review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP adopts and makes decisions necessary to promote the

effective implementation of the Convention, including institutional and administrative arrangements.

Friar Eduardo Agosta Scarel, O.Carm., a member of the Coordinating Team of the Carmelite NGO, works in close association with the Vatican and UNFCCC on climate change. Friar Scarel has written articles on climate change and traveled to Asia and the United States giving educational lectures on climate change. In addition, the Carmelite NGO has produced a curriculum for secondary schools using *Laudato Si*, a Study Guide to accompany the encyclical and a video on the effects of sea level rise with a focus on Louisiana and Indonesia.

The Carmelite NGO believes:

- Climate change is affected by human behavior.
- Climate change is more than an environmental concern; it is an issue of justice.
- Efforts must be made to help people living in poverty adapt to the consequences of climate change.
- Climate change is putting creation under threat and it is everyone's responsibility to protect the environment because the earth is indeed a precious gift of the Creator.

To address SDG #16, the Carmelite NGO networks with other NGOs, towards the eradication of poverty, achieving sustained economic growth, and promoting sustainable development.



Sr. Annah Theresa Nyadombo, HOLMC with the participants of AGAPE LEONA

The Carmelite NGO abides by the Right to Food as stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself, and of one's family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care."

The right to universal and sustainable food security includes not only the right to be free from hunger, but also the right to a safe and healthy environment in which food can be produced and consumed.

The Carmelite NGO supports the Right to Personal Security as demonstrated by its support of the AGAPE LEONA Program, an anti-trafficking program in

Zimbabwe that works with victims of trafficking by education and job training.

The Carmelite NGO in Indonesia operates programs to prevent human trafficking by intercepting would be victims of trafficking and providing them with shelter and an education.



The young people in the House of Mercy Pontianak, Indonesia

In keeping with SDG #16 the Carmelite NGO maintains that sustainable development for our future cannot be obtained without including those who will come after us. Pope Francis recognizes this in LS#159, "The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us."

LS #246, "At the conclusion of this lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling, I propose that we offer two prayers. The first we can share with all who believe in God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus."

As Carmelites we take into the depths of our being the inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus with enthusiasm – with zeal am I zealous for the Lord God of hosts!

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