

Collaborative Presence: Religious NGOs at the UN

2020 UN Orientation for New Representatives of Religious NGOs

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Introduction

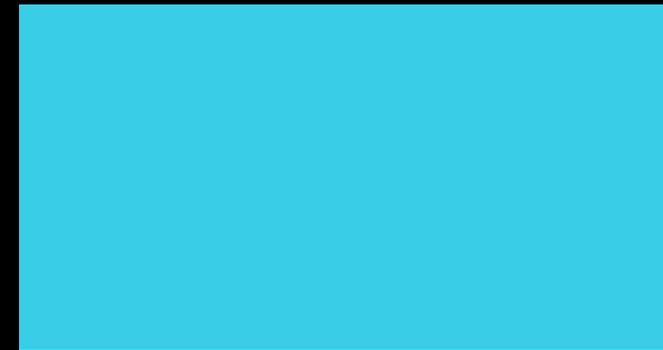
Presence by Numbers:

- Over 30 NGOs representing congregations of Catholic women and men Religious accredited with ECOSOC and/or DGC
- These 30 NGOs representing over 200 congregations
- Collectively present at the UN for over 20 years

Important contributions:

- Bring **credibility** by providing insights from members' work ministering to the poorest and most vulnerable populations “on the ground”
- Bring **impartiality** as most are present in many nations and have no national identity
- Bring **moral voice** as faith-based groups known for a life of dedication to human dignity of all and care of the natural environment
- Bring **stability and cohesion** to multilateral process as groups who have had constitutions longer and maintain positions and representatives at the UN longer than many nations

How Religious NGOs Work at the UN



Three Approaches to Systemic Change:

- Get “*in* the way”
- Get “*out of* the way”
- Model a “*new* way”

Getting “*IN* the Way”

Occupying space in places of power on behalf of those who can't be present in order to infuse the conversation with the perspectives, experiences, and needs that would otherwise be absent.

We do this by:

- Speaking on the floor of the UN (literally termed an "intervention")
- Participation in our own countries' political systems (via voting, lobbying, etc.)
- Participating in protests and demonstrations

Getting “*OUT OF* the Way”

Creating space within places of power for those who face the greatest barriers to the occupation of that space so that they can assert their own voices, perspectives, and experiences

- Organizing events and opportunities for marginalized individuals to speak at the UN
- Collecting testimonies of marginalized individuals and including them in written statements and reports
- Sharing statements of marginalized groups with our networks via social media, newsletters, or other platforms available to us

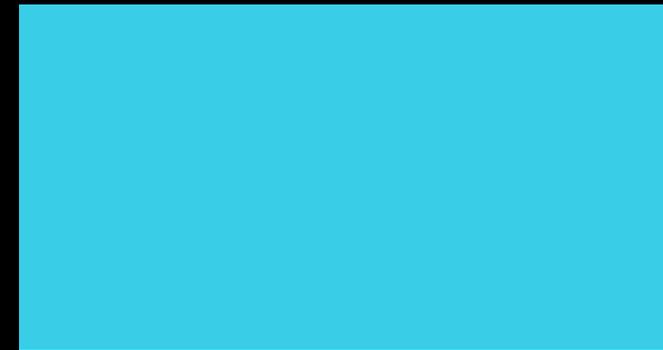
Modeling a “*NEW* Way”

Continually evaluating our role in unjust systems and modifying our behavior to lessen the burden our actions place on others’ ability to access their basic needs.

This includes assessing:

- What we buy, wear, and eat
- How we travel
- Where we save or invest our money
- **How well we work with others**

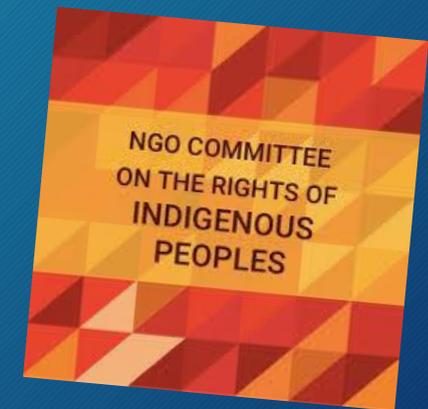
Religious NGO Leadership in Collaboration



RUN (Religious at the UN)

- Informal, open-ended group open to all UN representatives of Catholic congregations of women and men Religious
- Meets first Wednesday of every month (normally at varying locations in Midtown East, currently via Zoom)
- Provides:
 - spiritual fellowship
 - mentorship in the UN ministry
 - co-learning opportunities
 - orientation for newly arriving representatives
 - “home base” for idea-sharing and networking within the UN NGO community

RUN Members' Leadership & Participation



Other Coalitions



120 organizations promoting awareness of humanity's shared destiny throughout the full scope of the UN's work



>80 NGOs and Trade Unions from all parts of the world; advocate with ILO and other UN mechanisms for all forms of social protection



19 NGOs representing Religious congregations at the UN; formally participating in governance of a project to enhance collaboration and communication among their congregations at the UN and at the grassroots

Benefits of Collaboration

Response to “shrinking space” for civil society

- More voices integrated into shorter time allowances and tighter word count limits
- Better government and UN reception of joint statements and reports
- More comprehensive and impactful data sets
- Maximized physical presence via sharing spare UN grounds passes among organizations

Sharing costs & workload

- Work and meeting spaces
- Event and meeting expenses
- Planning tasks associated with event sponsorship
- Research for and drafting of written statements
- Communication materials
- Accommodations at conferences outside NYC

Co-teaching and co-learning

- Broad skill, information, and expertise sharing
- Access and contribution to cross-organization “community memory” as well as institutional memories (essential to long-term effectiveness in a rapidly changing work environment)
- Support in addressing our knowledge gaps and “blind spots” at intersections of our priority issues with our partners’ priority issues

Individual freedom to maximize collective impact

Our relationships with UN NGO colleagues:

- assure us that deep contribution in one or two issue areas is a contribution to *all* issue areas
- free each of us from feeling we must “do it all” and becoming too overextended to have impact in any area
- help us be strategic in selection of area(s) in which to build personal expertise
- allow us to stay informed on a broad array of issues even as we “specialize”



*When spider webs unite,
they can tie up a lion.*

-Ethiopian proverb