



### 5 years after the Paris Agreement.

12<sup>th</sup> December 2020 marked the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. To highlight the importance of the day, the UN partnered with France, UK (the COP 25 and COP26 Presidencies) to host the virtual **2020 Climate Ambition Summit**. A total of 70 Heads of State and Government along with local government and major business leaders, made pledges, setting out stronger commitments under at least one of the three pillars of the Paris Agreement: **mitigation, adaptation and finance**. Some countries promised ambitious dates to reach net zero carbon emissions: e.g. Finland by 2035, Austria by 2040 and the Holy See by 2050



while Pakistan committed to no more new coal-fired plants. Financial commitments to assist in adaptation of poorer countries were generally lacking.

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres challenged G20 leaders noting that their COVID recovery packages included spending 50% more on fossil fuel and CO2 intensive sectors than on low CO2 and renewable energy. *“The trillions of dollars needed for COVID recovery is money that we are borrowing from future generations. This is a moral test. We cannot use these resources to lock in policies that burden future generations with a mountain of debt on a broken planet.”*

➔ Read [more about it...](#) ➔ Watch [the short video](#)

### Health needs and climate change: Key Synergies.



Although the urgency of responding to the COVID pandemic has been the focus of global attention in 2020, the **World Health Organization** has made it clear that both health and climate action are intimately interlinked and one cannot displace the importance of the other. In a Manifesto published

earlier in 2020, WHO spelled out 6 prescriptions for a healthy and green COVID recovery. These ranged from protecting and preserving nature as the fundamental source of human health, to investing in water, sanitation and basic health services and stopping the use of tax-payers money to fund pollution. In a recent Webinar, the **WHO and UN Environment** combined forces to explore synergies between addressing Health (SDG 3) and climate change (SDG 13) in charting a sustainable path forward. ➔ Watch [the short video](#).

#### Did you know that....

- *Approximately 1.8 billion people are at heightened risk of COVID-19 and other diseases because they either use or work in health care facilities that lack basic water services,*
- *Water, sanitation and hygiene in health facilities produce a 50% return on investment with many health co-benefits.*
- *The single most important health agreement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.*
- *WHO estimates that 9 out of every 10 people globally breathe air containing high levels of pollutants and about 7 million deaths a year are attributable to exposure to air pollution.*
- *Burning fossil fuels is accountable for 2/3 of air pollution.*
- *Governments spend \$400 billion of taxpayers money each year in subsidizing the use of fossil fuels.*
- *The wealthiest 1 % of individuals worldwide emit 100 times as much carbon dioxide each year as the poorest 50%.*

### Human Rights and the UPR – USA

The **Universal Periodic Review** is a unique review mechanism of the **UN Human Rights Council** aimed at improving the implementation of human rights in each of the member states of the United Nations. It is a peer-review that takes place in Geneva every four years. NGOs are invited to make written submissions. For the first time in 2019 our **RSHM NGO** worked with our two RSHM JPIC Animators in the USA and with 9 other religious NGOs at the UN in preparing a joint written submission, highlighting human rights issues of concern in the USA – focusing on immigration, weakening of environmental protection and gender equality.



On November 9<sup>th</sup>, a date that was delayed by 6 months because of COVID, the USA presented a summary of their quadrennial written report to the Human Rights Council and received critical feedback from **120 UN member states** who made more than 300 recommendations. These covered domestic issues such as the death penalty, systemic racism, xenophobia

and use of force by police and immigration reform. Many recommendations called on the USA to re-engage with the international community by rejoining the Human Rights Council and the Paris Climate Agreement and by ratifying crucial international agreements. ➔ [Read more....](#)



## Human Rights, Justice, and Toxic Waste



*Human rights underlie all of our efforts to defend our right to a healthy planet. One of the often-unacknowledged threats to a healthy environment is **toxic waste**. It is 25 years since the United Nations established the mandate of the **Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights**. The independent expert is appointed to consult widely, make country visits, prepare annual reports to the **Human Rights Council** and the **UN General Assembly** on the actions being taken. This mandate has kept this issue before the consciousness of member states, as the need for legally binding agreements covering Businesses becomes ever more urgent.*

**November 5<sup>th</sup>** marked the fifth anniversary of the collapse of the **Fundão Dam in Mariana, Brazil**, and the release of 60 million cubic metres of iron ore tailings and toxic sludge into waterways, eventually travelling 663 km down the **Rio Doce** to the Atlantic Ocean. It was quickly recognized as the largest environmental disaster in Brazil's history, and seen by many human rights groups and others as an environmental crime. Although the number of human casualties was 19, it had untold environmental, social and economic impacts. Communities, and plantations were swallowed up by the mud and the Rio Doce river basin remains largely dead, five years later. As legal challenges drag on, many families and communities still await compensation. This year commemorations were held, and webinars, prayer vigils and protests highlighted the need for justice. The outgoing Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights gave testimony in several virtual commemorations and calls for action. ➡ [Read more.....](#)

Meanwhile in **South African courts** a continent away, a class action lawsuit was brought in November 2020 by a group of **Zambian women and children** against **Anglo American Corporation** for alleged lead poisoning suffered over generations as a result of untreated toxic pollution of the environment. Anglo American operated the lead mine in **Kabwe, Zambia** for 75 years. A recent study have shown that some young children have 20 times the level of lead pollution in their blood than the safety threshold in the United States. ➡ Watch the [short video](#) - **Children of Kabwe**



### RSHM NGO News Briefs

#### Young JPIC Social Forum Brazil

On 19 November, five student delegates representing the **5 schools in SAGRADO**, the **Network of RSHM schools in Brazil** came together on a virtual panel, moderated by the Director of **SOR**, (Religious Studies Department) of **SCM School, Belo Horizonte**. The purpose of the annual **Young JPIC Social Forum** is to awaken in the students the consciousness of ways in which they can concretely address social problems, expressing the values of human dignity, solidarity and justice in daily life.



During the preceding weeks, teachers had worked with the students in the 5 schools to choose the theme (Human Rights), explore it in depth, and come up with concrete actions students could take to promote implementation of human rights. **Srs. Mary Jo McElroy (RSHM International JPIC Coordinator)** and **Veronica Brand (RSHM NGO Representative)** were invited to participate in the panel which was broadcast on Youtube for some 500 students from the 5 schools. The student delegates were articulate and passionate as they highlighted concrete ways in which they could help to work for a more just society and world where human rights were respected.

#### Distribution

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

#### Human Rights week – Our Lady of the Rosary School (Porto, Portugal)



On December 10, the world celebrated **International Human Rights Day**, renewing the commitment to build a more just and equal human society. The COVID pandemic has shed new light on some of

our basic human rights, and launched many new challenges. As in previous years, the RSHM school in Porto organized a **Human Rights Week**, adopting the theme proposed by the United Nations - **"Recover Better - Stand Up for Human Rights"**. Four themes were proposed for reflection: 1. the fight against inequalities, 2. the end of discrimination, 3. the promotion of sustainable development and 4. the stimulation of civic participation and solidarity.

Building on their prior engagement with Amnesty International, Portugal, the entire educational community of Our Lady of the Rosary school was encouraged to participate in the **Global Letter writing campaign "Marathon for Human Rights – Signatures that change Lives!"** Parents, Families, Students (8th grade and above), Teachers, Collaborators, SCM Sisters and people linked to the **"Raiz"** community project were invited to write and submit letters through the school's portal concerning 8 specific human rights cases in different countries. ➡ [Read more...](#)from the school.