



# Franciscans International

A voice at the United Nations

organization with General Consultative Status. FI's vision is a global community in which the dignity of every person is respected, resources are shared equitably, the environment is sustained, and nations and peoples live in peace. FI brings our large and diverse Franciscan family together around a common cause and is the only common project of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, which appoints FI's International Board of Directors. Today, much as St. Francis did in his Letter to the *Rulers of the Peoples*, FI encourages national and international "civil authorities to be mindful of the Gospel's values" in policy-making.

FI is built around the collaboration with its partners at the grassroots who experience human rights violations every day. To support them, FI organizes capacity-building workshops at national, regional and international levels. It also encourages and enables its grassroots partners to build partnerships at the national level, with the view of strengthening national lobbying.

**Sandra Ascencio OFS**, who serves as the JPIC Coordinator from El Salvador, is one such partner. In July 2018 Sandra participated in the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York City. Previously, she had spoken at Ecumenical Advocacy Days in 2013, when she was interviewed by Jennifer Lentfer of Oxfam (excerpts below).

**Lentfer:** *What will you remember most from your time in the US and Canada?*

**Ascencio:** When I shared my experiences with the faith-based community at Ecumenical Advocacy Days [in Washington, DC] I saw how people got inspired and how they demonstrated their solidarity with us. It's important to transmit those emotions into the work. For us, promoting everybody's well-being remains the center of faith. Only that way, people can keep in mind that the most important things for humans to survive are water, air, and land.

**Lentfer:** *So many people who have been fighting to protect their communities in El Salvador have been threatened, and even killed. Despite these risks, what drives you to continue?*

**Ascencio:** A total commitment. My work is primarily spiritual and by conviction. God gives us each abilities to use according to our faith. When I die, I don't want to go [up] there and think I didn't do anything. I'm preparing my two children to know that my work is for God. They also need to learn the values of service and discernment. I tell them that if something happens to me, then they know that it was worthwhile. But it's better not to think of those things otherwise you could lose your energy and motivation.

**Lentfer:** *What gives you hope for the future?*

**Ascencio:** I think that every person is good, in their essence. My work is not because I'm a lawyer or a scientist, but because I believe in solidarity and harmony as the principles of life. We all are on a journey to encounter our common well-being.

