



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.

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RSHM at the UN

June 2020

“Nature is sending us a message!” In a recent message, the head of UN Environment, Inger Andersen, said that humans are placing too many pressures on the natural world with damaging consequences resulting. She warned that if we fail to heed the call to take care of the planet, we are increasingly putting at risk not only our own future, but that of future generations. As the COVID 19 pandemic continued to highlight our global vulnerability during the month of June, at least 6 international Days have drawn our attention to issues relating to the environment and important linkages to human health and wellbeing. This is a theme that is very much in line with the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si.* to integral ecology. He reminds us that *“Every intervention in nature can have consequences which are not immediately evident, and that certain ways of exploiting resources prove costly in terms of degradation which ultimately reaches the ocean bed itself.”* (*Laudato Si* No. 41) In this issue of News from the UN, we explore some of those themes highlighted in recent events, webinars and virtual UN meetings that resound with Pope Francis’ call to care for our common home.

World Environment Day

The web of life sustains us, and our wellbeing depends on nature and how we face its challenges. COVID 19 has been a wake up call that nature is in crisis! The theme of the **World Environment Day 2020** commemoration on 5th June was **“Time for Nature”**. Hosted virtually by Colombia and Germany, the Commemorative event highlighted the importance of raising global awareness of the need to protect the fragile balance of our planet’s ecosystem and encouraging the advocacy needed for transformative action.



message for the day, transformative actions are urgently required to protect the environment and human rights, and address the drivers of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, toxic pollution and zoonotic diseases. *“The global COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the direct and severe impacts of environmental degradation on the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including rights to life, health, food, water and culture....We need to address the root causes of these inter-related environmental disasters and seize this opportunity to achieve a just and sustainable future. Treating the symptoms of the crisis – with closed borders, lockdowns and hopefully a vaccine soon – is necessary, but a preventive approach would save millions of lives and trillions of dollars”.*

The latest **UN report on Biodiversity loss** tells us that we are on the cusp of losing one million of the 7.6 million species that inhabit the planet over the course of the next few decades, with humans being responsible for extinction rates up to 1,000 times greater than what would be expected without the influence of human behavior. As the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David Boyd, said in his

➡ Watch the [short video](#)

➡ Take the [World Environment Day Quiz](#)

World Ocean Day



71% of our planet. The oceans provide livelihood and food to millions of people around the world. They also provide key services like regulating our climate and acting as a carbon sink by absorbing approximately 30% of the carbon dioxide emissions that humans produce. Oceans are the home of biodiversity ranging from microbes to marine mammals that form a wide variety of ecosystems.

More than **1,500 pledges or voluntary commitments** have been made following the first Ocean Conference in 2017. These cover such areas as coral reefs, mangroves, addressing marine pollution, sustainable fisheries and implementing international law as reflected in the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**. With the postponement of the UN Ocean Conference due to have taken place in Lisbon, Portugal in early June this year, the UN is making efforts to keep up the global momentum of science-based initiatives, voluntary pledges and actions to protect the ocean.

Did you know that

- Oceans cover more than two-thirds of the earth’s surface; containing **97% of the planet’s water** and **80% of planet earth’s living organisms**.
- Around **90% of the energy** from warming of the Earth system has been stored in the ocean over recent decades.
- Oceans serve as the world’s largest source of protein, with **more than 3 billion people** depending on them for their primary source of protein
- Without significant changes, **more than half** of the world’s marine species may stand on the brink of extinction by the year 2100
- **Ocean plants** produce almost half of the oxygen we breathe
- **Only 1%** of the world ocean and adjacent seas are protected areas as compared to **12%** of land surface.

➡ Watch the [short video](#) and ➡ [another](#).

The growing problem of marine waste and the protection of the open seas represent particular challenges. What is needed, in effect, is an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called “global commons”. (Laudato Si No. 174)



Justice Coalition of Religious (JCoR).



Justice
Coalition of
Religious

COVID-19 Response Hub

The **Justice Coalition of Religious** is made up of **19 religious NGOs with a presence at the UN in NY.**

Between us we represent more than **200 religious congregations** based in more than 170 countries. The Coalition was started in order to build capacity and strengthen collaborative advocacy of religious at the UN in NY and in countries around the world. By enabling women and men religious, inspired by their congregational **charisms, mission and Catholic Social Teaching**, to work more effectively to address the root causes of unsustainable development and change unjust structures.

➔ Visit the [JCoR website](#)

Over these last two years, some basic structures have been developed in **India and Latin America**, some training sessions have been run and joint efforts launched at country and regional level as well as here in New York. With the postponement of in-person training sessions that had been scheduled during these months, efforts have been placed on strengthening our collaborative work here in NY as well as developing resources, actions and initiatives that we can share on the **JCoR** website and through social media. With the enforced global lockdown, JCoR has provided a means for sharing the inspiring work done by religious around the world to respond to emerging local needs during the pandemic in a spirit of solidarity. ➔ [Read more](#) about **JCoR** and our collaborative **global response to COVID 19**.

Mining Working Group :

Since January 2020, the **NGO Mining Working group** has set up two regionally focused working groups – on the **Amazon** and **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. – covering two geographic regions where indigenous populations are particularly at risk and impacted by the mining and extractive industries in their areas. Under the **UN Guiding Principle for Business and Human Rights**, all business actors, including institutional investors, have a responsibility to respect human rights. Yet strong evidence from the ground reveals how these principles are violated. Legal and illegal miners and loggers have invaded the people’s territories, bringing COVID infection, destroying livelihoods and threatening the integrity of the biome as well as the people’s relationship to it as guardians of the forest. The aim of our work is to bring the voices and experience of the local people into the UN dialogue and to advocate for more just conditions that protect the human rights lives and livelihoods of the indigenous peoples and support their important role in environmental stewardship. During these months we have worked closely with **REPAM** (the network of bishops of the 9 countries of the Amazon Region) who had planned to bring a delegation to the **Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN** in April. Instead, we have heard testimony virtually of people from Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and Venezuela. A formal statement has been issued and letters sent to the Member states concerned, voicing concerns and calling for action.



RSHM NGO Briefs

★ Before the COVID pandemic changed all our plans, the **RSHM JPIC NGO international team**



consisting of the JPIC Coordinator, Province (Area) Animators, the General Council Liaison person, and the UN NGO Representative were due to meet in Lisbon, Portugal for the first week of June 2020. The meeting had been planned to coincide with the second Oceans Conference, which had been convened by the UN to review and accelerate progress in addressing SDG 14. Our RSHM sisters in Lisbon were preparing to host us and plans were being made for interaction with representatives of our RSHM schools and communities throughout Portugal. Regrettably, the COVID pandemic intervened, closing borders, interrupting travel and postponing the UN Conference. To maintain our momentum in addressing the calls of our 2019 RSHM General Chapter, we decided to hold virtual meetings in the interim period. During the months of May and June we held two virtual meetings on Zoom, overcoming challenges of distance, language and technological variability.

★ **“Amazonia needs you”** is the slogan of the solidarity campaign jointly promoted by the **Conference of Religious of Brazil**, together with **REPAM**, the Bishops of the 9 countries of the Amazon and the **Pontifical Missionary Society**. The campaign involves sharing resources in a spirit of solidarity with the people of the Amazon during this time of COVID. On June 24th, a small inter-congregational group of three sisters was missioned to the remote area of **Alto Solimões** in the Northern Amazon Region. We are delighted that our **Sr. Delva Oliveira RSHM**, a nurse, is one of them.

➔ Watch the [short video](#)



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