



Update: June 2017

Indigenous Peoples and Pacific Islanders Speak about the Threat Posed by Climate Change



In our May issue, we reported on the visit of a group of Amazonian indigenous peoples to the UN's sixteenth Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In the second half of this Forum, UNANIMA had the privilege of co-sponsoring two more events highlighting indigenous perspectives on development, the challenges they face, and the solutions they have to offer.

The first event was entitled "Climate-Induced Displacement: Realities, Rights, and Responses." It featured a panel of speakers, including a representative of the UN

Environmental Program, a representative of the government of Tuvalu, an environment and human rights expert from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and indigenous persons from North America and Brazil. The panel was moderated by UNANIMA's Executive Assistant, Teresa Blumenstein as part of her leadership role on the NGO Committee on Migration's Subcommittee on Climate-Induced Displacement. (Pictured above, from left: Sunema Pie Simati, Permanent Mission of Tuvalu to the UN; Salote Soqo, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; Prairie Rose Seminole, American Indian Alaska Native Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Teresa Blumenstein, UNANIMA International; Juan Elias Chebly, UN Environmental Programme; Adelson Kora Kanamary, Kanamary People of the Amazon)

The group discussed the extent to which people are being forced to move from their homes by environmental changes and degradation and how those circumstances impact their human rights. They raised the problems of increasingly intense storms and floods, sea level rise, drought, and the warming of the oceans as aspects of climate change that lead directly to the destruction of the land and sea environments on which they depend for food, shelter, and income. As a result of this destruction, indigenous populations are forced to evacuate their native lands in search of life's basic necessities. In addition to these human rights losses, indigenous people who are forced from their land are stripped of sovereignty, culture, and identity, all of which are tied to the land and sea on which they live. For indigenous peoples, as with all others who are forcibly displaced across borders, migration often brings further human rights denials if they find themselves in a state that does not grant them access to labor markets, education, or healthcare systems.



The group also made the point that, considering the current scale of climate-induced migration (24 million persons per year since 2008) and the projected increases in affected populations, environmental conservation must be considered a top priority in

national and international security discussions and measures. If we cannot take action to end egregious exploitation of our natural resources, we are sure to see the extinction of indigenous cultures, the death of agrarian and fishing societies, forced mass-migration to overcrowded urban centers, a rise in climate-induced radicalism, violence, and conflict in the generations to come. Those in attendance were left with the message that an alternative future is possible and that those best suited to lead us there are the indigenous peoples of the world who imagined it first and are already walking the path to it.

See this [nearly full-length video of the event](#) for more information on this topic.

UNANIMA Co-Sponsors Showcase of the Sustainability Leadership of Filipina and Filipino Natives



The second event UNANIMA co-sponsored at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues focused on the topic of agency of indigenous peoples and how their practices and partnerships are contributing to development in their locales. The panel was moderated by UI Research Assistant, Celia Martin, NDS (pictured fourth from left above), and featured three indigenous persons from the Philippines. Filipina panelist Venerva Amil spoke of her experience as a student in an education program run by the Presentation Sisters on her home island. The program has increased school attendance and literacy rates among girls in a community in which most girls are married by age

14. As a graduate of the program, Venerva continues to explore and define her place in society by teaching and empowering other young women to resist gender-based oppression.

Her co-panelist, Edwina Quialquial, described a series of wellness initiatives offered in her community, including a Montessori pre-school, parenting and housekeeping classes for adults, health clinic to encourage the management of the tuberculosis outbreaks that plague the community, and a youth council that contributes to the proceeding of the official Tribal Council. They are also developing a school curriculum that allows local wisdom, language and culture to be passed down to the rising generation.

A third panelist, Pablito Gonzales, described his work as an advocate for the preservation of biodiversity on his home island of Negros. The people of Negros face many challenges to their natural environment, including mining activities, deforestation, and commercial, “monocrop” agriculture. “Monocropping,” is the practice of planting the same, single crop on the same plot of land year after year without rest or rotation. In the Philippines, major corporations use this practice on sugar cane plantations which they establish by taking over indigenous land with the promise to hire local indigenous people to work on the plantations. The practice quickly depletes the soil while bringing about the “extinction” of land-related indigenous knowledge, systems, practices, and spirituality. Gonzales works to stop this trend toward environmental and cultural devastation by staging awareness programs and campaigns within Negros’ indigenous community. His group has created a petition to stop deforestation, opened a school for the conferment of traditional environmental knowledge on young people, and engaged encroaching corporations in dialogue about the indigenous rights upon which their operations are infringing.



Collectively, these examples of indigenous action demonstrated the power of indigenous agency to keep the sustainability in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Video clips of the event are available: [Venera](#), [Edwina](#), [Pablito](#).

An Encounter with the Universal Periodic Review

By Jean Quinn, DW, UNANIMA International



I recently had the opportunity to go to Geneva to see and understand the process for the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Poland, Algeria, Brazil, India, and the Philippines. It was a great learning experience on one of the key processes of the UN Human Rights Council and the value of non-governmental organizations' (NGOs') participation in it.

The UPR was established in 2006, under the remit of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in order to address gaps in the UN Human Rights infrastructure and to compliment the work of both the Treaty Body and Special Procedures systems. During the first UPR cycle, from 2008 to 2011, each UN Member State had its human rights standards scrutinised by a committee of its peers. By the start of the second cycle of reviews, the UPR was already being hailed as a success due to the fact that, for the first time, all UN Member States had voluntarily subjected their human rights records to international scrutiny. The UPR then took roots as a crucial human rights mechanism. However, the question remained for many: was the UPR also effective in changing the human rights situation on the ground?

There have been a number of studies produced over the years including, “Beyond Promises: The Impact of the UPR on the ground” in 2014 and “The Butterfly Effect: Spreading good practice of UPR implementation” in 2016. These studies conclusively present evidence that shows the UPR has proven itself as an effective platform for discussion at an international level and that it has a positive impact on human rights at a national level. To date the UPR has achieved 100% participation rate, with each UN member States having engaged in the mechanism. The peer review nature of the UPR continues to encourage global dialogue on human rights and has ensured that all countries, regardless of geographical, economic, or political influence, are accountable both nationally and internationally for their adherence to universal human rights standards. We are now into the third UPR cycle (2017). Every Member State has had their human rights reviewed twice, in Geneva, Switzerland. Roughly 55,000 recommendations have been made and approximately 72% have been supported.



The crucial role of NGOs in the UPR is expressly recognised by the UN Member States in the document that founded this mechanism for the international promotion of

human rights. Since the UPR was introduced in 2007, NGOs and human rights defenders have constantly engaged in the process, in order to effect positive change for human rights across the world. The role of non-government participants has proven to be vital for the success of the UPR. Without the critical voice of civil society, such as groups like UNANIMA International, within this process, the UPR would run the risk of becoming merely a talking shop for human rights. Through the engagement of all States and of non-government groups, the UPR is constantly able to achieve a real impact on the ground.

For further explanation of the UPR system and how organizations like UNANIMA can (and must!) participate in it, see [my full report \(available in English\)](#).

UNANIMA Attends First Two Thematic Consultations in Preparation for a Global Compact on Migration



In September 2016, through the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, UN Member States committed to launch a process of intergovernmental negotiations leading to the adoption of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration.

They later adopted a preparatory process for the Compact that included a series of “thematic sessions,” in which UN Member States and civil society would be given the opportunity to present their perspectives and hopes for specific aspects of the Compact.

Jean Quinn, DW, was able to attend the first thematic session, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland in early May on the topic of “Human Rights of all Migrants, Social Inclusion, Cohesion, and all forms of Discrimination, including Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance.” At this session, Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for International Migration and Secretary General of the Conference, stressed the need to change the perception of Migration from a phenomenon “currently feared by too many”, to reflect its overwhelmingly positive impact on society. The session then proceeded with several panel discussions. By the end of the session, it was clear that many governments and members of civil society agree that human mobility is not a new phenomenon and that many of us have benefited from our own migration journeys and those of our elders, but that current policies fall short of recognizing the fact that migration must increase in a globalized world. Policies that aim to deter and criminalize migration rather than offering safe and regular channels serve only to push migrants to attempt dangerous journeys on which they risk exploitation and violence. Those that make it to their destination countries are then subjected to informal economies that offer them few or no rights, low wages, and lives of precariousness and fear that prevents them from raising their voices or accessing basic public services.

It was also noted that even without the Compact, the rights of migrants and their families are already enshrined within the same UN conventions to apply to all people at all times: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Compact will seek offer practical guidance for the creation of increased and regular channels for migration, including family-based immigration, access to identity documents, and paths to citizenship for those in irregular status already within countries. Labor migration programs should also allow visa portability, not tie work visas to a single employer, and the rights of migrant women and girls must be kept at the center of all policies. Finally, it was suggested that “firewalls” between immigration and other government offices would allow migrants to access their economic, social and cultural rights (e.g. education, accommodation, and health care)

as well as political rights (e.g. access to justice and protection of the justice system) without fear that doing so will cause immigration enforcement agencies to detain or deport them.



The second thematic session in preparation for the Global Compact on Migration took place in late May at UN Headquarters in New York on the topic of “drivers” of forced migration, including poverty, violent conflict and industrial crises, and climate change and natural disasters. Much of the discussion on this theme focused on the principle that migration should be a choice, not a necessity. While lacking in true dialogue among Member States, the second thematic session did allow some common themes and general consensus to emerge in a few areas.

Member States generally agreed that the Compact should align and work with existing plans for addressing poverty and humanitarian crises, especially the Sustainable Development Goals. They also acknowledged that the factors leading to any individual’s decision to migrate are almost always multiple and interrelated, such that all policies addressing drivers must take a holistic approach to resolving them. Many States also cited a need for “circular” or “seasonal” labor migration schemes among countries that would allow for the economic contributions of migrants to benefit both their countries of origin and destination and ease the poverty of farm workers whose land has become untillable due to environmental degradation. A large number of States referenced the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework, a set of guidelines for reducing national risk of loss and damage due to natural disasters, as essential to the effort to address environmentally-motivated migration.

Your UNANIMA representatives are pleased to report that, despite some States' past claims that it is impossible to identify climate-displaced persons (as opposed to conflict- or economically-displaced persons), a great number of States also noted a need for increased collection of data on migrants' motivations for relocating in order to better prioritize and address the factors displacing many involuntarily. UNANIMA submitted a statement to facilitators of the Compact development process calling for data collection, especially to highlight the need for special protections for those forced migrants who do not qualify for refugee status, such as tens of millions displaced annually by climate change and natural disasters.

Some disagreement arose over whether the Compact should address conflict as a driver of migration, because many of those displaced by conflict are considered refugees whose needs are addressed by the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the forthcoming Global Compact on Refugees. Some States raised the point, however, that many people displaced by conflict do not ultimately qualify for refugee status, but are still vulnerable and therefore in need of a separate means of protection under the Global Compact for Migration.

Although civil society was not given much opportunity to contribute to the session, it did offer us some clarity on the various perspectives of the Member States and constitute a significant effort on the part of the UN system to invest its energy not only in curing international problems, but in preventing them. It also foreshadowed that the Global Compact on Migration may definitively link migration governance to poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts in a way that the Sustainable Development Goals ultimately did not. Videos and more information on all thematic sessions are available online in multiple languages from the UN webpage for the Global Compact preparation process: [English](#), [Español](#), [Français](#). (Photo sources: Jean Quinn and Cecilie Kern, NGO Committee on Migration)

Flashpoints



- At a time when health care may be cut off for millions of Americans, Sr. Joan Klemballa, **DW, US Province** is working as a Nurse Practitioner who, in her free time, works in a clinic for undocumented persons in need of health care services. The clinic where she serves is known as Rotacares, under the sponsorship of the Rotary Club located in Uniondale section of Long Island, New York. Sister Joan has been a healthcare professional for many years and brings her vast knowledge and professional skills to meet the needs of a population that has no recourse to proper healthcare. She begins by interviewing and, with the help of a devoted staff, evaluating the level of need of each of her clients. Sr. Joan comes twice a week and listens with respect to each individual case as they present their situation. Despite needing an interpreter from time to time, Sr. Joan has saved lives and renewed hope and purpose for life countless times among the poorest of her patients. The work that she does is beyond measure.



- The **Carmelite Sisters of Charity of Vedruna** were recently featured in Global Sisters Report for their work with trafficked and abandoned children in Gabon and Togo. The CCVs work daily in centers for the protection children, which aim to rescue former child slaves from the street and offer them shelter, encouragement, and space in which to identify and cultivate their unique gifts. They do so by engaging them in games and hugs, facilitating their school attendance, and giving them access to social workers and psychologists. When possible, they even broker their reconnection with their families. Read the [full GSR article](#) for more details and photographs.



- Throughout March and April, Peru experienced torrential downpours and floods that destroyed over 800 villages. The rains were a result of the El Nino

phenomenon, which is triggered by the warming of the Pacific Ocean. In the midst of the devastation, the Bon Secours Health System, run by the **Congregation of Bon Secours** took action, delivering over 3,000 pounds (over 1300 kilograms) of medicine to the country and delivered it to remote areas in desperate need of treatment from waterborne illnesses. From the time the flooding began, the Sisters were treating approximately 200 people per day in their makeshift 32-bed hospital and mobile health clinics. Now, in the aftermath of the disaster, the Sisters abide with the affected communities, offering psychological and emotional support as they reconstruct their lives. (Photo source: [Global Sisters Report](#))

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