



# NGO NEWS

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN NOVEMBER 2020

## 75th Anniversary of the United Nations

The General Assembly of the United Nations opened its doors to a limited number of delegates from Member States to hold the 75th anniversary of the UN on Sept. 21. Unlike in the past, world leaders spoke during the commemoration by video. A total of 182 world leaders and regional representatives addressed the world. Most of them stressed the need to revive multilateralism to respond to the challenges facing the UN and the member states, especially the urgency to tackle COVID-19, climate change, poverty, systemic discrimination/racism, digital divide and inequalities. A UN declaration to mark the commemoration was also adopted by consensus. The document lacked not only real ambition, it failed to put forward a compelling vision for the future of humanity.

On Sept. 22, the UN General Assembly began the annual debate virtually. Delegates of each country introduced their leaders, who delivered pre-recorded speeches. In the name of the Holy See, Pope Francis also addressed the UN on Sept. 25. The Holy See wants to see the UN “increasingly serve as a sign of unity between States and an instrument of service to the entire human family.” | “Address Of His Holiness, Pope Francis, To The United Nations General Assembly (2020)” [Read](#) this speech or [watch video](#)

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres urged that all countries “must be guided by science and tethered to reality” while confronting the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. He also pointed out how women are disproportionately represented in the sectors hit hardest by job losses; doing the unpaid care work generated the pandemic, lack of economic resources and access to benefits. He highlighted the impact of the pandemic on millions of young girls—they are losing their chance for an education and a future as schools close.



*Above: The GA Hall on Oct. 22. Right: Slovakian President Zuzanna Caputova of Slovakia, the first female leader to speak after 50 male leaders. Screen shots by Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN*



Decisive actions are needed to stop the gains made on gender equality.

One notable feature during the UN General Debate was the absence of women leaders. Only on the second day a woman leader was scheduled to speak, after 50 male heads of states. Out of the 193 UN member states, only 21 have a female head of state or government. Only 14 out 193 have at least 50 percent women in the national cabinet. Only four countries out of 193 have 50 percent women in the national legislature.

# COVID-19 and Universal Health Coverage

The entire world is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As many as 213 countries and territories have registered COVID-19 cases, and it can be said that it is one of the greatest health challenges of our time. Measures taken by countries to slow the spread, find therapeutics and vaccines have not yet slowed the spread of coronavirus. The increasing number of infections and hospitalizations has created unprecedented challenges to public health and health care systems. In fact, the pandemic has laid bare the inadequacies in our health care systems. The world had ignored lessons learned from the past and prior warnings to get systems in place to face a sudden onslaught by a virus. Leaders failed to invest sufficient resources in health priorities.

In January 2020, before the spread of the pandemic, the World Health Organization released a list of urgent health care challenges for the next decade, developed with experts from around the world. These challenges are:

1. Elevating health in the climate debate, for climate crisis is a health crisis
2. Delivering health to countries in conflict and crisis, where health care facilities and professional are under attack
3. Making health care accessible to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic status
4. Expanding access to vaccines and medicine – a third of the world's population lack access to medicines and vaccines
5. Stopping infectious diseases – they are estimated to kill 4 million in 2020
6. Preparing for epidemics – very little spending on preparedness and prevention
7. Making healthy food more accessible – lack of food, unsafe food and unhealthy diets are responsible for many diseases
8. Investing in health care workers – health worker shortages due to under-investment in education, overworked and underpaid
9. Keeping adolescents safe – more than a million adolescents aged 10-19 die every year
10. Strengthening trust between health care systems and the public – misinformation on medicines and vaccines are detrimental to health
11. Utilizing modern technology and innovations
12. Preventing antibiotic resistance
13. Ensuring health care facilities are clean and ster-

ile (1 in 4 health care facilities worldwide lacks water and sanitation).

In spite of these warnings, the world was not prepared for COVID-19 pandemic. The underfunded health systems around the world failed to deliver adequate care to the most vulnerable. Almost 1.7 billion people have at least one underlying conditions, like hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease or immunocompromising conditions. Refugees, internally displaced persons, people living in conflict affected fragile situations at a high risk of getting infected without access to healthcare. We are also aware that it hits the hardest, those who can least afford it. A large segment of people infected by COVID-19 were older persons in long-term care facilities. Healthcare workers, frontline workers in essential services and women as healthcare workers and caregivers risked their lives to provide care.

It is in this context the UN Secretary-General issued the [Policy Brief on Universal Health Coverage](#). It means that “all individuals and communities receive health services they need without undue financial hardship.” Its goal is:

- Equity in access: everyone who needs health services should get them, not only those who can pay for them.
- Sufficient quality: health services should be good enough to improve the health of those receiving services.
- No undue financial risk: the cost of using health services should not put people at risk of financial harm.

The brief has the following recommendations:

1. Urgently control further transmission of COVID-19
2. Protect delivery of other essential health services
3. Massively expand access to new rapid diagnostics and treatments and ensure future COVID-19 vaccines are a global public good with equitable access for everyone, everywhere.
4. Achieve universal health coverage through investing in core health systems to protect and

Continued on page 7



# 10th Anniversary of the Recognition of Water and Sanitation as Human Right

On July 28, 2010 the United Nations General Assembly officially recognized water and sanitation as a human right. In September 2010, the Human Rights Council passed a new resolution affirming the recognition by the General Assembly and clarifying that the rights to water and sanitation derive from the right to an adequate standard of living, which is considered as a binding human right on almost all States. Since then a few countries have updated existing policies or created new constitutional provisions, or passed specific legislations to recognize the human right to water, to sanitation or to both. But many others have not.

One significant learning from the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of water and soap -essential for handwashing to control the spread of coronavirus. Safe water and sanitation are fundamental to preventing diseases, health and wellbeing of our society. Sustainable Development Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015, called on all governments to “ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”

During the 10th anniversary of the recognition of water and sanitation as a human right, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Leo Heller, stated, “the national implementation of the human rights to water and sanitation requires not only adequate legislation and courts willing to reflect it, but also autonomous regulatory bodies ensuring that water and sanitation services are provided in compliance with the human rights framework, both through a monitoring and enforcement role by promoting policy changes in line with human rights.”

The responsibility to provide water and sanitation rests with the local/national governments—it is a public service. Yet, the reality on the ground is very stark—worldwide, there is very little to show policy changes and investments to make water and sanitation available and accessible to 2.2 billion people without access to safe drinking water and 4.2 billion people who lack toilets. Beyond the household level, public spaces, public work places like prisons and others

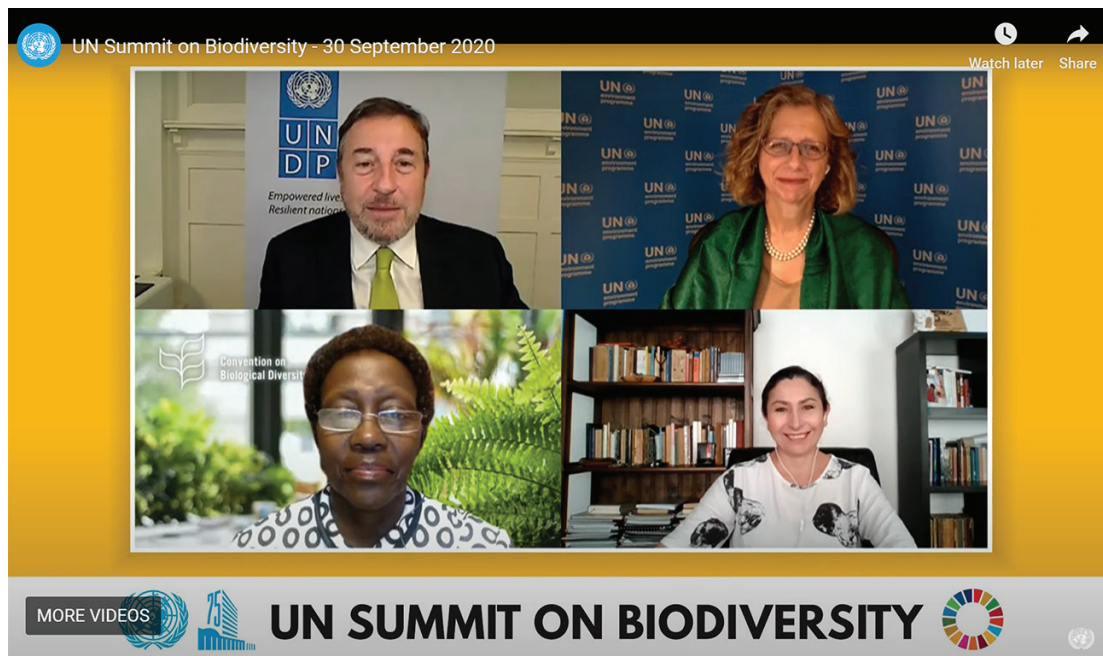


are not on the radar of the providers. Half of all health care centers in low-income countries have no clean water, and 37 percent of schools don't have a decent toilet on site. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, human rights require “a holistic understanding of access to water and sanitation and an explicit focus on the most disadvantaged, as well as an emphasis of participation, empowerment, accountability and transparency.”

A noticeable trend seen in many countries is the practice of privatization of water and sanitation services. As stated in the [final report from the Special Rapporteur](#), globally 10 percent of services have been privatized. Delivery of essential services through privatization, which can lead to corporate control of public services, is a deeply contested issue by human rights groups and private sector. People on the margins are forced to pay a higher price for basic services.

The neglect and discrimination on water and sanitation access by governments is impacting societies for generations—children dying from preventable diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. Lack of water and sanitation in schools for personal hygiene forces girls to drop out or absent themselves. At home, women and girls bear the burden of fetching water from far distances and the indignity of open defecation. They also become victims of sexual violence. The world not only denies them their dignity and human rights, but also condemns them to live on the periphery.

According to the Special Rapporteur, after decades of efforts, “the international community is aware of their obligation, both moral and legal, to ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all without discrimination.” This is a great milestone that needs to be translated into action. To bridge the disparities and inequalities, finance ministers and decision makers need to prioritize investments in water and sanitation services for people to benefit from WASH—Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Accessible and affordable water and sanitation for all requires political will. The benefits of these investments will keep people healthy and provide a pathway to enjoy their human rights.



## UN Summit on Biodiversity virtual event Sept. 30

The UN Summit on Biodiversity laid the groundwork for commitments from countries to stop the biodiversity crisis, prior to the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China in 2021. As we approach the end of the UN Decade of Biodiversity 2011-2020 and we are also confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, a zoonotic disease resulting from human interaction with wild animals. In fact, 60 percent of all known diseases and 75 percent of all new infectious diseases are zoonotic—transmitting from animals to humans. Climate change along with deforestation for unsustainable consumption and production patterns—commercial agriculture, livestock and mining are destroying rainforests and natural habitats. Every year we lose 13 million hectares of forests. One million species are risk of extinction. During the last 50 years, vertebrates have declined by 68 percent. It is impacting food security, water supply, livelihoods and our ability fight diseases. In fact, our health systems rely on our rich biodiversity—4 billion people depend on nature for their medicines.

Biodiversity is declining globally, and we have not achieved any of the biodiversity targets set for 2020. Our existence on this planet depends on our ability to protect nature in order to halt the biodiversity decline - a third of the world's oceans and land should be protected by the end of this decade. Biodiversity and ecosystem management are integral for sustainable development. To make this possible, governments

need to act urgently. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated during the summit that “humanity is waging a war against nature and we need to rebuild our relationship with nature.” Environmental health is always downplayed by our governments. Three priority areas managing biodiversity:

1. Nature-based solutions should be imbedded in the COVID-19 recovery and wider plans. Nature-based solutions are also important for climate change.
2. The global economic systems should invest in nature to conserve biodiversity.
3. Biodiversity must become a criterion for financial decision making in the future to shift from destructive activities and preservation

The world needs to change course to rebuild the web of relationships, ambitious actions from everyone is needed to transform our relationships with the natural world.

[Watch video:](#) UN Summit on Biodiversity (streamed live Sept. 30, 2020)

[Watch video:](#) Mongabay Explains: What is the controversy around palm oil?

*IN CONNECTION  
WITH WORLD  
CITIES DAY*

**URBAN AGENDA TO URGENT ACTION:  
PREVENTING EVICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS  
AS FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES AIM TO  
ENDURE THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27  
1 P.M. - 2:30 P.M. EASTERN**

**Register through this link:**

**[HTTPS://DAUGHTERSOFCHARITY.ZOOM.US/MEETING/  
REGISTER/TJUOCU-GPJMVH9WFGOV01NULMHGFUBBXCCXY](https://daughtersofcharity.zoom.us/j/81251251251)**







# The Economy of Francesco

The [Economy of Francesco](#) is an initiative of Pope Francis in which economists and entrepreneurs from all over the world are called to participate. The initial invitation to “Young economists, entrepreneurs and businesswomen from all over the world” went out in May 2019 for an event scheduled for March 26-28, 2020 in Assisi. The invitation from Pope Francis stated: “I am writing to invite you to an initiative that I have longed for: an event that allows me to meet those who are training today and are starting to study and practice a different economy, the one that makes life and does not kill, includes and does not exclude, humanizes and it does not dehumanize, it takes care of creation and does not plunder it. An event that helps us to be together and get to know each other, and leads us to make a ‘pact’ to change the current economy and give a soul to the economy of tomorrow.” (Economy of Francesco refers to the Saint of Assisi and the Gospel he lived.)

Pope Francis is inviting young people to “re-animate” the economy; it is a follow-up to his encyclical, “*Laudato Si*,” wherein he stressed the interconnectedness of everything and the need to protect the environment cannot be separated from justice towards the poor and the structural problems of world economy. Pope Francis understands the young are “capable of listening with your heart to ever more distressing cries of the earth and its poor.” He is inviting them to join him to promote together through a common pact, a process of global change, for individual and collective commit-

ment to cultivate together the dream of a new humanism that responds to human expectations and God’s plan.

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced the event to be held online Nov. 19-21. Virtual participation of Pope Francis is confirmed. The Pope has invited the best scholars, educators, economists, entrepreneurs and changemakers to the event to give a new soul to the global economy. The event aims to “listen to the voice of young people,” to put their vision to good use within the basic understanding that “no one is saved alone.” Online communities – called “EoF” (Economy Francesco hubs are being set up to enhance the involvement and participation for young people from around the world. According to available reports, 1,000 young people are working in 12 “EoF” villages, engaged in different themes, like Management and Gift, Finance and Humanity, Work and Care, Agriculture and Justice, Energy and Poverty, Business and Peace, Women for Economy, CO2 of Inequalities, Vocation and Profit, Business in Transition, Life and Lifestyle, Policies and Happiness. Over 2,000 men and women under 35 have registered for the event. Around 300 events have been organized in preparation for the Economy of Francesco, and 27 online seminars have been streamed on the organization’s [official YouTube channel](#).

Popular Movements and organizations of the Church will be presenting a Letter to Francisco during the Francisco Economy Event. You can read the letter titled: “[Document on the Popular Movements, The Economy of Francis](#)”

# International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor

The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring 2021 as the [International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor](#). The resolution was put forward by Argentina, a leading force in highlighting the issue of child labor. The resolution was sponsored by 70 countries, making a strong multilateral commitment to eliminating child labor once and for all.

The International Labor Organization is taking the lead in implementation of this resolution. The ILO has been working for the abolition of child labor for 100 years. ILO is a partner in Alliance 8.7, serving as the global secretariat of this global partnership for eradicating forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labor. Between 2000–2016, there was a 38 percent decrease in child labor globally.

This resolution urges member states to take immediate steps to implement SDG 8.7: “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.” We have just four more years in which to accomplish this. Currently 152 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are in child labor, almost half of them, 73 million, are in hazardous child labor. Child labor is concentrated primarily in agriculture—fishing, forestry, livestock herding and aquaculture (71 percent) and 17 percent in the industrial sector, including mining.

## COVID *continued from page 2*

promote health and well-being known as “common goods for health.”

5. Strengthen national and global pandemic preparedness and aim for healthy societies for the future.

Universal health coverage can be a powerful social equalizer if countries take immediate steps to invest health systems to bring the virus under control as well as for future preparedness. This can also serve as a catalyst for economic growth. Good health is both an outcome and driver for economic and social progress. Creating health systems to protect the health of people is a political choice.



## Is the UN Open for Regular Meetings?

A limited number of delegates from member states are participating in the business of the General Assembly from Sept. 15. All other meetings are held on virtual platforms. The Security Council began in-person meetings Oct. 8, but open debates were held online to allow more participants from all countries. On Oct. 27, all in-person meetings were suspended by Volkan Bozkir, the president of the General Assembly, after some diplomats tested positive for coronavirus. Since then, in-person meetings of the General Assembly were resumed beginning Nov. 2. All other meetings and conferences are taking place virtually. The 59th Session of the Commission for Social Development is scheduled for Feb. 8-17, 2021. Those who would like to participate virtually, please contact Sister Teresa at [scfederationunngo@gmail.com](mailto:scfederationunngo@gmail.com).



Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN  
NGO Representative  
747 Third Avenue, Second Floor # 213  
New York, NY 10017  
[scfederationunngo@gmail.com](mailto:scfederationunngo@gmail.com)  
[@ngoscfederation](https://facebook.com/ngoscfederation)  
[sistersofcharityfederation.org/ngo](https://sistersofcharityfederation.org/ngo)  
Vincentian Family: [famvin.org](https://famvin.org)